

Update on the implementation of the Place and Life in the ECE – A Regional Action Plan 2030 in Slovakia (Veronika Reháková)

Madam Chair,
Your Excellencies, Distinguished guests, Ladies, and gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to thank you for inviting me to this panel aimed at the implementation of the goals of the Regional Action Plan 2030. It is my pleasure to be here and to share some experience with you.

To ensure affordable, adequate, healthy, and resilient housing for all citizens is a big challenge in the most of countries. The COVID-19 pandemic and now the conflict in Ukraine has provided a strong reminder of the pressing housing challenges in our region. Therefore, we truly appreciate the work of this Committee and the outputs, for example also the Regional Action Plan, because it sets a broader perspective for housing challenges and shows different ideas and solutions to address the problems.

In line with the Regional Action Plan, we are aware of the importance of the comprehensive and long-term national housing policy. That is why in the past decades, Slovakia has actively developed its housing policy. In 2021 the Government of the Slovak Republic approved the new Housing strategy. This strategy defines our national housing priorities up to 2030. This document was elaborated through a broad participative process taking into account the Agenda 2030, The New Urban Agenda and also the principles of the sustainable development of housing formulated in the Geneva Charter and other relevant documents. It is important to mention, that in Slovakia the roles of various governance levels are strictly divided. The role of the State is to formulate housing policy and then create the tools to enable its implementation. The competence of the State is thus mainly focused on the creation of appropriate legislation, institutional and economic conditions for individual actors in the housing market. The active role in housing policy was passed to municipal level, which is responsible for the development of individual areas of municipal life, including housing.

The main goal of the Slovak housing policy is to increase availability and affordability of housing for the residents of Slovak Republic. Our top and long-term priorities are the support of affordable rental housing and refurbishment of existing housing stock. Slovakia is a nation of homeowners, and the rental market exists only in small extent. Crucial instrument in increasing of social housing availability, which is also public in our case, is the combination of subsidies provided by the Ministry of Transport and long-term low-interest loans provided by the State Housing Development Fund. This set of tools has a tradition of over 20 years, during which more than 47 000 social housing dwellings were supported. Due to the low availability of rental housing in general, this number is still insufficient. Central government aims to continue its support and to motivate local government to increase the rate of construction of social housing. Slovakia has also made impressive progress towards improving housing quality and energy efficiency, almost 70% of housing stock is renovated.

The new Housing strategy recommends several other tasks to be implemented in order to improve housing availability and affordability in Slovakia. We could mention for example passing new legislation on construction and urban planning, or reforming rental law and relations between landlord and tenant in general, which is still strongly influenced by former communist regime. These strategic documents also suggest reforming domestic public procurement act in order to remove unnecessary gold-plating elements in the process.

From our experience these objectives can only be achieved if all parties involved work closely together. The solution to the housing affordability issue cannot be achieved quickly and with an ease. However, we are of opinion that if we can achieve long term stability and continuation of housing policy and support measures, as well as implementation of new ones, housing situation will continue to improve.

Especially in national context, from our experiences, for the success of housing policy it is crucial to empower cities, towns and villages as active actors of the policy implementation. The transfer of specific solutions in housing and also in other areas to other countries is more difficult, because of that we consider specific experiences only to serve as inspiration. The implementation in national environment must reflect specific institutional, cultural and economic conditions to be successful.

Because of that we also believe in the importance of sharing knowledge in the area of housing, land policy, construction and wider urban policy. The overall objective of such activity is to raise awareness among various stakeholders about housing solutions available, to allow for accelerated learning and, in turn, the development and provision of affordable housing, which as we now witness is more important than ever. Therefore, Slovakia welcomes the work of the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management on promoting affordable and sustainable housing and encourages the Committee to continue its valuable work in this field in the future.

Many thanks for your kind attention.