



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
15 November 2019

Original: English

Commission for Social Development

Fifty-eighth session

10–19 February 2020

**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 Voice of Specially Abled People Inc., 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

INTRODUCTION

Around the world, the right to housing – a place to live in dignity and security, and to be included in community life with access to services and supports – remains beyond the reach for most persons with disabilities. The right to adequate housing is frequently absent from initiatives promoting the human rights of persons with disabilities; these rights have been largely ignored by legislative and policy initiatives globally. Thus, it is imperative that the right to adequate housing be accorded the same centrality in the implementation of the rights of persons with disabilities as housing occupies in their lives.

The right to housing enshrined in article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has been understood to encompass much more than physical shelter. It includes security of tenure, availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure, affordability, habitability, accessibility, appropriate location and cultural adequacy. Those central components of the right to housing have special meaning for persons with disabilities and give rise to particular obligations of States and other actors.

In the light of the extreme conditions of inadequate housing, institutionalization and homelessness experienced by persons with disabilities around the world and the commitment made by States in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to ensure access to adequate and affordable housing by 2030, the incorporation of the disability human rights paradigm into the right to adequate housing should be a matter of highest priority for State and the international community.

This essay will analyze various factors associated with inadequate affordable housing for persons with disabilities in India and argue that, on the basis of legislative precedents, the Government of India should install a development voucher program which would act as a subsidized fund provisionally designated to disabled individuals and would help alleviate the financial burden of renting or purchasing a home. Part I presents a deeper analysis of the facts that may be attributed to India's inadequate affordable housing for persons with disabilities. Part II argues for the access to affordable housing by installing a development voucher program for persons with disabilities. Overall, the implementation of a streamlined development voucher program would help eliminate the barriers that have traditionally caused the stigmatization and alienation of disabled individuals associated with housing rights.

I. ADDRESSING FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH INADEQUATE AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Currently, there are programs in India aimed at increasing affordable housing for persons with disabilities: (1) 3% reservation in allotment of housing under “Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojna” for persons with benchmark disabilities (2) 6.5% subsidy on housing loans and ground floor allotment in housing schemes provided by Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (an Indian affordable housing initiative).

India's deep-rooted problem of a lack of affordable housing is attributed to many factors, all of which have especially marginalized the disabled community. Perhaps the most problematic reason for inadequate affordable housing is simply the availability of land. The shortage of land within metropolitan cities has forced the implementation of government initiatives and projects to increase affordable housing in the outskirts of cities. Aarefa Johari, a fellow writer and correspondent of Scroll.in, delves further into this issue, finding that the public-private housing projects locations

are great distances away from most people's place of work. This is especially harmful for persons with disabilities, particularly those with physical disabilities, who often find it troublesome to travel long distances. This makes it incredibly important for cities to develop accessible mass transportation system for persons with disabilities in addition to affordable housing programs.

Another huge detriment towards persons with disabilities are the affordable housing structures that are incompatible with disabled individuals. According to a special procedures report released by Plan International, an independent development and humanitarian organization, most housing and development is designed as if persons with disabilities do not exist, will not live there or deserve no consideration. Housing programs and urban planning are rarely betted for barrier free design, and international development assistance for housing rarely includes requirements or resources for accessible housing. This evidence is furthered by a survey conducted by the Republic of Korea in 2015, finding that persons with disabilities were far more likely than others to have housing that did not meet the minimum standards of habitability.

With India's rapidly increasing population size, the call for affordable housing that is accessible to everybody, including those with disabilities, is more urgent now than ever. According to a recent report released by the IIMB Management Review, there is an estimated shortage of around 18 million houses. Moreover, they note that 99% of housing shortage is observed in economically weaker sections of society. The burden of economic discrimination when it comes to the lack of affordable houses falls right on individuals within the disabled community. The Council for Social Development conducted an economic analysis in which they evaluated different communities and their socioeconomic status, finding that the relationship between poverty and disability in India is more than apparent. They argue that not only are disabled individuals among the poorest of the poor in the country, but that they remain poor from generation to generation. This unfortunate truth only further perpetuates the cycle of inadequate housing for persons with disabilities.

II. DEVELOPMENT VOUCHERS FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN INDIA: A POLICY PROPOSAL

The best way to tackle inadequate affordable housing for disabled individuals is by putting power back in the hands of the people, more specifically, through development vouchers – a subsidized fund provisionally designated to disabled individuals which will help alleviate the financial burden of renting or purchasing a home. Development vouchers, instituted by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), enable non-elderly families housing a person with disabilities, who do not currently receive housing assistance in certain developments where owners establish preferences for, or restrict occupancy to elderly families, to obtain affordable housing. The public housing development partial rent vouchers for persons with disabilities would be used as a framework for development vouchers in India. Non-elderly families with a disabled person on the waiting list on a covered development would be eligible to apply for development vouchers. The Public Housing Agency (PHA) can give a rent voucher that covers an amount equivalent to the difference between 30% of family income and PHA determined payment standard or gross rent (whichever is lower).

Vouchers help mediate accessible housing by providing individuals with the freedom to choose the kinds of housing and the locations that best meet their needs. A voucher program would ensure that non-discrimination provisions are based on substantive equality, recognizing positive obligations to address the systemic

inequality in housing experienced by persons with disabilities. In order to ensure adequate affordable housing for disabled individuals, the government of India must prioritize and recognize in domestic law the obligation to realize the right to housing of persons with disabilities to the maximum of available resources.

CONCLUSION

Few marginalized groups suffer such egregious violations of the right to housing as do persons with disabilities. Across the world, they commonly endure homelessness and institutionalization as a result of inadequate housing. Although India has a few initiatives in place to increase accessible and affordable housing for persons with disabilities, installing a systematic development rent voucher program to ensure adequate, accessible, and affordable housing for disabled individuals would allow for the de-stigmatization of housing rights for persons with disabilities.
