

HOUSING EUROPE WORKING COMMITTEE MEETINGS

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***“State of play of the Greek Social Housing
Policies”***

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The rapporteur

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- ❑ He acted as the senior policy expert for “*The Green Paper on the National Social Inclusion Strategy*” (Greek Ministry of Labour, Social Insurance and Welfare, 2013-2014), and the Coordinator of the *National Social Inclusion Strategy* (adopted by the European Commission in January 2015) and the *National Strategy to prevent and combat homelessness* (2014-2016)

The Technological Educational Institute of Athens

The Technological Educational Institute of Athens (T.E.I. of Athens) was established in 1983 as a tertiary higher academic institute at the technological level supervised by the Ministry of Education. It is a self-governed, multi-disciplinary, legal body of public law assimilated to public universities.

The T.E.I. of Athens is an academic partner in **HOUSING EUROPE-The European Federation of Public, Cooperative and Social Housing** through the Unit of Health and Social Welfare Management (Department of Business Administration)

The national context

The development of sound social housing policies constitutes a key challenge for the rudimentary Greek Welfare State in the context of the sharp financial crisis that affects Greece and its implications during the implementation of the **Financial Stability Mechanisms**. However, the social housing discourse does not represent a major priority reform domain, although it may affect a broad range of persons unable to meet effectively their housing needs through the private market (particularly pensioners, long term unemployed, overindebted households and welfare claimants), already hit by severe austerity measures.

The social situation in Greece

As a result of the 2009 crisis, the national economic and social context remains highly challenging, with implications for both social stability and growth. The social pressures generated by recession and fiscal consolidation are significant.

In 2016, Greece is experiencing its eighth consecutive year of recession against a rising unemployment rate, estimated in **23,5%** in June 2016 (young unemployment rate: **50,3%**). **35,7%** of the population (3.825.000 persons) were at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2015, where **21,4%** lived below the EU statistical poverty line (income set at 60% of the median household income)

The domestic housing market

The Greek housing market **collapsed** since 2009, mainly driven by the drop of GDP per capita, the shrinking of residential lending and the rise in taxation, dragging investments and house prices down. Approximately €18 bn., or 8.2% of GDP, investments in construction were lost within 2008-2015, slowing further down the economic activity.

The Greek housing market currently **is an “outlier” of the European markets**, with a 41% decline in house prices between 2008-2015, and a 72% drop in transactions volume within 2008-2014. It is characterized today by **oversupply**, given that in 2004 there were 71 house properties per 100 people.

The Social Housing framework

A. The Constitutional Framework

Art. 21 par. 4 provides that *“For those without any or with insufficient accommodation, housing is subject to special State care”*

B. The Legislative Framework

There is not any single Legislative Social Housing Framework. Different statutes regulate aspects of social housing policies, as:

- a) Social housing programmes by the **Workers Housing Organization**, sacked in 2012
- b) The protection of over-indebted mortgage loan debtors from **eviction and auctioning** in case of prolonged arrears when their dwelling is the main residence (preventive model)
- c) **Supportive measures for homeless**
- d) **Rent subsidies to persons at risk of extreme poverty**

A new Social Housing Agenda

- ❑ The National Social Inclusion Strategy (2014)**
- ❑ The National Strategy to prevent and combat homelessness (2015)**
- ❑ The Social Housing Strategy (2015)**

The National Social Inclusion Strategy

The National Social Inclusion Strategy (NSSI) was designed in 2014 by the Ministry of Labour, Social Insurance and Social Solidarity as a common framework of principles, priorities and targets aiming at the coordination, monitoring and evaluation of all policies on national, regional and local level to combat poverty and social exclusion.

It was approved in January 2015 by the European Commission as the policy document fulfilling the respective national conditionality for leverage of ERDF and ESF resources of the Thematic Objective 9 “*Poverty & Social Exclusion*”.

The policy context of the Strategy

- ***Country-driven***, involving broad-based participation
- ***Comprehensive*** in recognizing the multidimensional nature of poverty / exclusion and proposing a commensurate policy response
- **Based on a *long-term perspective*** for poverty reduction
- ***Results-oriented*** and focused on outcomes that benefit the most underprivileged
- ***Partnership-oriented***
- ***Inspired*** by international policies and best practices

The Key Principles

- ❑ **Common and shared responsibility in combatting poverty and exclusion:** safeguarding the country's social fabric is a major challenge demanding active participation of all stakeholders (state, civil society, market)
- ❑ **Social justice:** unjustified and unfair inequalities can only be avoided by linking protection to need and prioritizing interventions accordingly (subsidiarity)
- ❑ **Empowerment:** vulnerable groups should be offered the opportunity and the means to regain control on their lives (activation)
- ❑ **Balanced adequacy of protection and fiscal viability:** introduce targeting, impact assessment and rationalization elements in every intervention
- ❑ **Social innovation:** coordinated mobilization of all available (public and private non for profit) resources in order to come up with new models of service provision (in social care and activation) aiming at enhanced effectiveness and viability.

The Architecture

A. PARLIAMENT AND GOVERNMENT

- ❑ ***Cross-sectoral design and monitoring*** with the participation of all Ministries with competencies in the field of inclusion policies
- ❑ ***Regulatory development*** (basic legislative package) promoted by the Ministry of Labour
- ❑ ***Operational coordination and evaluation*** by specialized mechanisms

B. REGIONS AND MUNICIPALITIES

- ❑ ***Territorial adjustment*** of the strategy's targets and priorities according to local needs and available resources
- ❑ ***Design and monitoring*** of Regional Action Plans with the participation of local authorities and local stakeholders
- ❑ ***Implementation of policies*** by Regions and municipalities

Policies on social housing and homelessness

The development of policies on social housing and homelessness is a key priority within the first pillar “**Access to basic goods**” of the No. 1 Objective to combat extreme poverty, which includes the following measures:

- ❑ **Measure 1.1.1** – Access to basic subsistence means
- ❑ **Measure 1.1.2** – Access to basic health care
- ❑ **Measure 1.1.3** – Protection in case of crisis
- ❑ **Measure 1.1.4** – **Access to adequate housing**
- ❑ **Measure 1.1.5** – Access to electric power
- ❑ **Measure 1.1.6** – Access to financial services
- ❑ **Measure 1.1.7** – Access to Justice
- ❑ **Measure 1.1.8** – Access to cultural and recreational activities

The National Strategy to prevent and combat homelessness

The National Strategy to prevent and combat homelessness (NSPCH) 2015-2020 was designed in 2015 by the Technological Educational Institute of Athens after a programming agreement with the Ministry of Labour, Social Insurance and Social Solidarity.

The so called *high priority groups* for the NSPCH include:

- rough sleepers;
- persons living in places or vehicles not suitable for ordinary residence (ex. cars, warehouses, tents etc.);
- persons living in temporary accommodation facilities;
- persons temporarily living in institutional care facilities and prisons;
- persons in high risk of losing their home due to economic and social factors.

Key long term Strategic Goals

- No legally and permanently resident in Greece should be denied the access to its owned residence due to absolute poverty.
- No legally and permanently resident should be denied the access to its rented residence due to absolute poverty.
- No legally and permanently resident should have to sleep rough for more than 24 hours in the street due to lack of housing alternatives.
- No legally and permanently resident should have to stay for more than 7 days in a place not suitable for ordinary housing due to lack of housing alternatives.
- No legally and permanently resident should have to spend more than 6 months in a total period of 2 years at temporary accommodation shelters due to lack of housing alternatives.

Key Operational Targets

- Establishment of an **Inter-ministerial Committee against Homelessness**
- Establishment of a **National Advisory Committee against Homelessness**
- Development of a **Support Services Network for the Prevention of Evictions**
- Development of a **Network for the Referral to Housing of Persons in High Risk of Homelessness**
- Introduction of a **National Programme of rent subsidy (housing benefit)** for households at risk of absolute poverty
- Creation of a **Homeless National Registry** for the immediate registration and monitoring of the target groups
- Creation of an **Immediate Relief System** for the coverage of persons already facing the risk of homelessness

The Social Housing Strategy

The National Social Housing Strategy 2015-2020 was designed in 2015 by the National Social Research Center after a programming agreement with the Ministry of Labour, Social Insurance and Social Solidarity.

It is not focused on the priority groups of the NSSI (groups at high risk of poverty and social exclusion), but rather on persons unable to meet effectively their housing needs.

Key Instruments

- a) The implementation of **social housing programmes** for private employees by a new public body in the type of the Workers Housing Organization, which will be supervised by the Ministry of Labour, Social Insurance and Social Solidarity.
- b) The introduction of a **means test housing rent benefit** for at least 400.000 tenants.

Conclusions

- **Greece is one of the very few EU Member States without an inclusive social safety net** (in the form of a national General Minimum Income Scheme) and **without any integrated social housing regime.**
- The introduction of a national MIS is among the social clauses of the Troika Stabilization Programmes, clearly emphasised in the Second (2012) and the Third (2015) Stability Programme.
- The development of social housing policies in Greece is subject to a complex set of external and internal factors.

The introduction of a concerted institutional social housing framework - 1

- The set of recommendations laid down in the National Strategy to prevent and combat homelessness and the National Social Housing Strategy
- The final drafts of both Strategies (with an Operational Plan) were submitted in May 2015 to the Ministry of Labour, Social Insurance and Social Solidarity in order for the implementation to start. However, until the present day, the Ministry has not initiated any implementation activities and **there is no indication of future progress.**

The introduction of a concerted institutional social housing framework - 2

The set of recommendations laid down in the **Action Plan on Housing**, which is among the so called social clauses of the Third Stability Programme for Greece (2015-2018)

Supplemental Memorandum of Understanding, 16 June 2016

(2.5.3., p. 20)

“The authorities will establish an action plan for a permanent housing policy for the most vulnerable in line with European best practice by December 2016”.

The introduction of an administrative social housing framework

The Deputy Minister of Labour, Social Insurance and Social Solidarity announced in September 2016 plans about the establishment **of a new social housing organization**, which will manage the stock of public housing that remains vacant and that will combine rehabilitation of housing units with access to jobs.

However, until the present day, the Ministry has not initiated any implementation activities and **there is no indication of future progress**.

In any case, this initiative is subject to the social clause on *an action plan for a permanent housing policy for the most vulnerable*.

The recovery of the domestic house market

Key policy initiatives as:

- reduce the housing **oversupply**, through massive redevelopment of part of the dwelling stock, along with infrastructure and technology investments;
- give incentives to foreign investors and **simplify the real estate regulatory framework**;
- **reduce real estate taxation**;
- facilitate transactions and deal with fragmented ownership, through the creation of a «**Land Bank**», a mechanism for concentrating property rights

The introduction of housing regimes for asylum seekers and recognized refugees

- Greece is the EU Member State most impacted by an unprecedented refugee crisis.
- Almost 62.000 persons were “trapped” in the end of November 2016 within the Greek territory.
- The European Commission has assigned UNHCR to develop a social housing programme through the **Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund Emergency Assistance support**. The Programme addresses the establishment of 20.000 reception places through rental, voucher and family hosting schemes (target groups are persons who have applied for International protection in Greece, irrespective of whether they qualify for relocation to another Member State; persons who did not apply for International protection are not included in this scheme)

Thank you for your attention!

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