



PERMANENT MISSION OF GREECE
GENEVA

VERY URGENT

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NOTE VERBALE

The Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations Office at Geneva and other International Organizations in Switzerland presents its compliments to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and, following the latter's Note Verbale, dated 5 April 2012, on adequate housing, has the honour to forward relevant information by the Greek Government (Ministries of Interior and Labour).

The Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations Office at Geneva and other International Organizations in Switzerland avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights the assurances of its highest consideration.



Geneva, May 29 2012

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OHCHR REGISTRY

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ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ/HELLENIC REPUBLIC
ΥΠΟΥΡΓΕΙΟ ΕΣΩΤΕΡΙΚΩΝ/ MINISTRY OF INTERIOR

**QUESTIONNAIRE ON HOUSING FINANCING POLICIES AND
PROGRAMMES BY THE SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON ADEQUATE
HOUSING AS A COMPONENT OF THE RIGHT TO AN ADEQUATE
STANDARD OF LIVING ANDE ON THE RIGHT TO NON-
DISCRIMINATION IN THIS CONTEXT**

Q1:

On the one hand, the Social Integration Division notes that within the legislative field law 3842/23.04.2010 aims to facilitate migrants to acquire their own house by providing for the exemption of tax for the acquisition of first residence particularly for immigrants with a long term residence permit and for recognized refugees.

The Greek Government has also drafted a **National Strategy for the Integration of third country nationals** which will provide the main directions and objectives for the integration of migrants in the country. This National Strategy introduces and focuses to the following nine (9) policy areas, among which, the promotion of housing and quality of life:

- Information- Service (reception- introductory lessons, information, access to public services, training of civil servants, participation in networks)
- Education and higher learning- courses on Greek language
- Employment and training (access to labour market, development of entrepreneurship, higher training)
- Access to Health services
- **Housing and quality of life.** This policy area aims at: a) promoting equal chances to the housing market, regarding both access to it and quality of housing and b) combating ghettoization phenomena while also enhancing a sense of community.
- Participation in public matters (right to vote and stand for election at local elections, establishment of Migrant Councils of Integration (MIC), Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Associations of Migrants, acquisition of Greek citizenship)
- Promotion of equal treatment principal (combating discrimination- sensitization of public opinion)
- Interculturalism (intercultural dialogue, inter- religious dialogue, artistic, cultural and athletic activities)
- Targeted social groups (women, minors, second generation migrants, seniors, persons, disabled persons).

In terms of national measures and action oriented activities, the Social Integration Division of the Ministry of Interior, as the Responsible Authority of the **European Integration Fund for TCNs (E.I.F.)**, implements a series of activities reinforcing integration of third country nationals

In terms of programmes and actions that have already been implemented and particularly under the Annual Programme 2009, the following is mentioned:

- *Training Program for Intercultural Mediators*, with emphasis on the issues of housing and then the provision of respective housing mediation services at a pilot

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level, in order to facilitate access of third country nationals to apartments and remove prejudice they might face when looking for housing.

Regarding programmes and actions that are being implemented or will be implemented in the near future under the Annual Programmes 2010 and 2011, the following is mentioned:

- *"Intercultural mediation"* supporting access to housing and social services: Intercultural mediators will provide intercultural mediation support to local structures dealing with social services offered to immigrants. They will also draw up a report that will focus on problems encountered by immigrants - with special emphasis on housing - and will include suggestions for developing local actions to promote the resolution of these problems.
- Programme *"Promoting a series of actions that bring together the local community at neighbourhood level"*: these actions aim to create common spaces of interaction for both native and migrant populations

On the other hand, the Department of Development Projects mentions the **Housing loans program for Greek Roma**. This programme aims to enable access to homeownership on the basis of mortgage loans for the amount of 60.000€ each, to 9.000 Greek Roma families living in shacks, tents or any other construction that do not meet minimum requirements of a permanent habitation. As explicitly provided in the relevant Law (L.2946/2001), the funding of the program is held exclusively on national funding and is guaranteed 100% by the State Budget.

This particular scheme may be combined with an additional state programme on the **allocation of municipal or communal property** (tracts of land) for constructing a house upon state subsidies (such as the program above).

Q1a:

The Department of Development Projects notes that the housing loans' program involve in practice public financing. Loans are granted upon favorable terms as regards the payment, thereof: the budget of the program is born by the State budget; additionally, beneficiaries are subsidized by the State on 80% of the loan's interest; 100% of the loan and of its interests is also guaranteed by the State Budget (for the banks participating in the program). In that context, missed payments of the loan to the banks by the beneficiaries are born by the State Budget.

Q1b:

The Department of Development Projects points out that the programme does not involve participation of international finance institutions.

Q1c:

The Department of Development Projects mentions that the programme was adopted in 2003 and is still in force.

Q1d:

The Department of Development Projects notes that the above mentioned programme has not been developed or implemented as part of the recovery measures in the context of the global financial and economic crisis that started in 2008.

Q2:

The Department of Development Projects underlines that the programme has not been subject to a thorough impact assessment with regard to its impact on the overall housing situation of the Roma population. Alongside the fact that there has not yet been a registration of the whole

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Roma population, particular those in poor housing conditions, the current number of beneficiaries under this particular programme (7.854 families) cannot be compared to the whole situation of Roma before the implementation of this programme, whether in numbers or in terms of improved access to services and infrastructures. In any case, it should be recalled that the program itself addresses a limited number of the population (9.000 Roma families) in need, mainly due to the fact that it was adopted as a supplementary housing intervention.

Q2a:

The Department of Development Projects notes that nevertheless following a broader assessment completed in 2009 on the interventions undertaken under the Integrated Action Plan, it is held that 50% of the Roma interviewed live in houses; 32.5% in tents and shacks; and 15% in prefabricated houses. The study is based on sample interviews all over the country, based on the intensity of the population per region and municipal district. Likewise, the sample represents the whole housing typology. Based on the methodology of the study, however, the latter reports the main tendency among the Roma population and not de facto quantitative data, whereas there is no factual comparison to the period (in particular the housing conditions) before the implementation of housing policies for the Roma.

Q2b-c:

The Department of Development Projects underscores that based on the nature of this particular housing policy, the houses to be purchased/ constructed or have been constructed, fulfill all technical requirements in terms of contemporary town building and infrastructures (access to electricity, water, heating, etc).

Q2d:

Depending on the procedure provided for the construction of the house, the Department of Development Projects stresses that an ownership title is gained at the time of contracting with a bank. In that context, 83.7% of the beneficiaries have already signed a contract and proceeded with the construction of a house or the purchase of a house. In any case, it is worth noted that the programme leads to a clear title of no disputed legal status or ownership.

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REPLY BY THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR

In Greece, till 2012, the main entity that exercised housing policies in order to enable access to decent housing for categories of people who had not the possibility to satisfy their housing needs by their own means was the Workers' Housing Organisation (OEK).

OEK was founded in 1954, with the aim of providing housing to those workers and employees who did not own a private residence. More specifically, its beneficiaries included:

- All the workers and employees, either Greek or legal financial immigrants, who were employed in the private sector and who – as well as their employers- made contributions into OEK,
- The employees of Legal Entities of Public Law and institutions of the broader Public Sector who also made contributions into OEK,
- Pensioners of the above categories.

OEK was a Legal Entity of Public Law, operating under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, but at the same time it enjoyed complete financial autonomy since it drew its funding from the contributions of the Greek working people (1% of their earnings) and their employers (0,75% of their employees' earnings).

In order to help its beneficiaries to access a decent home, OEK applied various forms of housing assistance:

- Grant of a finished house in settlements that OEK designed and constructed throughout Greece. The construction of these settlements was commissioned through the legal public work procedures to private construction companies, and was supervised by OEK's Constructions Department. The houses were ceded to the beneficiaries to the cost, without any profit for OEK and their value was paid off by the beneficiaries on an interest-free basis within 20-25 years,
- 15-years loans from banks for the purchase or construction of a new house with an interest rate subsidy provided by OEK. This subsidy was paid to the banks over the course of 9 years after the grant of the loan and varied depending on the number of the beneficiary's family members,
- Loans for the repair, enlargement or completion of an existing house, drawn exclusively on OEK funds. These loans were interest-free and paid off over a 20-year period,
- Rent allowance for pensioners, unmarried individuals and low-income families. The provision of this allowance depended on the family income, varied according to the number of family members, and was non-repayable,
- Special permanent programmes for the access to a private house of families with three or more children, two disabled

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- family members, pensioners due to a mortal work accident within a family with at least one child, beneficiaries facing acute financial problems, and single mothers. In all these cases, the housing assistance was taking the form either of a finished house, if available, or the right to purchase a house in the free market (to be purchased and then ceded by OEK to the beneficiary), or loans for the purchase or construction of a house. The repayment of these modes of housing assistance was effectuated on an interest-free basis over the course of a 25-year period,
- Programmes for the improvement/ renovation of damaged old settlements constructed more than 25 years ago. These programmes focused on the houses' exterior and common-use spaces,
 - Operation of a Special Solidarity Fund to cover overdue debts to OEK for beneficiaries facing acute financial problems. The beneficiaries had to submit their application providing a detailed justification (i.e. sudden misfortunes, such as illness, death, long unemployment etc), and there was a special committee that functioned in OEK and decided whether OEK would cover the debts for a period of 6 to 12 months.

Over its 58 years of operation, OEK has offered through its programmes, the possibility to access privately-owned houses to approximately 700.000 families. Moreover, every year about 100.000 of low-income families were granted a rent allowance, thus considerably reducing the family expenses.

OEK's activities within the Greek society were characterized by its remarkable sensitivity towards its beneficiaries, as well as all the vulnerable categories of the population. All the housing assistance programmes varied in their preconditions and benefits, so that those categories of beneficiaries who were objectively more disadvantage could be specifically favoured. Families with three or more children, disabled people, single-parent families, victims of natural disasters, residents of border regions, and Greek people repatriated from former USSR countries had the opportunity to benefit from special regulations and programmes ensuring both the improvement of their living standards and their social integration through the acquisition of a privately-owned house.

Special programmes, such as the favourable adjustments made for the repayment of overdue debts to OEK with a significant reduction, as well as the above mentioned Special Solidarity Fund, were intended to assist families confronted with the spectrum of social exclusion.

In 2012, by virtue of the Law 4046/2012, that implemented the second memorandum measures, OEK has been abolished and by an Act of the Council of Ministers, on 28-02-2012, all OEK competences, funds, property, future income, and staff have been transferred to the Greek Manpower Employment Organisation (OAED), which is

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entrusted with the accomplishment of all obligations already undertaken by OEK, yet is not entitled to plan and implement new programmes. This means that the programmes of OEK are not any longer in force. Furthermore, a Special Managing Committee has been placed in OEK in order to take care of the procedures for the completion of the running programmes, especially the construction works of new settlements and the real estate property of OEK.