

## United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

### Report of the Meeting of the Bureau of the Working Party on Land Administration (WPLA)

10 June 2020

10:00 – 12:00 (CET)

WebEx

#### Attendance:

Mr. Fredrik Zetterquist (Sweden), Chair  
Ms. Kirsikka Riekkinen (Finland), Vice-chair  
Ms. Chryssy Potsiou, (Greece), Vice-chair  
Ms. Mari Khardziani (Georgia)  
Mr. Filippo Cadamuro (Italy)  
Ms. Elena Busch (Norway)  
Mr. Konstantin Litvintcev (Russian Federation)  
Ms. Galina Kirichenko (Russian Federation)  
Mr. Gil Matoses (Spain)  
Ms. Victoria Abbott (United Kingdom)

#### **UNECE Secretariat**

Ms. Gulnara Roll  
Ms. Maike Salize

---

#### **Item 1: Opening and adoption of the agenda**

1.1 The Chair of the Working Party, Mr. Fredrik Zetterquist, opened the meeting and invited the bureau to make any amendments to the previous bureau meeting minutes and then to the agenda. No additional comments were made.

#### **Item 2: COVID-19, post-COVID-19 recovery and the land sector**

2.1 During a “tour de table”, the Bureau exchanged experience on the impact of COVID-19 on the land sector and opportunities for WPLA.

Firstly, Bureau members briefly **summarized the current situation in their respective country:**

(Kirsikka/Finland)

- Period of increased use of digital tools for cadastral surveying;
- Temporary laws have been passed to respond to situation; expectation that situation will go back to as it was before

- Market for summer cottages exploded, remote locations preferred, prices go up
- Cadastral services when needed can be done outside (if less than 10 people involved)

(Mari/Georgia)

- Distance working underpinned by the IT infrastructure and relevant legislative framework in place
- Increase of online services (e.g. for property registration, purchase); provision of part of NAPR services (around 30) by email as well; increased consultancy by phone
- Subsidies planned for development and construction companies, support for mortgages to help with economic recovery

(Chryssy/Greece)

- Changes in consumer preferences: single family houses instead of apartments
- Government measures to relax payment of mortgage loans, etc.
- Airbnb preferred by tourists over hotels, but overall much lower demand than in previous years
- Cadaster: electronic service provision for registration process; digitize parcel and document submission electronically
- Paper available on these new procedures (incl. statistics)
- Digitalization of country is ongoing by Hellenic Cadaster – paper under preparation

(Filippo/Italy)

- Cadastral services continue to use electronic channels, see reduction of number of documents at the beginning of the lock down
- Land registry services not deferrable as they need to be provided in presence. A reduced number in registration requests was noted, numbers are slowly increasing again and going back to normal level
- Systems need to be adapted to electronic processes, need for easier channels of communication
- Land market seems stable
- Technical concerns at the beginning related to stability of connections

(Elena/Norway)

- Less/no travel, more online communication
- Challenging to initiate new international projects
- Banks are cooperative, e.g. flexible with requesting payments from those that are unemployed, or as regards the payment of mortgage, loans, offer attractive interest rates
- Prices for property went up / new routines in managing real estate visits

(Konstantin/Galina/Russian Federation)

- Situation very different from region to region in the country
- Rental and tax postponement, SME are suffering, especially from economic crisis
- Increase in demand for e-service and software; provision of digital signatures has increased
- Contactless land related services, cadastral services provided upon special request

(Gil/Spain)

- Challenges with land registry: online services/communication increased, presence in office is being avoided
- New laws approved, e.g. to provide basic income for the most vulnerable/those not able to pay mortgages
- Unemployment increased significantly; this can make economic recovery difficult
- New law approved on real estate

(Fredrik/Sweden)

- No strict lock-down, still distance working/education
- Prices for land have come down, except for summer cottages. People prefer to stay in Sweden for holidays; demand for boats has sharply increased
- Properties are presented online by real estate agencies to individual clients upon request
- In person property registration for the elderly (as a main risk group) is on hold/done by themselves electronically
- Digitalization process is hampered due to slow changes in legislation

(Victoria/UK)

- Adapt to working from home (handout and setup hardware to staff) / set up processes to continue deliver services
- Quick adaptation to process transactions online securely outside the office
- Process requests now at pre-COVID level, but submitted electronically
- Engage differently with customers now – forum for customers to identify challenges in land registry
- Time needed to provide services online, electronic/digital signature solutions being developed (i.e. no presence of witnesses when signing); legal concerns in the UK (e.g. due to lack of use of IDs), requires development of new standards, e.g. web signatures with a witness

Secondly, Bureau members exchanged on **a possible contribution of WPLA to the post-COVID-19 recovery**. Proposals included the following:

- Share experience to identify patterns in building resilience; exchange experience on situations and solutions to facilitate mutual learning, exchange of good practices
- Possible themes that gain more relevance:
  - o Key role of mortgages

- o Housing issues/affordability, poor/vulnerable housing availability
- o Increase in service provision online/digitally, and related technical/legal questions to provide e-services
- o Changes in perception of security of tenure/ownership - Prindex?
- o Crowd sourcing of projects – base map prepared (Chryssy more details)

Lastly, the Bureau members discussed **opportunities for the land sector** that they see arising from this COVID-19 crisis. The following opportunities were identified:

- “Forced” opportunity for digitalization – online tools have gained importance
- New ways of working online/digitally: Fill in documents/requests online has proven to be effective, answer questions by phone (statistics on services available?)
- Acceleration of use of digital technologies e.g. electronic/digital signatures

The Bureau agreed to continue exchanging on this topic also in the light of identifying a suitable theme for the next WPLA session in 2021.

### **Item 3: Programme of Work 2018-2019, Programme of Work 2020-2021 and including the work of Task Groups and status on actions**

#### Capacity-building and international knowledge sharing:

3.1.1 Due to the current exceptional situation, the physical meeting of the Sixth High Level Forum on UN-GGIM was replaced by three webinars, which took place on 26 May, 2 June and 9 June. Ms. Elena Busch had attended the second session on Integrated Geospatial Information Framework (IGIF). She mentioned that IGIF is an interesting tool for counties to use, assess and compare their development. Mr. Fredrik Zetterquist reported that Sweden is also adopting IGIF and that it can be considered a flexible and easy to apply tool for developed and developing countries alike.

More information on the UN-GGIM virtual forum events, including the recordings are available online at: [https://ggim.un.org/meetings/2020/Virtual\\_HLF/](https://ggim.un.org/meetings/2020/Virtual_HLF/).

3.1.2 The sixth online meeting of the UN-GGIM Expert Group on Land Administration and Management took place on 29 May. The Chair attended the meeting which focused on the results of a global consultation on the **Framework for Effective Land Administration (FELA)**. He reported that over 250 comments had been received and were considered by UN-GGIM. WPLA had substantively contributed to the consultations.

The final version of FELA is available online at:

<http://ggim.un.org/meetings/GGIM-committee/10th-Session/documents/E-C.20-2020-29-Add 2-Framework-for-Effective-Land-Administration.pdf>

Further, the meeting discussed as to use FELA in practice. Proposals included the preparation of national case studies and possible integration of FELA in existing projects. The Chair shared his conclusions that IGIF and FELA are useful global guidance documents for the land sector. Further, he reported that UN-GGIM had expressed interest in contributing to the 12<sup>th</sup> session of WPLA, e.g. by organizing a side event or workshop on FELA.

- 3.1.3 The workshop in Sweden on Education for LA has been moved to spring 2021 (tentatively late February/beginning of March 2021). The Chair reported that it will be organized in the context of a 5-year Master Programme on Land Administration to be launched in autumn at the University of Gävle, Sweden. Given the current situation, the workshop might also cover practices for online education. Ms. Kirsikka Riekkinen reconfirmed her interest to contribute to the organization of this event.

#### Land administration reviews:

- 3.2.1 The next Country Profiles (CPs) on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management will be for Albania and Kyrgyzstan. Preparation of the profiles require extrabudgetary funding which still needs to be raised. The preparational work on the CP for Albania has been kicked off at a hybrid workshop “National Housing Policy in Albania: Financing for affordable housing and the role of housing agencies” (Tirana, 18 June 2020). The CP is planned to be developed by UNECE in 2020-2021. A call for experts to contribute to the review of land related issues is still open. Bureau members interested to contribute to the CP are requested to contact the secretariat as soon as possible.

#### Review and update of the 2005 publication “Land Administration in the UNECE region: Development, Trends, and main principles”:

- 3.3.1 The Chair stated that the WPLA Programme of Work for 2020-2021 includes the review and update of the publication “Land Administration in the UNECE region” with the aim of improving land administration systems in the ECE region, taking into account the developments as well as the trends that have taken place since 2005 and those leading into the future. In view of the discussion on IGIF and FELA under item 3.1.2, he reported that these two documents with a global scope had recently been prepared by UN-GGIM. To avoid duplication of efforts, he proposed not to review and update the 2005 publication. Instead, it was proposed that WPLA could contribute to FELA and e.g. support implementation of these frameworks through the study on

future scenarios. The Bureau was invited to comment on this proposal at the next Bureau meeting.

Task Groups: Discussions on activities for the task groups for the Programme of Work 2018-2019 & Programme of Work 2020-2021

- 3.4.1 Fraud in Land Administration: The request to WPLA focal points to share best practices that could complement the draft study is still on hold due to the exceptional situation. The situation will be revisited at the next Bureau meeting.
- 3.4.2 Informal settlements: The Guidelines were launched during the joint UNECE-FIG webinar “Formalizing the informal to protect residents in informal settlements” on 17 June. The webinar was attended by 140 participants from all over the world. It included presentations on the Guidelines by the main authors and experience in formalization was shared by representatives from Albania, Greece, Italy and North Macedonia. During the webinar, the importance of formalizing informal settlements for post-COVID recovery was stressed, as clear ownership titles and security of tenure and hence increased economic security for residents. The meeting recording is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=39PnEPCR3gk&feature=youtu.be>
- 3.4.3 Land consolidation: The final version of the FAO “Legal Guide and its Application at the Country Level” is available online at <http://www.fao.org/3/ca9520en/CA9520EN.pdf>. It has been launched during a webinar on 18 June. The meeting recording is available at: <https://youtu.be/ALnzjgA3Pc4>
- 3.4.4 Scenarios for future land administration and management: Due to the continuing uncertainty of the current situation and the cancellation of the Annual Meeting 2020 of FIG-Commission 7 in August/September 2020 where it was intended to hold consultations on the future scenarios, it was proposed to postpone the consultations on the future scenarios to the WPLA 12<sup>th</sup> session in spring 2021. In the meantime, the draft report presenting the scenarios would be made available for the Bureau’s review and approval before submitting it to the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management for approval at its eighty-first session (6-8 October 2020). It was proposed to hold the consultations on the scenarios at the WPLA 12<sup>th</sup> session and thematically link them with FELA. Outcomes of these consultations would then be reflected in the future scenarios report and finalized in the course of 2021.
- 3.4.5 Outreach and promotion: The secretariat briefly summarized the outcomes of the communication survey that had been circulated to WPLA focal points. Results show that the main channel of communication for WPLA focal points is email correspondence, followed by workshops, meetings and UNECE

website. It is evident from the survey that focal points prefer to receive information on WPLA activities via email correspondence. Other proposed channels, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter or the UNECE Vital Spaces Newsletter do not play an important role.

It was agreed that the secretariat would disseminate the results of the survey to the task group on outreach and promotion for follow up.

#### Programme of Work 2020-2021:

- 3.5.1 The survey of *Potential benefits and limitations of emerging technologies Forum* is still on hold as the planned workshop at the World Bank had been cancelled due to COVID-19. Ms. Victoria Abbott reported that she had been in touch with some people who were interested in the workshop. She expressed her hopes that the World Bank conference, including the workshop, would take place next year.
- 3.5.2 On Prindex, Ms. Chryssy Potsiou reported that the Prindex group is finalizing its next report that will be global in scope. She further informed that she had requested Prindex country reports on ECE member states.
- 3.5.3 Ms. Kirsikka Riekkinen reported that the questionnaire on PPPs in LA was ready for dissemination and had been put on hold due to the COVID-19 situation. In consultation with the FIG Commission 7 Chair, she proposed to send it out in order to have initial results from the questionnaire ready for presentation at the annual FIG Commission 7 meeting, currently planned to be held during the second half of September. She will share the questionnaire with the secretariat for dissemination.

#### **Item 4: The 12<sup>th</sup> Session of the WPLA**

- 4.1.1 The secretariat updated the Bureau on the preparation of the WPLA 12<sup>th</sup> session. The Bureau exchanged views on possible dates for the session and proposed to hold the meeting during the week of 3 May, pending availability of a venue. The Bureau welcomed the proposal to organize a joint workshop with UN-GGIM in the margins of the 12<sup>th</sup> session on the recently approved FELA.
- 4.1.2 The Bureau continued its exchange on possible topics for the 12<sup>th</sup> session and proposed to consider post COVID-19 recovery post, the future scenarios and FELA, PPP in LA, blockchain and electronic IDs, land accessibility for island states. The Bureau was invited to send proposals for topics to the secretariat by email until 30 June 2020.

## **Item 5: Upcoming events and WPLA participation**

### 5.1 List of events:

- 17 June - Formalizing the Informal to Protect Residents in Informal Settlements. Online workshop, 14.30-17.00 via WebEx
- 18 June - Land Consolidation Legislation: FAO Legal Guide and Its Application at the Country Level, 14.00-16.00 via Zoom
- CANCELLED: 30 August - 5 September 2020 - Annual Meeting 2020 of FIG-Commission 7, Bern, Switzerland
- CANCELLED: 7-11 September 2020 – Fourth Regional workshop on IGIF to be held in Issyk-Kul, Kyrgyzstan
- 5 October 2020 – SDG11 Day – Geneva
- 6 October 2020 - Forum of Mayors - Geneva
- 7-8 October 2020 – 81st Session of the UNECE Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management – Geneva
- 20-22 October 2020 – Online Annual Meeting 2020 “Building community resilience: urban-rural linkages and strategies to deal with COVID-19”, FIG-Commission 7
- End of February / early March 2021 - Workshop on education on land administration - Sweden
- May 2021 - WPLA 12th Session – Malta

## **Item 6: Next Bureau meeting**

- 6.1 The next bureau meeting will be held by WebEx and the secretariat will send out a poll to decide on the date.