



POLICY POSITION: GOOD HOUSING FOR ALL

Problem Statement

Section 27 of the Bill of Rights guarantees everyone the right to access to adequate housing.

Along with food and water, housing sits at the apex of basic human needs. Without a safe space to call home, there is no dignity or human fulfilment.

South Africa has one of the largest and most ambitious public housing programmes in the world. With over 4 million subsidies, and 3 million housing units provided since 1994, the numbers are hugely impressive by international standards.

Yet we still say that “it is not working”. Why?

First, it is simply not enough. With national resources dwindling, there remains a backlog of more than 2 million South Africans still waiting for a home.

Second, the effect of housing projects has often been to entrench apartheid spatial divides by building high-density mega projects in low-cost, underdeveloped areas far from economic opportunities, quality services and infrastructure. The knock-on effects on public transport are particularly acute – operating like a form of additional tax on poor people

The shortage of housing and associated rise of homelessness is a scar on the conscience of democratic South Africa, denying redress to those who were marginalised. The problem is only likely to grow, with rapid urbanisation taking shape in South Africa as people move to cities in search of better opportunities and services – but adding to the housing demand in the context of declining real income.

Homelessness impinges on the most fundamental rights to human dignity and adequate housing. For those who live in it, homelessness means food insecurity, inhumane conditions, demonisation and a constant fear of apartheid-style government security forces who seek to implement oppressive laws that criminalise the poverty of the most vulnerable members of our society.

Homelessness is a personal journey caused by various social factors, rather than fault. Homelessness is ‘state and not a trait’.

We need a policy that speaks to the three interconnected by distinct issues of housing, homelessness and spatial justice. All of society has an interest in eradicating homelessness, and the solution requires an all-of-society response. The private sector must be incentivised and morally committed to being part of the solution. Government must accelerate housing delivery, removing low-priority expenditure items the Budget and devoting its resources to the issues that matter most. Government must use

Public Land for Public Good, and allow our society to develop in a more inclusive, integrated and just way.

Solutions

a) End Apartheid Spatial Justice:

- Continue the pursuit of bringing affordable housing into areas that have traditionally had high property values;
- Build an integrated, affordable and efficient public transport;
- When there is an opportunity to bring jobs to the people, do it. For example, more government department buildings can be built in poorer areas, instead of paying exorbitant amounts for fancy offices in the Cape Town city bowl – but this must be supported by public transport and other forms of physical infrastructure;
- Build higher, build denser. End the fixation on free-standing, lower density mega projects on the urban peripheries. Move to higher density options closer to the economic centre, rather than growing out the townships;
- Encourage and build mix-income communities;
- Upgrade informal settlements to ensure the same or better standard of infrastructure and service delivery as compared to wealthier neighbourhoods.

b) Make Housing Supply Meet Housing Demand, to ensure housing for all South Africans

- A GOOD government will announce a record budget for social housing and homelessness services;
- Increase the supply of Social and Community Housing;
- Housing must be adequate, connected to critical infrastructure and meet all basic human needs: Housing that Feels Like Home.
- Housing must be accessible to those who experience disabilities;
- Release well-located land and make it available for affordable housing. Use inner city public land, or state acquired land, to develop higher-density, mixed-income, mixed-use, rental homes in the inner city;
- Alter the financial thresholds for housing assistance, to give a more realistic reflection of affordability;
- Enact stronger provision to force mixed-use properties that make provision for inclusionary, affordable housing when developing on and selling public land;
- Improve access to title deeds for those who already live in homes by: a) Transferring ownership of government-owned rental stock to long-standing tenants with good records and, b), Regularise the informal title transfers that have been occurring within the RDP/BNG housing market;
- Enforce legislation aimed at prohibiting excessive abusive rental practices;
- Increase security of tenure in private or public rental to ensure renting becomes a more secure, longer-term housing option;
- Test new housing types, tenures, and delivery models to demonstrate best practice on government-owned land;
- Establish a housing evidence centre to provide better guidance and a more collaborative and scientific approach to housing data and information, so as to inform housing delivery.

c) End the Indignity of Homelessness

- Adopt a humane societal attitude to homelessness that shows love and respect for human dignity. Repeal laws that criminalise homelessness, end heavy-handed policing and stop government perpetuating societal prejudices against those experiencing homelessness;
- Ultimately, the primary policy intervention for homelessness is to realise the constitutional right to permanent, affordable and adequate housing for all who legally reside in South Africa;

- Match demand with sufficient supply of temporary homeless shelters or ‘crisis housing’ while permanent housing solutions are completed;
- “Temporary” in this context means temporary for the occupants. These must be permanent structures, that ensure the safety and dignity of all who make use of it, and the full access to basic human rights and essentials;
- No person may be discharged from such spaces unless they are moving to another form of accommodation which is suitably located, adequate, humane and liveable: either a family home or housing provided by the state;
- We must address the root causes of homelessness to prevent homelessness before the fact, such as mental health, domestic violence, prejudice against LGBTQIA+ people and a stalling economy;
- As each person’s path into homelessness differs, so the solution is different for every person. Once a person is offered shelter or housing, a full needs-assessment of that person must be conducted by qualified counsellors and similar practitioners. Patients must then be given the treatment and help that they need;
- Enact a R999 Basic Income Grant to give further social relief, dignity and a pathway to betterment to the most vulnerable members of our society;
- Ensure that everyone has access to obtain an ID Document, and remove cost and unnecessary administrative barriers for accessing these documents upon which the delivery of, and application to, many social services depend on.