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**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE**

**COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS**

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(Item 4 (b) of the provisional agenda)

**COUNTRY PROFILES ON THE HOUSING SECTOR**

Note by the secretariat

Introduction

1. At its sixty-first session in September 2000, the UNECE Committee on Human Settlements agreed to discuss the progress made on the practical implementation of the recommendations of the country profiles in the countries where such studies have been carried out, with the aim of monitoring and evaluating their impact (ECE/HBP/119, para. 11 (a)). The Bureau of the Committee decided that this discussion would take place at the sixty-second session of the Committee. All countries where the studies have been carried out (Bulgaria, Poland, Slovakia and Lithuania) are invited to report on how they have used the outcome of the study, whether the process has been useful and how the recommendations have been followed up. Their presentations should also review the latest developments in the housing sector. Furthermore, best practices as well as possible shortcomings should be reported and discussed. The two countries where projects have recently been initiated (Romania and the Republic of Moldova) are also invited to report on their experience.

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## I. BACKGROUND

2. Despite the progress in solving some of the housing problems in countries in transition during 1990s, much work still lays ahead. Housing agendas need to be developed in a way that addresses local priorities, mobilizes resources and assigns responsibilities to the various parties in housing provision. As the situation is proving to be complex, there is a need for an ongoing reformulation of the housing policies based on reliable information on the housing sector, its institutional framework and related legislative and financial policies.

3. A Country Profile study is a strategic analysis of a country's housing sector. The project was initiated in 1993 and was adopted by the Committee in 1994 as a pilot project. Consequently, the Country Profiles project was included in the Committee's work programme and it got high priority. The organizational framework for the project was developed in February 1995. The studies on the housing sector of Bulgaria (1996), Poland (1998), Slovakia (1999) and Lithuania (2000) have already been published. The studies for Romania and the Republic of Moldova are in preparation. The project is carried out by an international team of experts. So far experts from Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Sweden and the United Kingdom have taken part.

## II. METHOD OF WORK

4. Studies on the housing sector cover five major areas: (a) the framework for the housing sector's transition; (b) the existing housing stock and housing developments; (c) the institutional framework; (d) the legal framework; and (e) the financial framework. Each chapter has three sections. In the first section, the conditions and problems are analysed. In the second section, the national, regional and local policy objectives are presented. The third section deals with performance evaluation: the current policy objectives are evaluated in terms of the existing problems and conditions. Finally, the study draws conclusions and makes recommendations to the policy makers.

5. The Country Profiles are undertaken at the request of the interested country and with the Committee's approval. The organizational structure of the study has developed over the years. In the first studies, after a preliminary gathering of data, all experts of the international team undertook two missions to assess the housing sector in the country under review. During this first, fact-finding mission a working relationship with the host authorities and the local expert team was established and further data and information collected. Following that mission the international team drew up a preliminary draft. The aim of the second mission was to verify the data and information and to hold detailed discussions with the local experts.

6. Following the recommendation of the Bureau, for the study for the Republic of Moldova, only two international experts and a secretariat staff member took part in the first mission, after the initial gathering of data. The objective was to establish a working relationship with the host authorities and the local expert team, to collect additional data and information and to prepare for the main mission. During the second mission the entire team of six international experts visited sites and carried out detailed interviews and discussions on particular issues on the basis of their

first drafts. Each expert worked closely with a local counterpart.

7. The final study with the conclusions and policy recommendations is not only of interest to the country under the review. The study process itself with its different stages can be valuable as well. The data collection process may indicate a need for streamlining and improving the availability of statistical data and encourage the provision of better statistics on the housing sector. Secondly, it may stimulate debate on policy formulation. The process may also bring together local experts from different organizations, representatives of different levels of administration as well as different actors in the housing sector. Therefore, the process of carrying out country profile studies may stimulate inter-sectoral exchange of information and strengthen concerted action in the country. In addition, country profiles can serve private-sector investors at home and abroad and lay the basis for international comparison.

### III. COUNTRY PROFILES PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION AT THE SIXTY-SECOND SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE

#### Objectives

8. The major objective of the in-depth discussion on the studies on the housing sector profiles is to exchange views on their results. The countries concerned are requested to report on how they have used the outcome of the study, whether the process has been useful and how the recommendations have been followed up. The discussion will also aim at seizing the usefulness of the exercise as a whole and how the Committee could best assist the countries in implementing the recommendations.

#### Organization of presentations

9. The countries where the studies have already been carried out, Bulgaria, Poland, Slovakia and Lithuania, and Romania and the Republic of Moldova are invited to present their experience. The presentations will be followed by a discussion moderated by Ms. Elena Szolgayova, member of the Bureau.

10. Countries are requested to structure their presentations around the following items:
- (a) The situation in the housing sector at the time when the Country Profile was initiated;
  - (b) The main challenges at that time;
  - (c) How useful the recommendations have been and how have they been implemented (pointing out any difficulties as well as best practices and achievements);
  - (d) The evaluation of the current situation.

#### IV. QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

11. The aim of the discussion is to examine whether the objectives of the Country Profiles, set at the beginning of the project, are being met. It should cover the following:

- (a) Did the Country Profiles become:
  - (i) A tool for governmental and other relevant agencies to assess and redirect their policies by facilitating the decision-making process, to eliminate bottlenecks, and to establish long-term strategies;
  - (ii) A tool for comparing the progress made and for testing the specific solutions;
  - (iii) A tool for potential investors by providing information on such issues as legal, economic and institutional conditions of the housing sector?
- (b) Did the Country Profiles help to set priorities for immediate action?
- (c) Did the Country Profiles help to harmonize individual projects with long-term strategies?
- (d) Have the Country Profiles been useful for:
  - (i) All interested parties in the reviewed country?
  - (ii) International agencies, donors and international governmental cooperation?
  - (iii) Private-sector investors?

12. The Committee is encouraged to evaluate the process and the methods used in the Country Profile project. The countries are invited to comment on the practical usefulness of the project, and also to point out any difficulties in carrying out the project as well as in implementing the recommendations. Finally, recommendations for improving the process itself and suggestions for follow-up activities are welcome.

#### V. FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

13. The Committee may wish to:

- (a) Discuss the project's implementation and decide on any modifications, if appropriate;
- (b) Agree on ways to evaluate the progress made in countries and assist them in the implementation of the recommendations;
- (c) Invite countries that have already indicated their willingness to initiate a study to report on their actual preparedness to proceed; and to invite new countries to indicate their interest in the project;
- (d) Decide on the next country(ies) for which a study should be initiated.