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BACKLOG

40-year wait for government houses

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IT COULD take up to 40 years before the housing backlog in KwaZulu-Natal is cleared.

Mhulelo Baloyi, spokesperson for the KZN Department of Human Settlements, said there were between 700 000 and a million people waiting for houses in the province.

Favershree Padayachee, the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) provincial manager for KZN, said: "We have received several complaints relating to access to housing, which are currently under investigation."

"In terms of section 26(1) of the Constitution, everyone has the right to have access to adequate housing. The state is obligated to take reasonable legislative and other measures within its available resources to achieve the progressive realisation of this right."

Baloyi said the backlog was mainly due to more people migrating from rural areas to urban centres, seeking economic opportunities.

"As alluded to somewhere, trying to end the backlog is akin to 'shooting a moving target'. The ongoing migration to urban areas and other economic centres continues unabated, which inadvertently creates pressure for more affordable housing near workplaces and other social amenities.

"Statisticians often say to entirely wipe out the current backlog it could take anything between 30 and 40 years."

Baloyi said despite the challenges, they had been making strides to upgrade informal settlements and provide housing opportunities.

"We understand that informal settlements are the direct result of the increasing rate of urbanisation and are responding in a systematic way as it is a national priority.

"We have been using different policy instruments, like rural housing, Greenfield Breaking New Ground urban

projects, rental and social housing and Serviced Sites programmes to address these challenges. We also remain committed to following the Global Action Plan Framework on Informal Settlements and Slums which was launched in October 2022," he said.

Baloyi said that during the past financial year, 10 255 houses were built.

"In addition there were about 4 599 serviced sites that were made available and a further 3 362 housing opportunities were achieved in the form of title deeds being issued, rectification of pre-1994 housing stock and maintenance, bringing the total of housing opportunities to 18 216," he said.

Mandla Nsele, spokesperson for the eThekweni Municipality, said there was a backlog of about 474 000 households in the city, which include people living in urban and suburban shacks in informal settlements (304 000), transit facilities (8 500), urban and suburban back-yard shacks in formal areas (49 000) and non-urban structures (112 500).

He said at an estimated 1% to 2% growth in the backlog a year, it was increasing between 2 500 and 5 000.

"However, the average number of new houses built over the past five years amounts to 2 200 per annum. It can clearly be seen that we are not reducing the total backlog at our current delivery rates.

"Furthermore, as the delivery of new housing units is determined by the available budget, there either needs to be an increase in funding or a new approach needs to be adopted to meet the housing backlog."

Nsele said rapid urbanisation led to an uncontrolled growth of informal settlements in the city.

"The informal settlement backlog comprises 64% of the overall housing backlog.

"Compounded with weak legislation to assist landowners in securing land, the lack of suitable and developable land for projects, lack of resources, funding

and bulk infrastructure, have resulted in a rising backlog. In such a context, the current delivery model for formal housing is deemed unsustainable.

"Given the weaknesses of the current delivery model, a new approach to upgrading of informal settlements is being pursued by the city.

"The new approach focuses more on basic services and socio-economic well-being as opposed to a policy that focuses solely on providing top structures. It aims to reach out to as many households as possible via sustained and practical services, instead of allowing households to wait indefinitely for any form of intervention," he said.

Marlaine Nair, DA KZN spokesperson on human settlements and public works, said as the population increased, so did the need for housing.

"People are desperate for housing. However, while defaulting contractors continue to do departmental work, thousands of people grow increasingly tired of waiting and start building their own shacks – often on unsale land.

"We desperately need a government that has a track record of putting the needs of the people first and delivering on promises. The current five-year parliamentary term has seen four different human settlements and public works MECs in KwaZulu-Natal. Each brought in, in a last-ditch effort to rescue these critical departments.

"Regrettably, the performance within both of these departments has only become worse.

"While the maximum budget is spent, underperformance increases. People will have an opportunity this next election to vote in a government that will make the change that's needed," she said.

Thokozile Gumede, IFP KZN spokesperson for human settlements, said to combat the backlog there was a need for rural development and job creation.

"People who are seeking green pastures so that they can care for their fam-



CHRISTINA Pillay sits in the small kitchen/lounge area of the park home.



PREMILLA Padayachee outside the park home where she was moved to almost nine years ago. | NADIA KHAN

PROMISES

'We are living in harsh conditions'

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ALMOST nine years later, six Chatworth families who were moved from a block of flats to park homes, are still waiting to move back or for the promise of free-standing houses to be delivered on.

The residents said the park homes were erected on a primary school ground in Westcliff, due to the homes "collapsing" and a failing sewerage system.

Christina Pillay, 81, shares a two-room park home with her daughter Rosanne Singh, 47, son-in-law, and 12-year-old grandson.

Singh said they were told that it would take six months for the repairs to be completed at the flats.

"But nine years later we are still waiting to go back to our flat.

"While we are grateful to have a shelter, how much longer are we expected to wait to have a proper roof over our heads?"

"My son sleeps on a couch in the

same room as my mother. He is almost a teenager and needs his own space," she said.

Singh said they were living in harsh conditions.

"Because the homes are made of metal, when it's hot, it feels as if we are standing close to a fire. When it rains, the water rises due to no drains and seeps underneath the door and leaks through the roof. The children have to walk through knee-level water to get to school."

Singh said about two years ago promises were made that they would be given free-standing houses.

"Government officials came to see us and we had a chance to share our concerns. We were told that they would look for vacant land to build us new houses.

"They said they would send out helicopters to look for vacant spots. We will probably only see them again during election time and more empty promises will be made," she said.

Premilla Padayachee, 63, said all she wanted was to return to her flat.

"We were told the flat was collapsing and the sewerage pipes needed to be replaced, but we have had so many natural disasters, yet the flat is still standing.

"Now, the metal has started to rust in the park home and we have water that comes into the home whenever there is rain. I had to throw my bed away and now sleep on a mattress on the floor, as I cannot afford to buy another one."

Noleen Pillay, 43, her husband and sons, aged between 8 and 18, who live in the park home with Padayachee, said: "We cannot live so cramped in rooms that are the size of cubicles."

"We made enquiries at the rent office last year for any available flats, but were informed that we needed to fill out an application form and would be put on the waiting list. It is also very hard to rent an outbuilding which costs more than R5 000, as we are barely putting food on the table."

The eThekweni Municipality had not responded by the time of publication.

ilies and themselves leave their homes and come to the city, only to find that there are no opportunities. They cannot return home and end up living in informal dwellings.

"The IFP believes that the focus needs

to be on rural development, which will decongest urban areas.

"There also needs to be job creation so people can have a stable income to afford proper housing.

"There is also the issue of corruption,

which is rampant. As we head towards the elections, people need to start thinking about who are the servant leaders – the people who want to be in power not for their own gains, but to serve the people," she said.