



Environment

E C O N O M I C C O M M I S S I O N F O R E U R O P E

Housing and Land Management

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Environment

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Housing and Land Management



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Introduction

Each of us can do a lot to protect our environment and make this world a cleaner and healthier place. We can recycle old batteries, cycle to school or to the office, refuse to buy over-packaged goods and not drop litter in the street. But have you ever wondered what the international community does to save the planet and improve our lives? What do our elected representatives talk about at international conferences? How are their decisions put into practice? And do they make any difference?

At the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) every voice counts. The UNECE region - Europe, North America, Central Asia and Israel - is very diverse and includes some of the most economically and industrially developed countries in the world. At the same time, its 56 member States are the cause of two thirds of the world's pollution, and are among the biggest consumers of natural resources and energy. So protecting the environment and improving the quality of life in cities and in the countryside figure high among UNECE's priorities.

This booklet introduces UNECE's work on environment, housing and land management, as well as on population issues. It will take you through the various treaties and programmes and clarify the role of international law and cooperation in improving our lives. If you want more information, contact us at:

UNECE Information Unit

Palais des Nations
CH-1211 Geneva 10 - Switzerland

Phone: + 41 (0)22 917 44 44

Fax: + 41 (0)22 917 05 05

E-mail: info.ece@unece.org

Web site: www.unece.org/env



E n v i r o n m e n t

The broad aim of UNECE's environment activities is to safeguard the environment and human health while promoting sustainable development in member countries in line with Agenda 21, the plan of action adopted by world leaders at the first Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. More specifically, the aim is to reduce pollution so as to minimize environmental damage and conserve our natural resources for future generations.

To achieve these aims, UNECE, through its Committee on Environmental Policy:

- Formulates environmental policy, develops international environmental law and supports international initiatives. It also helps member countries to put these into practice by organizing seminars, workshops and advisory missions.
- Helps individual countries in transition to improve their environmental performance by assessing their efforts to bring down pollution levels and manage their natural resources, and by making specific recommendations.
- Takes a very active role in certain regional and cross-sectoral processes, such as "Environment for Europe", "Transport, Health and Environment" and "Education for Sustainable Development".
- Has negotiated five environmental treaties, all of which are now in force. Their governing bodies are serviced by the UNECE secretariat, which also helps them to monitor the implementation of the treaties, and to organize forums for region-wide policy discussions in their areas of responsibility.



Air pollution

In the 1960s scientists demonstrated the link between sulphur emissions in continental Europe and the acidification of Scandinavian lakes. Later studies confirmed that airborne pollutants could travel several thousand kilometres before being deposited and causing damage. International cooperation was needed to solve problems such as acid rain. This is how the idea of a convention on air pollution was born.

The UNECE Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution is one of the main instruments for protecting our environment. It was the first internationally legally binding agreement to deal with problems of air pollution on a broad regional basis. It was adopted in 1979 and now has 50 Parties. Since the Convention's entry into force in 1983, its Executive Body has negotiated eight protocols. They are intended to tackle specific environmental problems, such as acidification and eutrophication, and specific pollutants, such as sulphur, nitrogen, volatile organic compounds, ozone, persistent organic pollutants and heavy metals.

Thanks to the Convention and its protocols, the air that we breathe is much cleaner now than a decade or two ago. In Europe, sulphur emissions have declined by more than 60 per cent since 1980, emissions of nitrogen oxides (NOx) have been cut by 25 per cent since 1990, emissions of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) are down 35 per cent, and ammonia emissions are almost 20 per cent lower than in 1990.

For more information: www.unece.org/env/lrtap



Environmental impact assessment

Environmental damage can often be anticipated. For instance, it is possible to assess the impact that a factory or a power plant will have on the environment when it is still on the drawing board. Such an assessment early on in a project's development is particularly useful because it makes everyone involved think through the different options before construction actually starts.

The UNECE Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context was negotiated to help countries carry out such an assessment when a project is likely to have a cross-border impact. It specifies what needs to be considered at an early stage of planning. It also lays down the general obligation of countries to notify and consult each other and the public on all major projects that are likely to have a significant adverse environmental impact across borders. The Convention was adopted in 1991 and entered into force in 1997. It now has 41 Parties.

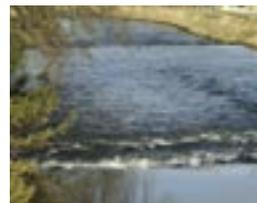


The Convention's Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment is intended to apply the principles of environmental impact assessment to plans, programmes, policies and legislation. Environmental assessments at these high levels of decision-making promote sustainable development and lead to better environmental protection. The Protocol was adopted in 2003 at the "Environment for Europe" Ministerial Conference in Kiev and has 37 Signatories, four of which have now become Parties.

For more information: www.unece.org/env/eia



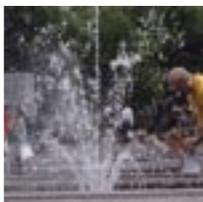
Water pollution



Water is life. Be it for drinking, for industry, for agriculture or for leisure, water is indispensable. However, water supplies are dwindling and it is estimated that up to 120 million people in UNECE member States do not have access to clean water.

The UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes was negotiated to help countries curb water pollution, prevent conflicts with neighbours over scarce resources and ensure that international rivers are well managed so that future generations will be able to extract clean water from them. The Convention is primarily intended to strengthen national measures for the protection and ecologically sound management of international surface water and groundwater. It also includes provisions for monitoring, research and development, consultations and early-warning systems. It encourages Parties to help each other in times of need, to make institutional arrangements for cooperation, to share information and to provide public access to information. The Convention was adopted in 1992 and came into force in 1996. It now has 35 Parties.

While water pollution is an environmental problem, it is also a serious threat to public health. Cleaner water and better sanitation could prevent over 30 million cases of water-related disease each year in the region. With this in mind, the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention in 1999 adopted the Protocol on Water and Health, in cooperation with the World Health Organization's Regional Office for Europe. The Protocol aims to protect human health and well-being by better water management, including the protection of water ecosystems. It entered into force in 2005 and now has 17 Parties.



After a spate of industrial accidents that polluted international rivers, the Meeting adopted the Protocol on Civil Liability for Damage to Transboundary Waters in Kiev in 2003 (see page 10).



Industrial accidents

Industry is the backbone of many economies, and new technology is making industrial operations increasingly complex. Unfortunately, even the safest industrial plant is never totally risk-free, and industrial accidents hit the headlines only too frequently.

The UNECE Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents spells out what countries have to do to reduce risk and, as far as possible, prevent industrial accidents that can have cross-border effects. Yet, no matter how stringent the safety standards, accidents will occur and countries must be prepared to deal with their consequences. The Convention, therefore, also outlines how Parties can maintain a high level of preparedness to respond to an industrial accident, especially if its effects spill over into another country. Hazardous operations must have on-site and off-site contingency plans. If several Parties could be affected by a hazardous operation, they are expected to work together to ensure that their plans are compatible or even to draw up joint off-site contingency plans. If an industrial accident does occur, the Convention expects the Parties to take steps to minimize its effects and help one another if asked to do so.

The Convention was adopted in 1992 and came into force in 2000. It now has 35 Parties. They negotiated the Protocol on Civil Liability for Damage to Transboundary Waters, together with the Parties to the Water Convention (see page 9). The protocol was adopted in 2003 at the "Environment for Europe" Ministerial Conference in Kiev and has 24 Signatories.



For more information: www.unece.org/env/teia



Public participation

Information is power, and environmental information in the hands of citizens enables them to play a meaningful role in shaping a sustainable future. Too often people are left in the dark about environmental disasters and degradation.

The UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, or Aarhus Convention, is not only an environmental agreement; it is also a convention about government accountability, transparency and responsiveness. It grants the public the right to access environmental information, to participate in decision-making processes and, if need be, to go to court to protect the environment. It links environmental rights and human rights. It acknowledges that we have an obligation to future generations. It establishes that sustainable development can be achieved only through the involvement of all stakeholders. The Convention was adopted in 1998 and came into force in 2001. It now has 39 Parties, including the European Community, whose institutions are bound by the Convention.

These Parties negotiated the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers requiring polluting companies to provide information on their releases of certain polluting substances, such as greenhouse gases, dioxins and heavy metals, to a national register accessible and searchable through the Internet. The Protocol was adopted in 2003 at the "Environment for Europe" Ministerial Conference in Kiev and has 37 Signatories. Since then UNECE has launched a clearing house to share good practices in environmental democracy and promote the Convention's application.

For more information: www.unece.org/env/pp



Environment for Europe

When the Iron Curtain was finally raised in 1989, no one had a clear idea of the state of Europe's environment. Environmental protection and restoration emerged as new issues for pan-European cooperation.

The region's Environment Ministers launched the "Environment for Europe" process in 1991 at Dobris Castle near Prague. Their aim was to improve the region's environment and to work towards the convergence of environmental policies throughout the continent.

The "Environment for Europe" Conferences are convened every three to four years. The sixth Ministerial Conference will take place in Belgrade in October 2007. The Conferences have reflected the priority concerns of countries in the region and struck a balance between subregional and regional issues. The "Environment for Europe" process has evolved into "the major long-term pan-European political framework" to discuss key policy issues, develop programmes, prepare legally binding instruments and launch various initiatives, including new institutional structures for the environment. UNECE, which has been closely associated with the "Environment for Europe" process since its inception, serves as its secretariat.

The publication of periodic pan-European assessment reports on the state of the environment is one achievement of the "Environment for Europe" process. The reports produced in 1995, 1998 and 2003 helped to identify major threats and challenges for the development of regional environmental policies. Specific efforts have been made to improve national systems for monitoring the environment and collecting, processing and managing data, particularly in economies in transition, and to make these systems compatible throughout the region.

Given education's importance in achieving lasting change, the Environment Ministers, in Kiev in May 2003, asked UNECE to draw up a regional Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development that countries can adapt to their needs and priorities. The Strategy was adopted by a High-level Meeting of Environment and Education Ministers on 17-18 March 2005 in Vilnius. It will also feed into the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014).

For more information:

www.unece.org/env/efe

www.unece.org/env/europe/environmental_monitoring.htm

www.unece.org/env/esd/welcome.htm

Environmental performance reviews



After the Dobris Assessment had drawn a first overall picture of the state of the environment in Europe in 1993, the Environment Ministers decided that countries would be reviewed individually in much more detail. The aim was to examine not only these countries' environmental conditions, but also the strategies, policies and tools that they used to manage the environment. UNECE carries out these reviews in its South-East European, Caucasus and Central Asian member States. The reviews are a useful tool for helping these countries upgrade their environment in line with the pan-European objectives of the "Environment for Europe" process.

Environmental performance reviews assess a country's efforts to reduce its overall pollution burden and manage its natural resources; to integrate environmental and socio-economic policies; to strengthen cooperation with the international community; to harmonize environmental conditions and policies throughout Europe and North America; and to contribute to sustainable development in the UNECE region.

The reviews have three main objectives:

- To help countries in transition to improve their management of the environment by establishing baseline conditions and recommending better policy implementation and performance;
- To promote continuous dialogue between UNECE member countries by sharing information about policies and experiences; and
- To stimulate greater involvement of the public in environmental discussions and decision-making.

The first cycle of reviews, performed between 1994 and 2004 in 23 countries, included Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, the Russian Federation, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovenia, Tajikistan, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. The second round cycle has begun (in chronological order) with Bulgaria, Estonia, Belarus, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. Serbia and Montenegro are next.



Transport, health and environment



Agenda 21 identified transport as a priority for national and international action. In recent years Europeans have become increasingly concerned about the sustainability of transport developments in their region. The challenge today is therefore to develop transport systems that allow transport to continue to foster economic growth and integration, while addressing health and environmental concerns.

UNECE has emphasized that only close intersectoral cooperation can bring about sustainability. The World Health Organization (WHO) follows the same approach, and their joint Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme, set up in 2002, focuses on a few priorities where international action is believed to have the most impact. They include (1) integrating environmental and health concerns into transport policy, (2) supporting demand for environmentally friendlier modes of transport, and (3) urban transport.

The Programme is paying specific attention to developments in Eastern Europe, where a sharp increase in the use of private cars combined with a low level of investment in public transport is expected to worsen congestion and pollution instead of improving people's mobility. The Programme is also:

- Disseminating information on transport, health and environment via an Internet-based clearing house (www.thepep.org/chwebsite);
- Organizing workshops and other capacity-building activities to help countries put sustainable urban transport and land-use policies into practice;
- Analysing the health effects of transport, especially on children, and their cost;
- Providing practical guidance on institutional arrangements and mechanisms for integrated policy- and decision-making; and
- Promoting safe conditions for people to walk and cycle in urban areas.



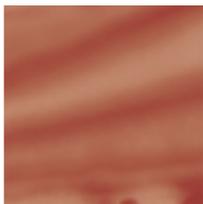
Sustainable development

In essence, much of UNECE's environment and human settlements work draws attention to the social, economic and environmental implications of development. By highlighting the need to balance social progress, economic growth and environmental protection, UNECE ultimately helps its member countries to make development sustainable. Through its regional implementation forum, UNECE also contributes directly to worldwide efforts to achieve sustainable development.

Since the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg (South Africa), UNECE's regional implementation forum has assessed the progress made in its region in meeting some of the goals set in the World Summit's plan of action. In line with the work done around the world and coordinated by the New York—based Commission on Sustainable Development to follow up on specific commitments, the Second Regional Implementation Forum in December 2005 focused on the goals related to energy, transport, air pollution, climate change and industrial development. Agriculture, land and desertification issues will be next on the agenda.

For more information:

www.unece.org/env/sustainabledevelopment/welcome.htm



Housing and land management

The general aim of UNECE's activities related to housing, planning and land administration is to promote a sustainable quality of life in towns and villages in its member countries in line with the Strategy they adopted in 2000, the Habitat Agenda and Agenda 21. Its Committee on Housing and Land Management considers that living conditions and urban problems are multidimensional and should be considered in the broad context of economic and social development, environmental protection, peace and security.

The Committee provides policy guidance on housing and urban sector reform in its member States. To this end it explores trends and policies in housing and urban development. The Committee investigates the link between economically viable settlement structures and urban forms and their social and environmental qualities. It also supports the development of modern land administration systems. To improve the quality of life in UNECE member States, the Committee promotes cooperation among central government, local authorities, the business community and NGOs.

Over the past decade the Committee's programme and methods of work have changed radically. The overall trend has been to move from narrow, sectoral and technical subjects to integrated and multidisciplinary issues, and from rigid and formal working methods to smaller groups and greater organizational flexibility. The nature of its output has also changed from general reports to practical guidelines and country-specific studies.

For more information: www.unece.org/hlm





H o u s i n g

Countries with economies in transition have made some progress in solving their housing problems, but much work still lies ahead. Housing agendas need to be developed in ways that address local priorities, mobilize resources and assign responsibilities to the various housing providers. Given the complexity of the situation, housing policies need to be constantly updated using reliable information on the housing sector, its institutional framework and related legislative and financial policies.

The Committee on Housing and Land Management reviews housing policy and reform in its member countries to obtain this reliable information. It has already published country profiles of the housing sectors in Bulgaria, Poland, Slovakia, Lithuania, Romania, the Republic of Moldova, Albania, Armenia, the Russian Federation and Serbia and Montenegro. Profiles of Georgia and Azerbaijan are in the pipeline. These studies, which contain conclusions and policy recommendations, are of interest not only to the countries themselves but also to potential investors. Moreover, the review process itself can be very valuable. It brings together local experts from different organizations or administrations. The collection of data for the country profiles may reveal a need to streamline housing statistics and improve their availability. Also, the reviews may expose specific problems, such as the management of condominiums, the provision of social housing or the availability of housing finance; these may be common to several countries, enabling the Committee to publish guidelines on these subjects.

Data collected for the country profiles are posted on the Internet.



Land administration

The societies which have created an operational market economy and enjoy internal stability recognize that, to a certain degree, this was achieved thanks to an effective system for registering land rights and an inexpensive system of real-estate transfers. Appropriate land administration and land information systems are vital for land management, urban and regional planning, housing, the banking sector, taxation, agriculture and environmental protection.

In view of the current progress in information technology and the rise of the information society and globalization, most countries of the UNECE region are modernizing their traditional cadastre and land registration systems. Such reforms are needed to improve customer services, to increase involvement of the private sector and to ensure that accurate data are available at the right time.

The Committee's Working Party on Land Administration helps countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia and South-Eastern Europe establish land registration systems that guarantee title to land and other real property. It carries out capacity-building activities in the form of workshops and provides policy advice and recommendations on national programmes for land market development and real estate registration. The Working Party has also published *Guidelines on Land Administration*, which are widely applied, particularly in these countries.



Urban development

Cities and towns are efficient starting points for promoting a sustainable quality of life. Numerous local initiatives have been launched to raise public awareness of the environmental impact of individual consumption behaviour, and to promote environmentally sound goods and services and sustainable use of energy, water, raw materials and land by individuals and communities. Spatial planning focuses on a broad range of issues and factors – social, economic, environmental, financial and cultural, to name a few. To help countries and cities develop effective local planning processes as an integral part of strategic national and regional development planning, UNECE is developing guidelines on spatial planning.



Population

Europe's population is ageing. This trend will have profound economic and social implications for the UNECE region and therefore poses unique policy challenges for member countries. Recognizing that these challenges need to be tackled through a coherent system of policy measures, the 2002 UNECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing adopted a Regional Implementation Strategy for the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (2002).

UNECE helps member countries implement this strategy and evaluate their achievements. It focuses on areas where international action can have the most impact – for example, facilitating information exchange between national focal points, collecting data and preparing regional-level analyses on issues relevant to ageing.

The region's demographic prospects are shaped largely by family and fertility trends. The nature of the family is changing, and in much of the region fertility levels are below replacement rates. To help countries develop sustainable population policies, UNECE is coordinating the Generations and Gender Programme. The Programme includes a Generations and Gender Survey that looks at a broad range of influences on demographic behaviour in a triennial prospective panel study, as well as a Contextual Database that covers national and regional trends and policies related to these issues.

For more information: www.unece.org/pau



UNECE Information Unit

Palais des Nations
CH-1211 Geneva 10
Switzerland

Phone: + 41 (0)22 917 44 44

Fax: + 41 (0)22 917 05 05

E-mail: info.ece@unece.org

Web site: www.unece.org/env

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