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Item 2 of the provisional agenda

Ministerial meeting on housing affordability and sustainability

Draft ministerial commitments on housing affordability and sustainability

Note by the Bureau of the Committee

Summary

The present document contains draft ministerial commitments initially prepared by an ad hoc group of experts representing academia, private and public sectors, in consultation with the Bureaux of the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management; the United Nations Forum of Mayors; and the Working Party on Land Administration, as well as the Real Estate Market Advisory Group. The draft document was finalized taking account of the feedback received from member States of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) at the consultation meetings held in June and July 2025.

The document is submitted according to A/79/6 (Section 20) and ECE/HBP/2024/2, paras. 15 (d)–(g).

The ministers responsible for housing matters and heads of delegation of the ECE member States at the Committee session are invited to agree on and adopt the commitments.



I. Introduction

1. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management, at its eighty-fifth session (Geneva, 2–4 October 2024), called for the organization of a ministerial meeting on housing as part of the Committee’s eighty-sixth session (Geneva, 8–10 October 2025). The meeting was to follow up the report on “*Challenges and priorities for improving housing affordability in the ECE region*”¹ presented and the workshop on housing affordability² held during the Committee session in October 2024.
2. The Committee agreed that the ministerial meeting should address housing affordability and other topical issues relating to sustainability and energy efficiency of housing. To that end, the Committee decided to invite ministers to agree on related pledges or practical commitments.³ It also noted several suggested priority topics for the ministers to focus on.⁴
3. The Committee tasked its Bureau, supported by the secretariat, with the preparatory work, including the development of a background document. It also invited volunteering representatives of member States, local governments and partner organizations to contribute to the preparations.
4. To respond to the above mandate from the Committee, an online workshop was organized on 25 March 2025 to develop draft commitments for the consideration of ministers.⁵ The 35 experts participating in the preparatory workshop were selected and invited based on their respective expertise on housing related matters. They included members of the Bureaux of the Committee, the United Nations Forum of Mayors, the Working Party on Land Administration, the Real Estate Market Advisory Group and representatives of academia, private and public sector institutions.⁶ The ECE Sustainable Energy Division was also represented.
5. Aside from suggesting commitments for ministers, the experts addressed the three questions below:

¹ The report was prepared by the UNECE Real Estate Market Advisory Group and issued in February 2025 as United Nations Publication ECE/HBP/225. Available at: <https://unece.org/info/Housing-and-Land-Management/pub/399669>

² See ECE/HBP/2024/2, paras. 9–13.

³ See ECE/HBP/2024/2, para. 15.

⁴ See ECE/HBP/2024/2, para. 14.

⁵ The workshop was co-organized by the ECE secretariat of the Committee together with Craft - Department of Architecture and Urban Studies, Politecnico di Milano and two Geneva UN Charter Centres of Excellence for Sustainable Housing hosted by University of Geneva and Glasgow Urban Laboratory of the Glasgow School of Art, in collaboration with partner organizations and national experts.

⁶ Association of Construction and Complementary Companies of Milan metropolitan area; Braillard Foundation, Geneva; Centre for Research on Architecture Society and the Built Environment, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich; Colegio de Registradores, Spain; Confcooperative Habitat (Rome); Department of Building Theory, Faculty of Architecture, Czech Technical University (Prague); Department of Geography, University of Zurich, Switzerland; Department of Sociology, University of Vienna; Department of Urban and Regional Planning of the Norwegian University of Life Sciences; Descartes Institute for the Future (Geneva); Division of Geography and Tourism, KU Leuven, Belgium; European Mortgage Federation (Brussels); ECE Group of Experts on Energy Efficiency; Faculty of Architecture of the Sapienza University of Rome; Federal Office for Housing, Switzerland; Geneva UN Charter Centre of Excellence on Sustainable Finance for Cities and Infrastructure at Cattaneo University - LIUC (Italy); Harvard University, Graduate School of Design; Housing Europe - The European Federation of Public, Cooperative and Social Housing, (Brussels); Housing Expert, Ukraine; Laboratory of Urban Sociology and Laboratory of Urbanism, Swiss Federal Technology Institute of Lausanne; Metropolitan Research Institute (Budapest); One Works (Italy); Paris School of Urban Planning, Université Paris Est Créteil; Research Center for New Social Housing, Technical University of Vienna; School of Rural and Surveying Engineering, National Technical University of Athens; Tecnoborsa SCpa (Italy).

(a) Barriers: What are the major challenges that prevent/hinder the implementation of the objectives of the *Geneva UN Charter for Sustainable Housing*?⁷

(b) Evidence: How can housing affordability help drive the response to wider socioecological challenges;

(c) Priorities: What priorities are needed for effective implementation of housing affordability and sustainability.⁸

6. Based on the outcomes of the workshop, the secretariat prepared draft ministerial commitments in consultation with the Committee Bureau. The Working Party on Land Administration, at its fourteenth session (Geneva, 28–29 April 2025), also provided inputs to the draft document. The draft document was then submitted for feedback by the ECE member States during online informal consultations held on 17 June and 15 July 2025. The present draft document, tabled for the ministerial meeting, has been revised based on the outcomes of the consultations with the member States, and translated into French and Russian.

7. Ministers responsible for housing and heads of delegations of the ECE member States at the eighty-sixth session of the Committee will be invited to agree on and adopt the commitments.

II. Draft ministerial commitments on housing affordability and sustainability

We, Ministers and high-level representatives of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) member States gathered in Geneva, on 8 October 2025, on the occasion of the Ministerial Meeting on Housing Affordability and Sustainability, at the eighty-sixth session of the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management

Reaffirming that access to adequate, affordable, sustainable and resilient housing is a human right and a cornerstone of sustainable development and social equity,

Recognizing the importance of adequate, affordable and sustainable housing as essential to the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly Sustainable Development Goals 1, 10 and 11,

Recalling the New Urban Agenda and the Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing, which promote access to decent, adequate, affordable and healthy housing for all,

Acknowledging the persistent housing emergency across the ECE region, which affects member States and their regions and cities with different intensity, involving: the lack of the adequate provision of affordable housing in areas of high demand; scarcity of available land; demographic changes; the financialization of the housing sector; outdated legal frameworks; and the limited integration of social and environmental objectives in housing policy,

Recognizing the complex, dynamic, diverse and context-dependent character of housing challenges,

Recognizing also that housing affordability is intrinsically linked to economic growth and broader socioecological resilience, enabling equitable access to employment, education, health and essential services while being mindful of supporting sustainable land use and reduced greenhouse gas emissions,

⁷ Available at: <https://unece.org/info/Housing-and-Land-Management/pub/2891>

⁸ “Sustainability” in this context is understood as defined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, covering the “5 Ps”: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership, see: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf?ref>.

Concerned that the excessive [commodification⁹ of housing, which often leads to] financialization [and speculation], increasing land prices and insufficient public investment have deepened the housing emergency and contributed to exclusion, displacement, and spatial inequality, particularly affecting groups and persons in vulnerable situations,

Considering the urgent need for integrated, inclusive and forward-looking strategies that address the housing emergency by prioritizing retrofitting of existing buildings, regenerative urban planning, and community-based housing initiatives to meet both affordability and sustainability objectives,

Mindful that successful implementation of sustainable housing requires coordinated action among national and local governments, enhanced international cooperation and data-driven policy frameworks aligned with the Geneva Charter principles,

1. *Commit to* undertaking the following actions towards housing affordability and sustainability in line with national needs and priorities:

(i) **Develop and adopt integrated national housing strategies** that are aligned with the Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing, prioritize the needs of persons and groups in vulnerable situations and are grounded in inclusive governance and climate justice;

(ii) **Align national housing policies with the principles** of social inclusion, economic efficiency, environmental sustainability and cultural adequacy, as **set out in the Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing**. Support the development of pilot projects and spatial prototypes that translate these principles into built form. Promote the use of evaluation tools that assess outcomes beyond mere policy compliance;

(iii) **Recognize and reinforce, as appropriate, the role of [competent] local governments** in implementing sustainable, affordable, and climate-resilient housing policies by ensuring adequate legal, policy and financial support, and by empowering them to plan, develop and maintain such housing; additionally, **establish strategic cross-sectoral platforms** among public, private, professional and civil society actors to support community-based regeneration and co-create solutions that operationalize the principles of the Geneva UN Charter.

(iv) **Systematically collect and share national, regional and local housing data¹⁰ cadastres and, whenever possible, geospatial data, including 3D models of the built environment** to ensure evidence-based decision-making, monitor housing needs and affordability trends and promote policy accountability;

(v) **Establish active land policies at the national and local levels** to enable affordable housing supply, and promote equitable land use, while enhancing the capacity of public authorities to shape policy outcomes and the use of land strategically, in response to future priorities. Active land policies may include measures such as land value taxation, tax increment financing and public land banking;

(vi) **Ensure that housing policymaking and implementation consider the changing needs of the population** through demographic changes (migration, ageing), societal changes (smaller households) or environmental changes (adaptation to climate change), while encouraging architectural innovation—such as inclusive, adaptable and resilient design typologies—in cooperative and community-led housing;

(vii) **Invest in and expand the stock of public, cooperative, social and community-led housing models** that uphold long-term affordability and social inclusion;

⁹ “Excessive commodification of housing” refers to the situation in which housing is used as collateral in the creation of financial assets that, in themselves, have the potential to alter patterns of use or affect property rights—commonly due to the lack of an adequate legal framework that protects current holders or owners.

¹⁰ Taking into account national and international data protection standards and regulations.

(viii) **Reduce the speculative¹¹ use of housing**, including by regulating the use of short-term rental for touristic purposes, with the aim of achieving a more balanced distribution in sensitive and clearly defined urban areas;

(ix) **Adopt innovative financing tools** such as green bonds, sustainability linked loans, community land trusts and blended finance instruments to attract private investment in sustainable housing without undermining affordability, and promote the integration of energy renovation financing with broader housing investment strategies, particularly in the reuse of existing buildings where renovation costs are significant;

(x) **Commit to increasing the supply of affordable, sustainable housing through national and local strategies** by promoting new construction models that integrate climate resilience and mitigation, energy efficiency and innovative building technologies, including modular structures, ensuring these developments serve diverse needs and avoid displacement while aiming to reduce construction costs and greenhouse gas emissions;

(xi) **Retrofit/transform the existing housing stock** through targeted incentives, often combined with regulatory reforms, to ensure that energy efficiency upgrades are accessible to all, address interventions in multi-ownership buildings, apply localized solutions, create scale economies and align the housing sector with climate mitigation and adaptation goals—thereby enhancing sustainability and resilience to extreme weather events;

(xii) **Promote regenerative densification** by redeveloping vacant or underused urban sites, encouraging context-sensitive design, transformation and adaptive reuse of existing buildings, to avoid unnecessary demolition and integrating—through sustainable urban planning—affordable, green housing within well-connected and climate-adaptive neighbourhoods that offer access to essential services and green spaces while ensuring that densification serves diverse needs, enhances social cohesion and avoids displacement;

(xiii) **Enhance international cooperation and peer learning mechanisms** to disseminate good practices, support capacity-building and enable countries to address housing challenges through solidarity and shared responsibility.

2. *Agree* that the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management will report on the progress in the implementation of the above commitments at its annual sessions.

¹¹ Speculation is the act of buying, holding or selling assets (such as securities, commodities, currencies, or real estate, including housing)—with the primary goal of profiting from expected price changes, rather than from the asset’s intrinsic value, utility or income—with a view to achieving gains in the shortest time possible.