

Hello everyone,

It is an honour to participate in this Ministerial Meeting to talk about the Portuguese experience with the recent policy of public housing.

The right to housing is a fundamental right for every citizen and should not depend on the market provision.

In the last decades the idea that market would work and that its mechanisms would be enough to meet all the population's needs, prevailed. This idea led to a growing lack of responsibility from the State on direct provision of dwellings – one of its main constitutional obligations – and to an ever-greater reduction of the public investment in housing.

Even worse than that, this failure of the State has represented a real retreat in one of the most important and structuring domains of society - housing - which has become less and less accessible for an increasing number of families, with an invaluable social impact. At the same time, the public responses were focused on interventions through the market, that proved incapable of responding to the housing shortages and needs.

In fact, due to this mercantilist vision, we were not able to create the same public response for housing as we have created for health or education. And that means a structural social problem and a very relevant factor of social inequality, that was exacerbated during the pandemic crisis. Those were the times when the house became a home, school, work and a place for individual and collective protection.

We need to return to the State and to the centrality of its role in housing policies, adopting mechanisms of shared governance at the local, national

and transnational level, and promoting robust policies of direct provision in order to reinforce the public housing stock.

The existence of structural housing problems, as the Portuguese case, makes it essential to achieve and stabilize a public housing policy, based on two priorities: the universal access to housing and the reinforcement of the public housing stock.

Fortunately, the priority of housing public investment began at the end of 2015. We are on our way and the challenge is to build a real public housing policy. A policy that does not result from a mere response to the pandemic crisis, but from the urgent need to rebuild a fundamental pillar of the Welfare State, promoting - at the same time - the country's economic and social development.

Therefore, the challenge we face now is nothing more than assuming the responsibility of implementing a housing policy that is, in fact, for everyone. That's why housing is one of the main pillars of investment identified by Portugal in the EU Recovery and Resilience Plan, in order to ensure a public universal response for housing problems, along with an inclusive and sustainable approach, by choosing better housing solutions.

In this context, the two main instruments for promoting housing responses – the «First Right» and the «Public Housing with Affordable Costs» programs – are central in our housing policy, mobilizing the action of the Housing Institute, in close collaboration with the municipalities.

It is very clear for us, that the path to stabilize a solid public housing policy demands a continuous increase of our public stock, achieved with a collective national significant effort and the support of supranational financing

instruments, in order to complete our Welfare State and guarantee better life conditions and well-being for all Portuguese citizens!