



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission for Social Development

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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and  
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:  
priority Theme: Affordable housing and social protection  
systems for all to address homelessness**

### **Statement submitted by Hellenic Association of Political Scientists, non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

What characterizes a civilized and inclusionary society is how highly it values human life and human dignity. In an age where information is more than accessible, access to the basic means of survival appears to be challenging for a considerable number of individuals in many societies. Despite the significance of the problem, social exclusion is not adequately addressed. As a result, the persistence of phenomena, such as that of homelessness are undermining citizens' wellbeing and fundamental human rights.

In many urban areas, living costs are constantly increasing making housing unaffordable. This can be attributed to the concentration of large proportions of citizens in cities, as well as to the new possibilities for home owners to achieve short-term renting periods in an unregulated market. Under these conditions, phenomena that have been impermissibly characterized as parasitic, are becoming more and more relevant to the citizens of the big cities on a daily basis. Nevertheless, these phenomena are not holistically addressed by long-term strategic frameworks of action.

Providing social protection against homelessness is definitely a complicated issue to deal with, constituting a battle on two fronts: On the one hand, the state must make sure that people can continue to afford their housing. On the other hand, a mechanism that will eradicate existing homelessness should be introduced. The cases in which the states, through the central or general government, usually attend to the matter, is either on a level of damage limitation in cases of extreme weather conditions, or on a level of keeping the cities clean in light of important events (Olympic Games, election campaigns etc.).

In this way, social protection fails to embrace homeless people who are somehow perceived as less important and inferior. Lack of access to basic living standards is framed as their mistake, entailing that there are not any prospects for a better future. Horizontal inequality, which go beyond a social nature, is also taking on an economic character. More specifically, homeless people are faced with strong labour market barriers. This of course has an impact on them stemming from unemployment and the loss of their ability to produce and consume. At the same time, however, it directly affects the economy, since losing labour (and at the same time consumers) means that the economy does not operate at full capacity.

The Hellenic Association of Political Scientists, supporting the fight against social exclusion, considers the lack of affordable housing and the diachronic state of homelessness as issues of great importance that need to be efficiently addressed. The so – called developed world is required to make use of economic development and democratic values so as to come up with viable policy proposals and, in turn, effective policies, for eliminating the abovementioned phenomena.

Starting with the problem of homelessness, specially designed programs should be introduced aiming to protect those that are on the brink of homelessness due to unemployment or low-paying part-time jobs. The support of the already homeless people's ability to reenter the social and the employment sector should also constitute part of those programs. When it comes to the former objective, programs could contribute in the short term by covering part of the housing costs of people (rent, bills etc.). Introducing compulsory training sessions linked to the labour market could be seen as a more long-term strategy. In order for such programs to be sustainable they should be accompanied with monitoring strategies on whether participants meet the conditions for participation.

On the other hand, a holistic strategy should make sure that homeless people are also provided with opportunities to get re-skilled and access the necessary tools to stand on their own after a period of time. Bearing this in mind, tailor-made, and time constrained programs should be designed with the purpose of providing housing and enabling reintegration of homeless people in the social and working life. The full use of unexploited state infrastructure is vital (closed hospitals, camps etc.), as well as the energetic role of social enterprises.

The following steps are deemed necessary:

- a) A task force, composed of civil servants, psychologists and sociologists, to correctly record each case and set the program in motion.
- b) The people will be provided with shelter and food and will be inducted into training programs focused on the development of useful skills for the labour market.
- c) Reintegration in the labour force through social enterprises.
- d) Medical and pharmaceutical coverage throughout the program.

Programs like this could have a duration of two years and could be (at least partly) funded by the gains of social enterprises. In any case, programs targeting any of the two objectives should be accompanied by, first, monitoring mechanisms as the means to sustainability and impact evaluation initiatives, preferable prospective ones, with the purpose of pointing out possibilities of improvement.

Moving to the second problem of unaffordable housing, policies should also target the constantly increasing prices of accommodation. The main aim of policy makers should be the development of less urbanized regions through investments. Investments could provoke a spill – over effect. In the first place they could increase employment opportunities in those regions, triggering, in turn, a shift of significant amounts of populations from urban environments to less urbanized ones. In other words, regions outside the big cities could – through investments – become opportunity intensive environments, offering a viable alternative to those who cannot bear the high living costs of big cities.

The Hellenic Association of Political Scientists, based on its willingness to promote the scientific research and the fundamental issues that influence social protection and social inclusion, welcomes all Member States and non – governmental entities to provide sustainable solutions and strategies. The creation of an inclusive framework that can lead to the reduction of extreme poverty and the promotion of education is the rethinking element of change and strengthening of social development necessary in the contemporary world.