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Review of the programme of work 2012 – 2013

Country profiles on housing and land management

Guidelines for the preparation of ECE country profiles on housing and land management

Note by the secretariat

Summary

ECE country profiles on housing and land management are the flagship activity of the Committee on Housing and Land Management. Regular reviews of the methodology for the preparation of country profiles are conducted by the Committee in order to reflect social, economic and political changes in housing and land management in the ECE region.

At its seventy-third session, the Committee requested the secretariat to review the methodology of the preparation of the country profiles and prepare guidelines for the preparation of country profiles. This note contains these guidelines.

The Committee is invited to endorse these methodological guidelines. Following the Committee's endorsement, the guidelines will be made available through the ECE website.

I. Introduction

1. To support housing and land policy reforms in the ECE region, and especially in countries in transition, the ECE prepares country profiles on housing and land management. These country profiles are a tool for Governments to analyse their housing, urban development and land management policies, strategies, and institutions. They also help countries to compare their progress in these areas with that made by other countries in the region. At the core of the country profiles is an analytical study of housing, urban development and land management written by independent international experts. Practical policy recommendations are formulated based on this analysis.

2. The target groups for country profiles are: most importantly, decision-makers in the national and local authorities; international and non-governmental organizations; academia; and the private sector active in housing, urban development and land administration.

3. The housing profile studies have been developed by ECE since 1996. Thus far, ECE country profiles have been produced for Bulgaria (1996), Poland (1998), Slovakia (1999), Lithuania (2000), Romania (2001), the Republic of Moldova (2002), Albania (2002), Armenia (2004), the Russian Federation (2004), Serbia and Montenegro (2006), Georgia (2007), Belarus (2008), Kyrgyzstan (2010), Azerbaijan (2010) and Tajikistan (2011). The country profile of Ukraine will be completed in 2013.

4. Country profile recommendations have resulted in important policy reforms. For example:

- In Armenia, following the completion of the country profile, a state programme on housing for special population groups was developed and a framework to improve housing conditions of the socially vulnerable was approved. Moreover, the Government initiated a five-year programme on multifamily housing stock maintenance and management.
- Since the launch of the country profile of Azerbaijan in 2010, the Government amended its housing code and drafted a town planning code.
- In Belarus, recommendations from the 2008 country profile were translated into national legislation to make housing more affordable through savings schemes and to facilitate easier access to mortgages and low-interest credit. As part of these reforms, new regulations on savings for housing construction are being considered. Moreover, a programme for the design and construction of energy-efficient housing was launched and a pilot project to introduce rental housing in Belarus was started in Minsk.
- Following the preparation of the country profile for Georgia, the Government of Georgia developed a draft Codex for Spatial Planning and Construction Regulation. This included, for example, rules to legalize existing illegal buildings.
- In Serbia, the country profile has served as a basis for substantive improvements in housing legislation, including the creation of a legal framework for social housing.

5. This note contains information on the purpose of country profiles, the rationale behind their structure and the role country profiles play in facilitating legal, political and infrastructural reforms. This information is presented for the use of experts who contribute to country profiles and authorities who use country profiles.

6. In 2008, the Bureau of the Committee conducted a self-evaluation on the preparation of country profiles (ECE/HBP/2008/41). The self-evaluation focused on the procedure for the preparation of country profiles. This note builds on this self-evaluation and addresses logistics as well as the structure and the content of the country profiles.

7. The rest of this note contains guidelines which are divided into three areas: the procedure for the preparation of the country profiles (section II), the structure and content of country profiles (section III), and the use of country profiles as a tool to promote reforms in housing and land management (section IV).

II. Procedure for the preparation of country profiles

8. **Request.** The Committee considers the preparation of a country profile after receiving a request from the relevant national agency or Ministry, addressed to the director of the division servicing the Committee.² If the Committee approves the request, the ECE secretariat (hereinafter, secretariat) requests the country to nominate a focal point for the country profile project.

9. **Nomination** of a focal point. The country assigns a representative of the relevant ministry as a focal point for the project. The focal point coordinates country efforts to facilitate the country profile preparation process. The focal point regularly communicates with the secretariat regarding the preparation and execution of research missions and the coordination of national experts. The focal point must be able to communicate in English.

10. **Establishment** of a national team of experts. The national team of experts is established by the host government to support the international team. This is done before the preliminary mission of the secretariat is conducted. National experts represent the government institutions dealing with housing and land issues in the country under review. The experts provide available information relevant to the country profile prior to the research mission and assist the international team during and after the mission. The work of the national team of experts is an in-kind contribution of the host government to the country profile project.

11. **Preliminary mission.** The secretariat will undertake a preliminary mission to the country in order to establish contacts with the national and local organizations involved in housing, urban development and land management and to collect information materials that could be useful to the international experts. After the mission, the structure of the country profile is drafted and a list of national experts with contact data is established. The structure of the country profile will be decided, in consultation with national authorities, based on the main housing, urban development and land management challenges identified during the mission.

12. **Establishment of an international team of experts and collection of background data and information.** A team of international experts is established by the secretariat. The team includes professionals in housing policy, housing finance, urban planning and management, land administration and land management. Experts act in their personal capacity and are chosen on the basis of their expertise and knowledge of the region. Usually, experts are not from the country under review in order to avoid conflicts of interest and to provide an external, independent perspective.

¹ Available at <http://www.unece.org/hlm/sessions/69thsession.html>

² A template request letter is available at <http://www.unece.org/housing-and-land-management/areas-of-work/country-profiles-on-housing-and-land-management.html>

13. The secretariat and the national focal point facilitate the initial contact between international experts and national experts via email so that international experts can further communicate directly with national experts to collect necessary background information for their chapters and, thus, to prepare for the research mission.

14. National experts are requested to participate actively in the collection of relevant background information and data. Information is provided to international experts well in advance of the research mission and not later than four weeks before the mission. When possible, main documents and legal acts should be provided in the English language.

15. Background information includes policy documents, reports, publications, lists and copies of relevant legal acts as well as available and relevant economic data for the last 10 years. Earlier data will be requested as needed.

16. **Research mission.** The research mission is conducted by the secretariat and the international team of experts. International experts are requested to submit a two-page draft outline of their chapters, with the main points to be covered by the chapters, to the secretariat at least one month prior to the research mission. The research mission involves fact-finding and in-depth discussions with the national team of experts and housing and land management stakeholders in the country. Close cooperation between the international and national expert teams is a prerequisite for a successful research mission. Technical visits to housing sites can be organized during the mission.

17. **Preliminary chapter drafts.** International experts prepare comprehensive first drafts of their chapters after the research mission. The expected length of a chapter is 7-10 pages (in 11 point Times New Roman with single line spacing). Each chapter includes proposed policy recommendations. While these drafts are being written, the national expert team is expected to answer additional queries from international experts or the secretariat as needed.

18. **Final draft.** The secretariat and the international experts cooperate to create a revised draft. This draft is sent to country authorities for acknowledgement and verification. The secretariat produces a final draft, incorporating these comments. The final draft is presented to the Committee for approval.

19. **Publication.** After the country profile is approved by the Committee, it is published in English and, when requested by country authorities, in Russian. Country authorities translate the study into the national language. The document is made available in hard copy and online on the Committee website at <http://www.unece.org/hlm>.

20. **Launch Event.** After the publication is released in English and the national language, a launch event is held in the country with the participation of a wide range of international and national actors in the housing and land sectors.

21. **Distribution.** Copies are distributed directly to all the ECE member States through relevant ministries, local authorities and other institutions.

22. The following factors should be taken into consideration in planning and organizing a country profile study:

- **Financing.** Country profiles are financed primarily through extrabudgetary funds, mostly in the form of member State contributions to the Housing and Land Management Trust Fund. Member States sometimes provide in kind assistance as well, by contributing and paying the travel costs of international experts. Countries under review contribute national experts, data and information collection, translation of relevant documents, interpretation and local transport during the missions.

- **Cooperation with international organizations.** During the country profile missions, the secretariat should establish contacts with international organizations in the country of the mission in order to take advantage of existing knowledge.
- **Sources.** Analyses prepared by international experts should be based on the data and information provided by the country under review and on the reports and publications of international organizations and donor agencies active in the country.
- **Approximate timeframe of the county profile study.** The process of preparing a country profile should take approximately 38 weeks, including a pre-mission (one week), collection of background data and information (six weeks), research mission (one to two weeks), drafting the chapters and recommendations (twenty-four weeks) and publication (six weeks).

III. Structure and content of country profiles

23. Countries under review vary geographically, politically and socioeconomically and it is therefore impossible to establish a single country profile structure for all countries. The proposed structure is indicative and should be adapted as needed.

24. International experts should consult the Committee website³ before preparing their chapters. The website contains published country profiles and other useful links and information.

25. Country profiles have various end users and each may seek different information. Nonetheless, especially for national authorities of reviewed countries, the most important component of the profiles is the conclusions and policy recommendations. These are found at the end of each chapter and summarized in the last chapter of the country profile.

26. Policy recommendations should be direct, clear and realistic and include a timeline. They should indicate actions that are needed in order to effect change and the public actors who are responsible for each action. Recommendations should include guidelines for the coordination of different actors.

27. The following structure for the country profiles is recommended:

28. **Preamble.** This part of the profile includes a foreword by the ECE Executive Secretary, a preface, acknowledgements, and an executive summary.

29. **General overview of the country situation.** This chapter includes information on geography, political framework, population and socio-economic conditions.

30. **Legal and institutional framework for housing, urban development and land management.** This part consists of two chapters, one each on the legal and institutional frameworks for housing, urban development and land management. These chapters identify the strengths and weaknesses of the legal and institutional systems. They analyse relevant actors and their roles, the level of engagement of the public and private sectors and participation of the public in decision making.

31. **Housing conditions, maintenance and management.** This section includes an analysis of the housing stock, including its physical condition, accessibility, affordability, habitability and cultural adequacy, as well as housing maintenance and management

³ Available at <http://www.unece.org/housing-and-land-management/areas-of-work/country-profiles-on-housing-and-land-management.html>

practices, including the role of the private sector in housing management.⁴ The section also analyses utilities, housing energy efficiency and housing tenure systems (such as home ownership, individual ownership, condominiums and cooperatives). The section addresses gender issues (such as home ownership by women), adaptation to climate change and strategies to combat natural and human-induced disasters through better housing standards and design. Finally, the section shall analyse housing policies, including the housing policy framework and policy instruments.

32. Urban development and planning. This section explores the state of urban development, including issues such as urbanization, the abandonment of urban or rural areas, the densification of inner cities or urban sprawl, social inclusion, gentrification, socially mixed development as well as planned and unplanned housing development in the context of the development of smart and compact cities. The section also analyses large housing development projects, the reconstruction of degraded areas (greenfield development and brownfield regeneration), spatial planning, the management of urban growth, the adaptation to and mitigation of climate change and informal settlements. The section addresses the policy framework for spatial development and land-use regulations, including master plans and zoning.

33. Infrastructure and public services. This section analyses the quality of infrastructure and public services and the roles of different actors in their provision and management. The chapter analyses management systems in the country and the extent to which they facilitate the provision of services. It assesses investment priorities.

34. Land administration and management. This section usually consists of two chapters, one each on land policies and land administration. The first chapter analyses the national land administration system, including: relevant authorities; the role of notaries, if applicable; the real estate cadastre, including the cadastral basis; private sector involvement in land administration, the geodetic framework and topographic mapping; services to the public, including the provision of information on land and real estate; collaboration with other departments and municipalities; mortgages (including registration processes, fees, and foreclosure procedures); and the use of land as collateral. The chapter also discusses the state of real estate markets, including the taxation of real property. The second chapter in this section provides an analysis of the land policy framework⁵, including ongoing or planned reforms.

35. Financial framework for housing and land. This section addresses the public and private financing of housing and land, the availability of housing finance, housing affordability, the financing of housing improvements, and measures to increase housing energy efficiency, including for the poor. The section will address the link between housing policy and the banking system and the role of national and local housing finance authorities.

36. Policy recommendations. This section will summarize the recommendations included in each chapter.

⁴ See also “Elements of the right to adequate housing”, available at <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Housing/toolkit/Pages/RighttoAdequateHousingToolkit.aspx>

⁵ In the preparation of this chapter, it is recommended to make use of the Food and Agriculture Organization’s “Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security”, available at <http://www.fao.org/docrep/016/i2801e/i2801e.pdf>

IV. Country profiles as a tool to promote reforms in housing, urban planning and land management

37. Country profiles provide concrete policy recommendations. It is important to ensure the implementation of those recommendations and to support policy reforms. Following the preparation of country profiles, the government is recommended to write a national action plan with specific measures for the implementation of country profile policy recommendations. ECE can assist in the preparation of such an action plan, subject to the availability of extrabudgetary resources.

38. In 2013, ECE proposed the establishment of national urban policy dialogues. The objective of the dialogues would be to assist target countries in carrying out policy reforms by supporting the preparation of national action plans and their implementation. To monitor the implementation of the action plans, countries are recommended to form interagency committees, which include all key ministries and agencies involved in housing, urban planning and land management.

39. To ensure better coordination with UN-Habitat and its work aimed at coordinating the preparation of the third United Nations conference on housing and sustainable urban development (HABITAT III) 6., it is proposed that these national interagency committees be established in cooperation with ECE and UN-Habitat as National Habitat Committees. These committees could then, in addition to monitoring the implementation of the country profile national action plans, engage in policy and strategic discussions on issues related to the preparation of Habitat III

40. National urban dialogues can promote the strengthening of legal, institutional and managerial frameworks so that national and local authorities, urban planning, housing and land management authorities can cope with existing and new challenges.

41. Several years after the country profile has been produced, the country under review may request the team of international experts to conduct an assessment of reforms carried out. The team would evaluate the implementation of the recommendations, discuss future strategies for housing and land management and assess the impact of the country profile on housing policy. This could allow long-term monitoring of reforms and the creation of new policy objectives to meet evolving challenges.

42. The Committee on Housing and Land Management is invited to endorse these methodological guidelines for the preparation of country profiles on housing and land management, reaffirm the importance of the leadership of the ECE in the preparation of the country profiles and encourage the cooperation of the ECE with other international organizations and agencies interested in contributing to the preparation of the country profiles on housing and land management for specific countries in the ECE region.

⁶ Mandated by the United Nations General Assembly in A/RES/66/207, available at http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=%20A/RES/66/207