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# Homelessness Policies in Crisis Greece: The Case of the Housing and Reintegration Program

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- **Abstract\_** *The article attempts to explore the planning and implementation of the Housing and Reintegration Program through semi-structured interviews, as well as its influence on the philosophy of addressing homelessness policies in Greece. After outlining the main forms of housing support, an attempt is made to correlate them with Greek policies that focus on the changes ushered in by the Housing and Reintegration Program. The empirical section evaluates the pilot implementation of the Program as well as the broader impact of the features of homeless policies. It should be noted that, despite the various omissions and ambiguities, this is the first complete intervention made by the Greek state to tackle this particular social problem.*
- **Key Words\_** *Homelessness, housing and reintegration, social policy, Greece, crisis, social exclusion*

## Introduction

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This article investigates the design and implementation of the Housing and Reintegration Program, tracing its influence on homelessness policies in Greece. This will be attempted through an examination of the attitudes of the main actors involved towards the strong and weak points of the Program during its pilot implementation. In order to develop the argument, the basic approaches to supported housing will initially be presented. Here an attempt will be made to link the Program to the developing European dialogue around ‘Housing-Led’ schemes. This will be

followed by a discussion of the nature of social interventions for homeless people in Greece in recent decades, along with an outline of the objectives and content of the Housing and Reintegration Program. In the empirical section, the Program will be assessed through a presentation of the field research. This will be done by highlighting the positive elements that have been introduced, and by identifying omissions as well as areas that need future improvement during the processes of its planning and implementing.

International experience has been strongly influenced by the American tradition of policies for homeless people. Two main approaches can be distinguished in the literature. The first is the “staircase of transition” and the second is Housing First (see Tsemberis and Eisenberg, 2000; Sahlin, 2005; Atherton and McNaughton Nicholls, 2008; Busch-Geertsema, 2013). Both approaches aim at housing homeless people, although with different philosophies and priorities.

The staircase of transition is a traditional form of housing provision, the basic philosophy of which is the priority of treatment. The homeless person must be “housing-ready” if they are to move into independent housing. A basic prerequisite for this is to have previously resolved, with the help of social services, the problems that led to them becoming homeless in the first place (for a critical analysis, see Ridgway and Zippel, 1990). The basic idea of the staircase of transition is that different levels of progressive control and autonomy (for example, moderate requirements for shelter access, temporary accommodation or specialized hospitality facilities for social groups) are developed like a staircase that will lead to the stage of permanent housing (Busch-Geertsema, 2013, p.15).

Housing First originated in New York with the Pathways to Housing Program, its goal being to prevent homeless people with a mental illness from living on the streets (Tsemberis and Eisenberg, 2000). Its advantages include the provision of permanent independent housing, the decentralization of services, the normalization of housing and social conditions, as well as the provision of individual support to homeless people (Busch-Geertsema, 2013, p.211). In contrast to the staircase of transition, Housing First’s priority is immediate housing. The homeless person is immediately placed into autonomous housing, with support services to address their problems being offered afterwards (Busch-Geertsema, 2012).

With Housing First, access and accommodation in a residence are independent of the services received or the fulfilment of other conditions. Housing autonomy is not the culmination of a series of reintegration measures, but a human right. The goal here is for the homeless person to achieve a sense of security and then to utilize the social services that they need (Pleace and Bretherton, 2013, pp.26-7).

In Europe, versions of Housing First have been implemented in slightly different ways, leading to Housing-Led schemes. The Housing-Led approach is increasingly being recognized as an effective intervention for reducing homelessness. Its main features are access to stable housing solutions as soon as possible, targeted interventions for households that are at risk of becoming homeless, and the provision of personalized solutions based on each individual's needs. Such support addresses issues such as tenancy maintenance, social inclusion, employment, health and well-being for people who are living in housing, rather than at a stage prior to re-housing. Moreover, it is delivered on a "floating" basis rather than in an institutional setting (FEANTSA, 2013, pp.4- 5).

Along with the emergence of Housing-Led in Europe, efforts to construct expanded typologies of social services for the homeless can be observed. Edgar *et al.* (2007, p.72) go as far as distinguishing five different types: firstly, housing services (emergency shelters, temporary hostels, supported or transitional housing). Secondly, non-housing services (day centers, counseling centers). Thirdly, housing services that are intended for other social groups but that can also be used by homeless people (hotels, rehabilitation centers, etc.). Fourthly, services for the general population from which the homeless can also benefit (advisory services, municipal services, health and social services). And, fifthly, special services for specific groups (psychiatric services, rehabilitation facilities).

In Greece, policies to tackle homelessness have historically been insufficiently developed (Sapounakis, 1997; Arapoglou, 2002; Maloutas, 2012). Their dominant traits have been their weak presence, a lack of coordination, high fragmentation and distinct charitable rhetoric, as these actions were implemented mainly by voluntary and church bodies (Arapoglou, 2004). Although these policies in Greece did not have any clear intervention philosophy, the services had an element of the staircase of transition approach (Arapoglou *et al.*, 2015a). And this is because the focus of the services for the homeless were the emergency services (shelters with a limited time stay, soup kitchens, etc.), which embodied forms of social control (Sapounakis, 1998).

The economic crisis has had a definite impact on rates of poverty and social exclusion in Greek society (Petmesidou, 2013; Papatheodorou, 2014), resulting in a qualitative and quantitative increase in homelessness (Arapoglou and Gounis, 2015; Kourachanis, 2015a). Despite the negative developments, the spirit of homelessness interventions for the homeless has not changed (Kourachanis, 2015b). From 2009 to 2015, the character of the measures appears to be the product of model for the emergency management of the social crisis (Arapoglou and Gounis, 2014; Arapoglou *et al.*, 2015b). In this model, civil society acts as a substitute for

state-led social policy or private companies, with interventions that aim at alleviating the most extreme and publicly visible consequences experienced by homeless and other vulnerable groups (Arapoglou *et al.*, 2015a; Kourachanis, 2015b).

The Housing and Reintegration Program may usher in the beginnings of a different philosophy, and it is an initiative that is oriented to the long term. The Program has prioritized accommodation in self-catering apartments, and not in transitional or emergency accommodation (Arapoglou and Gounis, 2015, p.15).

Individual aspects of the Housing and Regeneration Program appear to diverge from the philosophy of Housing-Led schemes. Elements such as the immediate placing of beneficiaries in autonomous housing before any other intervention and connecting it to other forms of social support, such as subsidized work, give the impression that the Program adopts this approach. The thorough discussion below of the planning and implementation framework will show if aspects of the Program moved in this direction.

## **Objectives and Content of the Housing and Reintegration Program**

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The Housing and Reintegration Program was launched in September 2014 and the pilot Program was implemented in July 2015 for a period of twelve months. It is a specialized intervention measure that arises from the recognition of the homeless<sup>1</sup> as a Vulnerable Social Group (Article 29 of Law 4052/2012). It is also encouraged by Law 4254/2014, which foresees the possibility of implementing Programs or activities for homeless people. The Program was designed by the Ministry of Labor, Social Security and Welfare and it was decided that it would be implemented by Regions, Municipalities, NGOs and church bodies.

The Housing and Reintegration Program was not part of a wider strategy to tackle the lack of housing. On the contrary, its creation was decided upon under conditions of great pressure. In 2013, the then Prime Minister Antonis Samaras announced that €20m of the primary surplus, which resulted from the budget cuts stipulated by the bailout programs, were to be used for measures to help the poor and unemployed, such as supporting soup kitchens, bolstering the work of the Church and NGOs, and creating a new program for social interventions. The General Directorate for Social Welfare of the Ministry of Labor, Social Insurance and Social Solidarity was requested

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<sup>1</sup> The selected definition, although compatible with the ETHOS typology of FEANSTA, has received extensive criticism as it does not include homeless migrants among the beneficiaries of the social provisions if they did not have an official residency permit (see Arapoglou and Gounis 2015; Kourachanis 2015a)

immediately to design a program that would aim at housing those homeless living on the streets or in hostels. No in-depth negotiation with the involved agencies took place as part of the design of the Program. The inclusion of those at risk of housing exclusion among the beneficiaries of the intervention as well as the Employment Reintegration pillar were added in the later phases of the planning.

According to the text of the Invitation, the aim of the Program is the “transition from emergency accommodation facilities and Social Hostels to independent housing solutions” (Ministry of Labour, 2014). The target groups of the action were: firstly, families and people who are accommodated in Social Homeless Hostels and shelters or who make use of the Homeless Day Center services; secondly, families and individuals who have been registered as homeless by the social services of the Municipalities or the Centers for Social Welfare; thirdly, women who are accommodated in Women’s Shelters for victims of violence; and, fourthly, people who are hosted in Child Protection Structures, are at least 18 years of age and are not in education (Ministry of Labour, 2014, p.3).

The Program is structured on two pillars, that of Housing and that of Reintegration. It had an initial budget of €9.25m and was implemented nationwide<sup>2</sup>. The specific objective of the Housing pillar is the direct transition to autonomous forms of living through the provision of housing and social care services. The specific objective of the Reintegration pillar is the return to the community by providing services for reintegration into employment.

In terms of the quantitative objectives, the beneficiaries of the Program were estimated at about 1 200 people. Of these, at least 40% from each action plan were required to fulfil both the two pillars. The cost of the action was not to exceed €11 000 per recipient for both pillars or €5 500 for beneficiaries who would only make use of the housing pillar. Based on the above figures, the promoters had to offer accommodation services, funds for basic necessities, psychosocial support, employment and legal counseling, and financial management, as well as to interface with the relevant departments (Ministry of Labor, 2014, pp.4-5).

In order to select the agencies that were to implement the Program, an invitation was issued by the Managing Authority outlining the criteria for participation as well as the evaluation criteria. These were in the form of a list of official preconditions that each interested agency had to fulfill, along with an evaluation of the thematic content of each action plan that it was submitting. For this purpose, an Evaluation Committee was established to assess the applications and proposed action plans.

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<sup>2</sup> Specifically, 55% of operations will be fulfilled in the Regional unit of Attiki, 20% of the Regional Unit of Salonika and the remaining 25% in the geographical areas of the rest of Greece.

The candidate agencies had to explain the main goals of their proposals in their action plans as well as: the categories of homeless people that they had selected to include in the Program; the ways in which they would communicate with and inform them; their evaluation criteria; the scientific team from the agency that would work with homeless persons; and the social actions that it would implement in order to fulfill the Program. For all the above measures, general directions were given by the Managing Authority. From the action plans submitted by the agencies that were examined, it was apparent that their proposals were greatly influenced by these directions. Most agencies attempted to incorporate them in a very general and vague way, in order to secure funding for their plans.

More specifically, the benefits offered under the Housing pillar state that each apartment should cover toilet space requirements, and have a kitchen, heating, bedroom and anything else that is required for the running of an average household. The beneficiary family had the opportunity to stay in an independent apartment that met the needs of its members, while individuals could choose a room or an apartment or to cohabit with another person in a two-bedroom apartment. Renting apartments in the same building was permitted for 10% of the total beneficiaries of each project (Ministry of Labor, 2014, p.6).

**Table 1: First Pillar Actions – Housing Spending**

| Housing Costs  | Individual People  | Families                |
|--|--|-------------------------|
| Rent coverage up to 12 months  | Up to €180 / month (1 person)<br>Up to €240 / month (2 people)   | Up to €280 / month      |
| Expenses coverage for repairing existing housing                         | Up to €3 600 (lump sum)  | Up to €3 600 (lump sum) |
| Household spending, basic clothing – footwear needs and social utilities | Up to €1 500 (lump sum)  | Up to €2 000 (lump sum) |
| Expenditure for daily needs (food, travel, etc.)                         | Up to €200 / month   | Up to €250 / month      |
| Temporary homeless adult underwriting costs                              | Up to €300 / month for accommodation and living expenses in a foster family and up to €100 / month for personal expenses |                         |

Source: Ministry of Labour (2014, p.9)

As regards the second pillar, much attention was paid to the effort to support beneficiaries through information activities and employment counseling, as well as through the development of personal skills. Based on this support, efforts were made to pursue their targeted links with the labor market. The beneficiaries were asked to choose between four alternative forms of enterprise: firstly, work experience in the private sector; secondly, to provide counseling and financial support

measures for the establishment of an individual enterprise; thirdly, employment in the agricultural sector; alternatively, the beneficiaries could receive a training voucher. For each proposed project, there was a quota system according to which beneficiaries were distributed into different types of employment (30% of the beneficiaries of each project would be earmarked for work experience in the private sector, 30% for setting up businesses, 30% for employment in agriculture, while 10% would receive a training voucher). Each organization had space in which to reallocate up to 20% of the above quota, according to any needs that arose (Ministry of Labor, 2014, pp.6-10).

**Table 2: Second Pillar Actions – Employment Rehabilitation Expenditure**

| <b>Employment Rehabilitation Costs</b>                                     | <b>Eligible Limits</b>   |
|--|--|
| Traineeships in Private Sector Enterprises                                 | Minimum basic salary as defined in each case by the applicable provisions, with the respective insurance contributions |
| Support in building enterprises / self-employment or creating a small unit | Up to €6 000 in total  |
| Employment in the agricultural sector                                      | Up to €6 000 in total  |
| Training services with a Voucher   | Up to €6 000 in total  |

Source: Ministry of Labor (2014, p.10)

As will also be discussed in the section on the results of the field research, it is noteworthy that any reference to special coverage for the needs of different categories of homeless is missing from the design of the Program. Parameters relating to specialized social interventions as part of the Program are absent. Aspects of such efforts were noted during the creation of each beneficiary's profile, as well as the actions for psychosocial support (initial stage of the Program) and provision of job advice (advanced stage of the Program) that the agencies committed to undertaking. Even so, a crucial question was the necessary adequacy of such actions, especially since they had not been specifically outlined, and only a general and vague reference given.

Fifty-seven organizations were initially included in the implementation phase of the Program. Of these, 34 were Municipalities, 15 NGOs, 5 Regional Authorities and 3 church foundations. So far €7.1m has been absorbed, or approximately 75% of the original budget. Overall, 1 031 beneficiaries have joined the Housing pillar and 323 the Employment Rehabilitation pillar. The project is nearing completion of the pilot phase and has not yet been evaluated. A first glance at the main positive and negative issues encountered in the design and implementation processes and the wider impact on the philosophy of homelessness policies in Greece is, therefore, of particular interest. The following sections describe the research methodology, the results and the general conclusions drawn.

## Research Methodology

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Based on the analysis thus far, I will now try to identify the positive points and the problems in the planning and implementation of the Housing and Reintegration Program. How did the design and implementation of the Program affect the general philosophy of homelessness policy responses in Greece? Do any aspects of the Program reflect a specific housing support approach and, if so, which?

Given that to date the evaluation of the Program has not been completed in order to exploit the available data, it was decided to conduct field research instead. More specifically, the method of qualitative research interviews was chosen. For the needs of the project, a guide based on four subjects was developed (see MacDonald and Headlam, 2009). The first subject contained general information about the Program (content, objectives, and individual intervention fields) and policies before its implementation. The second concerned planning policy (origin, use of primary data, the documentary needs of the intervention). The third strand concerned the implementation of the policy (characteristics of the organizations, positive experiences, problems and obstacles). The last strand sought to provide an initial assessment (adequacy of resources and benefits, social impact of the intervention, its effects on the characteristics of social policies for the homeless, suggestions for future improvements).

The interviews took place during the planning and implementation phases of the Program. Fourteen interviews were done with representatives at the central, local and non-governmental levels. Four interviews were with central-level officials (policy-makers and experts), another four with the municipal social service officers, and six with members of NGOs that were participating in the Program. Furthermore, the action plans proposed by the agencies and which were approved for funding were the products of much consideration.

## Research Results

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The interviews produced a series of findings. Among the positive points are the innovative features of the intervention, such as the transition to independent forms of living, the connection with employment opportunities, as well as the versatile coordinating role of the managing authority. In addition to the positive dimensions, a number of issues that require future improvement were also identified.

At the planning level, the construction of the action was not based on primary data. An enlarged and heterogeneous group of beneficiaries<sup>3</sup> without the care of specialized means of intervention has been observed. The duration of the intervention was short and there is also uncertainty in calculating the funding/beneficiaries of the families being observed. The stipulation of the 30% quota for each employment strand created problems for rehabilitation. At the level of implementation, some bureaucratic problems were identified, as well as the preference for creaming homeless persons in the selection of beneficiaries, and the low absorption of funds. A discussion of all these issues is attempted in the following paragraphs.

### ***The positive points of the Program***

A first aspect raised by interviewees is the beneficial characteristics of the action. Interventions to address homelessness in Greece have historically been of a fragmented, piecemeal and short-term nature (Arapoglou, 2002). With this Program, for the first time in the history of the Greek state a holistic approach to the social inclusion of the homeless has been adopted. The Program offers a complete plan that starts from independent housing and ends with the placement of beneficiaries in subsidized jobs. In addition, the adoption of the ETHOS typology of FEANTSA (2006) enhances compatibility with modern European policy developments.

A key aspect of Housing-Led is the emphasis on autonomous forms of living (Pleace and Bretherton, 2013). Social policies for homelessness in Greece had never before had any clearly discernible form. However, this fragmented grid of services was more akin to the approach of the staircase of transition. The direct transition to independent housing, as provided in the first pillar of the Program, indicates an obvious orientation towards Housing-Led:

The Program is ground-breaking for the Greek situation. For the first time we have a systematic and consistent effort to address homelessness. The beneficiaries also include people suffering from all types of homelessness. Very importantly, one of the two pillars is based on the transition to independent housing. This orientates the policies towards Housing First. All these things are being seen in Greece for the first time. (NGO Housing Policy Coordinator)

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<sup>3</sup> Details on the characteristics of the beneficiaries of the Program are drawn exclusively from the answers given by the actors involved during its implementation stage. Unfortunately, the descriptive statistical data of the beneficiaries of the Program, as well as their demographic characteristics, their housing status before being included in the Program, and the ratios of Greeks/migrants or men/women are not known. This information should be made available with the completion of the evaluation of the pilot Program in September 2017. This is also the case with the total number of individuals who applied to the Program and for which reason were selected to be its beneficiaries.

Another positive feature is that the second pillar is based on work reintegration. In the past five years, Greece has been plagued by both high unemployment and long-term unemployment (Papatheodorou and Missos, 2013). This structural factor decisively affects the rise in homelessness (Elliott and Krivo, 1991) and has been keenly felt within Greek society during the crisis period (Kourachanis, 2016). The addition of the work parameter to the Program is on first reading positive. The question is to which kinds of employment positions were the beneficiaries guided and whether the possibility of them remaining in these positions after the conclusion of the Program has been secured. The combination of housing support and the provision of subsidized employment is an essential innovation that significantly broadens the perspectives of the beneficiaries for social integration.

The innovative features are that it addresses the problem of homelessness in an integrated way. It doesn't only include a bed. It includes food, a home, work. And the fact is, that this is great way to get someone off the street and put him into an apartment. (Head of an NGO that participated in the Program)

Finally, the constructive attitudes of the respondents to the role of managing authority are noteworthy. During an unprecedented intervention by Greek standards, the members of the managing authority were able to supervise properly the implementation process and respond immediately to problems that arose daily. Nevertheless, there were still problems resulting from design deficiencies or the ways in which the Program was implemented. These factors will be discussed below.

## **Ambiguities and Omissions during the Design Stage of the Program**

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### *The absence of primary data to exploit*

Greece, after seven years of deep recession and a sharp rise in poverty and social exclusion, has still not attempted to create a national register of homeless people. This results in an ignorance of the real dimensions of the problem (Kourachanis, 2015a). A major drawback, therefore, in the design of the Program was the lack of data. The Program was not developed on the basis of the real dimensions of the problem, but on the available budget.

I: For the design of the Program, was primary data used?

R: No. Primary data do not exist, nor was any research conducted before starting to design it.

I: Then how did you conclude that the action will benefit 1 200 people?

R: This was based purely on the available budget. We will be given €9m for the homeless and we calculated that with this 1 200 people can benefit. (Housing Policy Coordinator of an NGO that participated in the Program)

Such a position confirms the scholarly scientific literature that focuses on the political terms of public policy actions (see Wildavsky, 1964). In this way, the extent and features of social interventions are mainly developed on the basis of the available budget each time and not on the extent and severity of the social problem that they seek to resolve.

### ***The short-term nature of the intervention***

One major weakness is the brief duration of the Program. Within a short time the beneficiaries are expected to have been successful in their housing integration and within three months at least 40% would have to have found jobs. Interviewees considered the twelve-month duration of the Program as too short to make a meaningful social impact on the beneficiaries.

A major drawback of the Program was its short duration. It is not possible in just a few months for a homeless person to get back into the pace of independent living, to find a job quickly and then after a short while to face the danger of ending up homeless again because the grant for the shelter and the job will end. Nobody has the time to get back on track easily within such a short time. Such actions usually last for three years. In Barcelona, for example, they provide three years of counseling, individual and group, within the framework of the intervention. If in these three years they do not succeed, then they will leave the Program. (Member of the Program's Managing Authority)

This situation contributes to the increased fragmentation and transitory nature of social policies for the homeless, exposing them to a continuous situation of social precariousness. This dimension recalls the scholarly debate around the "abeyance mechanism", a phenomenon that refers to the inadequate and temporary arrangements that social benefits offer the homeless (Hopper and Baumohl, 1994). Along with its short duration, the abeyance mechanism arises from the failure to provide a transitional framework for the beneficiaries after the end of the Program. The grant for both pillars ceases to exist by the end of the action. This puts the beneficiaries directly at risk of returning to their previous social situation.

### ***Uncertainties in calculating the number of beneficiaries among homeless families***

Confusion was caused by the calculation of the number of beneficiaries in homeless families. More specifically, when providing an additional subsidy to the recipient families, the number of children was not taken into account. In other words, the same amount of subsidy was given to families with one child as to a family with five children.

Another design oddity had to do with the calculation of the total number of beneficiaries. The minor family members were counted as beneficiaries per action plan, although they themselves did not receive a subsidy. Indeed, this measurement made it difficult to achieve the target of 40% employment in the Employment Rehabilitation pillar, since minors were estimated based on the total number of beneficiaries, even though they could not work.

I: Did a family with one child and a family with five children receive the same subsidy?

R: Yes. They were simply counted as a family. The number of children in each housing unit was of no importance. Although the number of children did not receive any additional subsidy, they were counted among the beneficiaries. And this led to increasing demands on the 40% bar for employment reintegration. This means that they counted people who were unable to work as beneficiaries. This caused problems in the disbursement of the second tranche and created the risk of having to return the first. So of the 37 beneficiaries, 17 were children and they were counted as the 40% of the total beneficiaries who had to find a job. (Employment Counselor of an NGO that participated in the Program)

### ***Problems arising from the 30% quota per employment sector***

Complications in the implementation of the Program meant that a quota of 30% per unsubsidized employment sector was introduced. For each project the bodies envisaged a quota in the transition of beneficiaries into employment (30% of the beneficiaries of each project would be earmarked for work experience in the private sector, 30% for setting up businesses, 30% for employment in agriculture and 10% would receive a training voucher). Each body had space to reallocate up to 20% of the above quota, according to needs as they arose (Ministry of Labor, 2014).

This provision caused problems in the implementation of the Program. For all the actors involved, the most feasible part was finding job positions in which to employ the beneficiaries. Only a few beneficiaries were directed towards entrepreneurship or the rural economy, while the concept of a training voucher was not adopted.

I: Many agency representatives argue that the introduction of a quota in the second pillar created problems.

R: It did not work. This was a design error that could not work and for this reason we ended it. Because you have a population but you don't know its characteristics. How can you send them to work in the rural economy, for example? (Member of the Managing Authority of the Program)

## **Problems that Arose in the Implementation Stage**

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### ***Bureaucratic obstacles***

It should be noted that approximately 2.5 years had passed from the moment when the welfare package for homelessness, to be paid for from the primary surplus, was announced until the Program actually began. This delay can be attributed to the rigidities of the Greek public sector (see Sotiropoulos, 2004) as well as to the increasing requirements of the Program itself. On this last point, the implementation of an intervention with characteristics that were unprecedented in Greece meant that the bodies involved were not initially familiar with the nature of the Program.

The objective difficulties inherent in the process also created unavoidable delays. More specifically, these included problems in the design of the process for starting a business, which foresaw the submitting of action plans by the agencies, the selection of the action plans, the process of finding beneficiaries, the preparation of their documents and the search for potential accommodation. Moreover, the above actions were to be fulfilled by bodies and services that, due to the crisis, are understaffed and therefore unable to meet serious social challenges. All these parameters created delays in the immediate implementation of the Program.

The final Program was launched in September of 2014. After that, the proposals were evaluated and in July 2015 its implementation began. These delays are due to the administrative rigidities of the public sector and the unpreparedness of the agencies for dealing with such an issue. And, of course, there is the question of the understaffing of the agencies. It's impossible not to be diverted in what you are doing under these conditions. (Senior figure in the Ministry of Labor)

Significant difficulties in implementing the Program were encountered mainly by the municipalities. Tied down by a dysfunctional bureaucracy, they were often unable to fulfill the requirements of the Program. Many of the expenditures earmarked, from the leasing of accommodation to house repairs or the purchase of household goods, were not approved by the financial supervisors of the municipalities. This created significant problems and delays due to the increased procedural requirements of the Greek bureaucracy.

### ***The effects of the horizontal character of the Program***

The main problem that arose during the implementation of the Program was that, although it was declared as taking a broad approach as to who the beneficiaries were to be, incorporating heterogeneous groups of homeless, it foresaw the same type of intervention for all of them. It was, in other words, a horizontal action for different forms of homelessness.

More specifically, as mentioned at the beginning, the Program was based on two pillars: housing and employment reintegration. Individual actions were foreseen in order to support the two main ones: these include psychosocial support, advice in finding a job, counseling on the financial management of the grant offered by the Program and acting as intermediaries for connecting with other services.

Even though these were the directions indicated by the Invitation issued by the Managing Authority and they were superficially integrated into the action plans of the candidate agencies, from the interviews it became apparent that they were not substantially applied during the implementation stage, nor was there a check to see that they had been fulfilled. On the contrary, the agencies stressed those actions that were a precondition for receiving the individual financial installments from the Program. That is, actions for finding housing and employment.

At the same time, the Program did not foresee any specialized support as a whole. The actions that were designed were the same for all categories of homeless. In addition, those areas that could offer a more personalized approach (e.g. psychosocial support, advice on employment and financial management) were neglected and not put forward as an equal priority of the real goals of the Program.

The Program thus offered the same benefits (primarily housing and subsidized work) for different categories of homeless, which could include homeless people with psychological problems, homeless drug users, or homeless people with disabilities. Although, therefore, when it was announced the action ostensibly covered a wide range of forms of homelessness, it indirectly excluded many of these because there was no provision for the relevant tools for social integration. This is apparent from a series of factors, which will be presented below:

The Program was very open to beneficiaries. That's good. But there should have been more specialized means of intervention. Because, for example, we wanted to work in the area of mental health, but we couldn't do this with the tools provided. Or why can't a homeless person with an addiction benefit as easily as someone who only has financial problems and no other issues? (Member of an NGO that participated in the Program)

The general tools that the Program provides can't work like this. It provides the same, identical guide for all groups covered in the intervention. This is, then, a negative aspect of the Program – the fact that the guide for the intervention was the same for different groups of homeless people. Some were being evicted, others lived on the streets, others had psychological problems, others may have been drug users. You can't have a horizontal intervention with such different groups. (Head of an NGO that participated in the Program)

The horizontal character of the intervention resulted in the indirect exclusion of many categories of homeless people. As a result of how it developed, the Program favored the selection homeless people primarily with economic but no other kinds of problems. This was particularly observed during the implementation of the Program and the implementation of different social interventions ultimately only benefits the more able members of the target group selected (Anderson *et al.*, 1993). As a result, those who benefitted from this intervention were mainly those who were homeless for economic reasons and who lived on the streets or in hostels, as well as households under threat of eviction and who were included in the category of people living in insecure accommodation.<sup>4</sup>

I would say that the Program led to the selection of those who were homeless or at risk of housing exclusion due to poverty. In other words, it didn't involve either homeless people with a mental illness or drug users. After a year, these people would end up back in the same place. What makes me say this are their individual profiles and their family backgrounds. Many things. In indirect terms, the call to participate in the Program was a tool, you can't take a person who's at rock bottom and solve all his problems and then within a year expect that he will be reintegrated. Of course, if the Program had a longer duration then it could have a tremendous social impact. (Member of an NGO that participated in the Program)

This informal orientation to creaming was also encouraged by the Employment Rehabilitation pillar. In this case, the precondition for the payment to the agencies of the second tranche of funding was the placement of at least 40% of the beneficiaries of each action plan in positions of employment. Such preconditions push the agencies into selecting the most easily "treatable" of homeless people (Clove *et al.*, 2010). As a result, in order to facilitate the payment of the funding, the agencies tend to choose the most immediately "employable" of homeless people.

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<sup>4</sup> For the typology of homelessness, see ETHOS (FEANTSA, 2006).

Something else that played a role in the selection of the individuals who benefited was that 40% of them had to find employment. This alone immediately determined the profile of the homeless who were to be selected. Because, to find work for almost half of the homeless beneficiaries, they should have primarily economic problems and nothing else. (Senior figure in the Ministry of Labor)

In order for us to receive the second tranche of the funding we had to reach an employment target of 40% of each action plan. We had an issue with that because employers were suspicious about hiring homeless people in their businesses. We were thus forced to take on those homeless who were almost ready to work. (Member of a municipality that participated in the Program)

Finally, it is worth noting that the choice of beneficiaries was left almost entirely at the hands of the agencies. More specifically, the agencies were invited to inform the homeless of the action, and to select who they were to include in the Program, as well as where they were to live and work. As can be seen from the examination of the action plans, this resulted in many agencies choosing beneficiaries who were already registered with them. The most common method of assessing their needs in order to select them was to create an individual profile of each beneficiary based on an interview. It is, therefore, possible that agencies may have behaved in a clientelist way towards certain beneficiaries, but more focused research would be required in order to argue for this.

### ***The Program's relatively low financial absorption***

A final issue that was mentioned was that the Program did not manage to absorb all the initial budget. It is estimated that up to 25% of the budget was not allocated. This was because of the preconditions that needed to be fulfilled in order to receive each installment of the funding, such as the precondition that at least 40% of the beneficiaries be employed per action plan, the quota for employment sectors, as well as other, less significant, obligations.

I: What was the greatest difficulty in absorbing the funds?

R: The fact that for many agencies to receive the second and third installment 40% of the beneficiaries had to have achieved employment rehabilitation. And this was an objectively large number. Yet, they were obliged to achieve this because otherwise they would have to return the money from the first installment. (Member of an NGO that participated in the Program)

And all these administrative obligations produce a large amount of funds that can't be absorbed. Just imagine, we had people who found a job on their own and did not take the benefits that they were given. Because the quota was an

impediment. We noted this in writing, that we had funds that weren't absorbed. In the end, there was no real change. (Member of an NGO that participated in the Program)

Administrative filters, such as those discussed above, remind us that the way in which a policy is finalized, with the establishment of selection criteria, may often result in its initial plans being effectively changed during the implementation phase. In these cases, the beneficiaries may not receive the greatest possible social benefits from the intervention, because of these impediments (Van Oorschot, 1991; Curie, 2004).

## Conclusions

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Historically, policies to tackle homelessness in Greece have not clearly adopted a particular approach to subsidized housing. In other words, they were not influenced either by the staircase of transition or by Housing First. Even so, their insufficient and fragmented service-centric character displayed elements that were partially compatible with the staircase of transition. In the past five years, within conditions of economic crisis and an escalation of social problems, the establishment of social facilities, such as day centers for the homeless, hostels, etc. have reinforced this approach.

The Housing and Reintegration Program, even though it contains some elements that correspond to aspects of Housing-Led schemes, is first and foremost an intervention that acknowledges the need to develop forms of housing support for poor households and individuals in Greece. Even so, it is also a Program that introduces elements that create the preconditions for a future transformation in the philosophy of social policy towards the unemployed, towards a more holistic direction.

The immediate housing of the beneficiaries in autonomous housing before any other services is offered in combination with subsidized employment is shaping an innovative social intervention that offers many possibilities for the social integration of individuals who are suffering from extreme phenomena of poverty and social exclusion. In other words, what is being offered is not a one-dimensional form of housing assistance. On the contrary, the combination of accommodation and a subsidized employment position creates strong expectations for the Program's social impact.

The goals and the content of the Program indicate a tendency towards a Housing-Led orientation. This approach has been widely adopted in recent years by the member-states of the European Union. Aspects such as the shift from the provision of services, centered around social hostels and guesthouses, to the provision of independent living accommodation for a specific period of time, expanding the beneficiaries of the policy to include heterogeneous forms of home-

lessness, the separation of the provision of housing from the provision of services and its combination with employment policies are fundamental dimensions of the Program, which are compatible with Housing-Led.

Even so, a series of omissions means that the Housing and Reintegration Program has diverged from Housing-Led. A first point is the horizontal character of the Program, in contrast with the tendency towards individualization that such initiatives usually have. The Housing and Reintegration Program included among its potential beneficiaries an expanded number of diverse beneficiary groups, without developing the corresponding specialized means of intervention. A fundamental feature of Housing-Led is the flexibility and adaptability of the services, in relation to the needs of the different categories of homeless.

In contrast, the Housing and Reintegration Program offered those beneficiaries suffering from different forms of homelessness a unified framework of social provisions (housing, subsidized employment), which could be of direct use only for the cream of the homeless. In other words, primarily for those who are homeless for purely economic reasons. The result of this was that those homeless for whom immediate employment was not possible were indirectly excluded, and in large numbers. This was due to the absence of individualized tools that could respond to the multidimensional character of the lack of housing.

A further parameter that encouraged the selection of certain homeless people was the requirement for the employment rehabilitation of at least 40% of the beneficiaries per action plan. For the agencies implementing the Program, this stipulation was a precondition for the payment of the second tranche of the funding. This obliged the agencies to select those homeless who were immediately employable, in order to achieve the 40% target. As such, it was another indirect discouragement not to select those homeless people who had a number of social disadvantages.

One further negative point was the short-term nature of the intervention. The Program was initially designed to last for twelve months, during which the beneficiaries would have to be rehabilitated in terms of housing, employment and, by extension, socially. In contrast with the long-term interventions adopted in other European countries, the duration of the Housing and Reintegration Program was deemed insufficient. And this is because the social integration of an individual who is dealing with multidimensional social exclusion in such a short period of time is extremely difficult.

Despite the negative points in the planning and implementation of the Housing and Reintegration Program, it is the first comprehensive response on the part of the Greek state for tackling a serious social problem. After seven years of crisis, during which there was a marked exacerbation of social exclusion and homelessness, the development of such holistic interventions can offer solutions with a more effective

social impact. The evaluation process will produce some very useful information and feedback for the Program. It is very important that the decision to evaluate the Program is taken. Equally necessary is the political will to move from the pilot stage to the regular operation of the Program, under the umbrella of a broader strategy that still today continues to be absent from Greece.

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