

Adequate Housing in the Western Balkans Podgorica Declaration

4th October 2019

Platform for Development of Adequate Housing in Montenegro – coordinating office ADP-Zid, in cooperation with Habitat International Coalition, has organized a conference on adequate housing in the Western Balkan region on 3–4 October 2019 in Podgorica, Montenegro. The following declaration reflects subjects discussed during the conference and summarizes the efforts and contributions of national and international participants.

We are aware that the Human Right to Adequate Housing (henceforth HRAH), including the affordability of housing, are mostly unknown concepts in the Western Balkans, even though the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the European Social Charter clearly state HRAH as an inalienable part of social rights. More than 100 countries around the world have adopted the HRAH in their legal system, be it in their constitution or legislation. The Platform for Development of Adequate Housing in Montenegro intends to constitutionalize HRAH through a citizen's initiative; thus we invite like-minded organizations to replicate this strategy in their respective countries in the Western Balkans.

We affirm that HRAH is part of the "New Urban Agenda", which provides further specificity to the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Therefore, it is pertinent that the decision makers in the Western Balkan region understand the need for fostering and promoting this human right.

We understand that the market liberalization during the 1990s sharply changed the way housing policy was implemented in the Western Balkans region. Most countries adopted laws which created very simple and affordable procedures for tenants to buy their apartments from the state. A vast majority of the population has used this process in order to obtain ownership, albeit at the same time, it severely decreased the state's interest to be involved in housing policy and housing production. The percentage of state-owned housing units, for example, decreased from 31% to 15% in Slovenia and 24% to 1.5% in Serbia¹, and in Montenegro social housing constitutes only 0.6% of all housing units. Most states, like Montenegro and Serbia, delegated full jurisdiction on

¹Jašović, Radmila et al, *Socijalnastambenapolitika u Crnoj Gori nalokalnomnivou*, ADP-Zid, 2019, p. 10



housing policy to local authorities, which in theory was a good solution as it allowed local communities to create housing policies aligned with their needs. However, in practice this led to local authorities not having any interest in developing local policy documents and the needed implementation plans due to the lack of financial support from the state. Social housing policies have the aim to help people solve their social needs, but without financial support and designated social services that go along with social housing initiatives, improvements in the housing policy will not be achievable in the foreseeable future.

We recognize that the transition from the “housing for all” system to housing as a market commodity was sudden, and as the standard of living and purchasing power parity kept lowering, the governments of Western Balkan countries have started mostly to focus on social housing, predominantly for vulnerable social groups and low-income families. Adequate and affordable housing are intended for everyone who isn’t able to have a secure tenure via the housing market. Few affordable housing projects and innovations have been presented and later implemented in the whole region; hence we see this as an important opportunity to address existing issues and instigate amendments in the housing policy field. Negative practices, such as financialisation and commodification of housing and corruption have been observed many times and pose a serious threat to the implementation of sustainable and innovative practices. The transition from state funded social housing to private ownership could be positive only if the owners (families) keep their properties out of the market or sell them with regulated prices and value capture measures.

We make clear that the HRAH is one of the key components for sustainability of any community, for a region that is experiencing low fertility rates, brain drain and high unemployment rates, it is adamant to hold discussions between the public and civil sectors in order to find tangible solutions. We hope that this event is the beginning of a wider and coordinated effort of like-minded organizations and individuals involved in the housing policy field, be it nationally or regionally, to emphasize the importance of the right to adequate housing and to create good policy solutions and recommendations that can improve the current state in this field of pertinence for every community in the Western Balkans region.

We firmly believe that ensuring the viability of HRAH in the region is possible via innovative models, good policy recommendations and cooperation of all sectors. The signatories of this statement **recommend**:

- I. The recognition of HRAH in legislation;
- II. The implementation of innovative and alternatives models of housing production such as Community Land Trusts, whereby a landlord entrusts his land for the construction of affordable housing;
- III. The establishment of an independent housing fund enabled by various sources (public, private or civil sector or international donors);
- IV. The creation of social services with the aim to support local social housing policies;



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- V. The creation of social rental housing agencies with the aim to mobilize the private sector;
- VI. The creation of housing cooperatives funded by local/national budget, donations and community members, among others;
- VII. The creation of local adequate housing plans that guarantee the implementation of HRAH for all;
- VIII. The involvement of citizens in any public-private partnership for affordable housing, as their interests, needs and human rights must be recognized, respected, protected and fulfilled.

Habitat International Coalition endorses this initiative. Representatives of this international organization were present on the event and hereby support every regional initiative and organization that has the aim to advocate and realize the human right to adequate housing.

Regional signatories of the statement:

Platform for Development of Adequate Housing in Montenegro, Montenegro

Igor Milošević _____



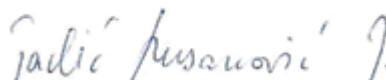
Housing Center Belgrade, Serbia

Branislava Žarković _____



CENSOR Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Jasminka Tadić-Husanović _____



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Ministarstvo javne uprave

International signatories of the statement:

Habitat International Coalition- Housing and Land Rights Network (HIC HLRN)

Joseph Schechla



Habitat International Coalition (HIC)

Alvaro Puertas



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