

**Presentation from Marco Keiner (UNECE)  
CSD, New York, 4 May 2009**

Dear Madam Chair, distinguished delegates

In my presentation, I will focus on an issue where UNECE makes a difference and where we have gained a broad variety of experience: it is **land management and land administration**.

In the ECE region, the **most important challenges in relation to “land”** pertain to

- **sustainable land administration and land use,**
- **access to land and security of tenure,**
- **improved spatial planning policies,**
- **better urban environmental performance**
- **and strengthening social cohesion in cities.**

**The Committee on Housing and Land Management and the Working Party on Land Administration** are the **UNECE intergovernmental bodies** that have a **mandate to compile, disseminate and exchange information and experiences on housing, urban development and land administration policies.**

Advice is produced through workshops, guidelines and other publications, including two country specific studies, which are **the country profile on the housing sector and the land administration review.**

**Land Management and Spatial Planning**

Challenge: Such issues as **urban sprawl** and the formation of **informal settlements** are recurrent problems. For instance, in the region as a whole, 50 million people live in informal settlements (in over 15 countries).

These people do not have adequate housing and often lack access to basic services such as clean water, sanitation and heating. Recent cases addressed by the UNECE encompass countries at all stages of development, from the *novostroiki* settlements in the periphery of Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan to recent immigrant settlements of major urban centers in industrialized countries such as Italy and Spain.

Policy implications: Solutions to existing illegal forms of housing and the prevention of new un-planned settlements often involve a combination of

- **legalization;**
- **regularization and upgrading**
- **and resettlement and reallocation programs.**

Which combination of the three is applied depends on the specific context of the country involved.

Solutions always imply to build regulatory frameworks to **facilitate access to housing assets** in the form of **efficient cadastre and registration** systems and **affordable credit** (such as micro-finance).

UNECE Work: UNECE has undertaken in-depth analysis of the phenomenon of informal settlements and produced policy guidance for member states. Particularly important is that **land be considered as a basic human asset and a key factor in addressing unequal wealth redistribution**. Proactive land policies that create secure and equitable land rights may create opportunities for low-income groups to **build their own wealth, increase economic stability and prevent social exclusion**.

### **Land Administration**

Challenge: In the UNECE region, **technical and institutional innovations** have been implemented to improve **efficiency and equity** of land administration practices. Recently, other regions have built on the experience of the ECE to promote sustainable land administration practices elsewhere, including the creation of equivalent bodies to the UNECE WPLA (as, for example, ESCAP in Asia and the Pacific, where a proposal to create a similar body is at present being considered).

A trend can be identified in many ECE countries where **mapping, cadastre and registration systems are becoming integrated under the umbrella of one administrative unit**, although this remains a major challenge for countries in transition.

Policy implications: Some countries have experienced the advantages linked to simplicity and transparency of inexpensive registration procedures, that are **reducing transaction costs** for individual customers. In the most economically advanced countries, registration systems have been constantly modernized through the introduction of **digital technologies**, achieving high degrees of complexity as a result of improvements in the move towards e-government.

**Electronic technologies could also facilitate market exchanges for real estate and enhance the long-term stability of land registration.**

UNECE Work: The UNECE WPLA promotes the exchange of knowledge and good practice on the modernization of land administration systems through the organization of workshops. Topics recently addressed include the use of **electronic technologies to upgrade spatial data infrastructure**, the **question of transparency in conveyancing** and the **application of cost recovery mechanisms** in cadastre and registration services.

## Real Estate Markets

Challenge: In the context of the current world economic crisis, improved land administration implies a good understanding of **regulatory institutions** that underpin the well-functioning of the economy.

There is an obvious need for improved **regulation of both the real estate and financial markets.**

Policy implications: **Efficient housing markets require a solid legal system** securing property rights as well as effective foreclosure procedures.

Further prerequisites include modern systems of banking supervision, safeguards for creditors and anti-fraud mechanisms.

In transition countries, **many of these instruments are deficient.**

However, **the current world financial crisis has shown that increased regulation is also necessary in the more advanced countries.**

UNECE work: **The UNECE WPLA is currently addressing these issues through the works of its Real Estate Market Advisory Group.**

More specifically, the Advisory Group is preparing guidelines on the characteristics that real estate markets and credit system should have, including the setting of **standards for increased informational transparency on real estate valuation, limitations on the use of complex financial tools, better capital risk allocation models, and policies and actions to sustain investors' confidence and increase citizens' trust.**