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Crime in Public Rental Housing Complexes: When the Solution Becomes a Problem

الإجرام في التجمعات الخاصة بالسكن العمومي الإجباري: حينما يتحول الحل إلى مشكل

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Abstract:

Through the public rental housing scheme, the Algerian State seeks to provide decent housing for disadvantaged groups, within the broader framework of giving practical effect to the State's social character and promoting social equality. However, the housing complexes established under this scheme, rather than serving as a form of support enabling vulnerable groups to begin a dignified life and as a mechanism for eliminating marginalized neighborhoods, have become a source of persistent hardship in the daily lives of their residents, given the widespread prevalence of various forms of crime within them, particularly among young people. Accordingly, this study aims to identify the reasons that have led these complexes to become crime hotspots, while proposing certain measures that may contribute to reducing criminality within them.

Keywords: Criminality, Public rental housing, Poverty, Security, Fighting crime.

الملخص:

تسعى الدولة الجزائرية من خلال صيغة السكن العمومي الإيجاري إلى توفير مسكن لائق لكل الفئات المحرومة وذلك في إطار تجسيد الطابع الاجتماعي للدولة وتحقيق المساواة الاجتماعية، إلا أن التجمعات السكنية المنجزة في إطار هذه الصيغة وبدلاً من أن تكون مساعداً للفئات المعوزة لبدأ حياة كريمة وآلية للقضاء على الأحياء الهامشية، تحولت إلى كابوس يطبع حياة ساكنيها نظراً لما تشهده من انتشار للإجرام بكل أنواعه، خاصة بين فئة الشباب. لذلك كان هدف دراستنا هذه محاولة الوصول إلى الأسباب التي أدت إلى تحول هذه التجمعات إلى بؤر للجريمة مع إقتراح بعض التدابير التي من شأنها الحد من الإجرام في أوساطها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإجرام، السكن العمومي الإيجاري، الفقر، الأمن، مكافحة الجريمة.

INTRODUCTION:

The public rental housing scheme represents the practical implementation of Article 63 of the Algerian Constitution, which provides that: "The State shall ensure that citizens are enabled to: obtain housing, particularly disadvantaged groups."¹ This falls within the framework of giving practical effect to the social character of the Algerian State. The State has committed itself to constructing and distributing tens of thousands of housing units, commonly referred to as social housing, across the entire Algerian territory. This policy aims to promote social equality among citizens, support low-income groups and residents of informal and fragile neighborhoods, and thereby contribute to raising them to a decent standard of living that preserves their dignity, facilitates their

integration into urban life, and removes from their consciousness any sense of inferiority in comparison with other citizens of the State.

However, the reality of these housing complexes has been entirely different. Most of them have become hotspots of both conventional and organized crime, as well as a negative model of urban residential complexes. They have turned into arenas for violent confrontations between criminal gangs, shelters for drug trafficking, sources of disturbance to public tranquility, and sites of assault on the security of individuals and property. More dangerously, in some provinces, they have evolved into criminal forces that challenge the authority of the State and seek, by all available means, to spread violence and security disorder.

This situation has led a large segment of citizens to view the housing policy adopted by the State to support disadvantaged groups as a major mistake that now requires correction. Even State institutions themselves, particularly the security services, have come to regard these complexes as a major security problem that drains their capacities, increases their burdens, and prevents them from performing many of their various duties. Thus, a wide gap has emerged between what the State sought to achieve through the public rental housing scheme and what has actually occurred on the ground in this type of residential complex.

The outcome, which is hardly disputed by anyone on the basis of lived reality from both the citizen's and the State's perspective, is that the burdens and problems that society and the State alike were expected to eliminate through these housing complexes have instead multiplied and intensified. This is particularly evident in light of the spread of criminality from these complexes to other urban centers that were previously known for calm and security. Consequently, the real beneficiaries of this housing policy in its current form have become criminals and organized crime networks.

Therefore, in view of the persistence of this real problem—and indeed its continued expansion—despite all the criminal legal provisions enacted by the legislator and despite the severe penalties contained in these provisions, which has demonstrated the ineffectiveness of criminal policy in this field, it has become necessary to pause and return to examining the deeper roots of this dilemma. Under this dilemma, an action initially intended as a corrective measure has produced a serious error. This begins with the following research problem: How have public rental housing programs in Algeria shifted from being a manifestation of social equality to becoming a manifestation of criminality and crime?

This study therefore seeks to identify the causes of this transformation and the extent to which the adopted housing policy

may have contributed to this troubling situation, while also attempting to propose a total or partial amendment to the legal framework governing the public rental housing scheme, or even to the relevant criminal provisions themselves, if necessary.

To answer this research problem, the descriptive and analytical method was adopted in order to present the concepts that must be addressed in this study, and then to analyze the subject of the research paper within the framework of the problem raised.

First: The Causes of the Spread of Crime in Public Rental Housing Complexes

Although crime is a phenomenon experienced by all societies and present in all residential communities, regardless of their type or the nature of their inhabitants, this is primarily due to the existence of the human being himself, insofar as he constitutes the source of crime. It is impossible, under any circumstances, to eradicate crime completely as long as human beings continue to inhabit the earth. Secondly, crime is also attributable to several causes, some of which are shared by communities, while others vary from one community to another. Nevertheless, when crime intensifies and exceeds its ordinary level in certain residential complexes rather than others, several questions arise, most notably those concerning the reasons for this escalation. This is precisely the case of public rental housing complexes in Algeria, which have not only become centers of significant criminal activity, but have also turned into sources of crime affecting other neighborhoods and residential communities. For this reason, identifying the causes that have made crime exceed all limits in these areas constitutes half of the solution—if not the entire solution—to reducing crime within them and among their residents.

1- The Type of Persons Benefiting from Public Rental Housing

According to Article 02 of Executive Decree No. 08/142, which establishes the rules for granting public rental housing, the persons entitled to benefit from this housing

formula are those classified, on the basis of the income criterion, as needy and disadvantaged groups who do not own housing, or who reside in inadequate housing and/or housing that does not meet the minimum standards of hygiene. This means that the persons targeted by this formula are essentially classified within the category of the poor, whether because of the absence of financial income or because of its insufficiency.²

Since ancient times, scholars have linked poverty to deviant behavior. Plato affirmed this relationship when he explained that the love of wealth and material greed constitute the primary cause of criminal behavior. Accordingly, sociologists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries argued for the existence of a direct causal relationship between poverty and the dependency resulting from urban living, on the one hand, and crime and deviance, on the other.³ This means that one of the main causes of crime—whose role in individual deviance is scientifically and realistically acknowledged—is present in the case of those entitled to public rental housing. Poverty often constitutes a strong motive for the emergence of criminality in the individual, or at least an assisting factor, whether by generating the idea of crime in the human mind or by providing an environment conducive to it, in view of several considerations.

For this reason, poverty has been regarded as the primary factor accused of leading individuals to commit many crimes that erode society, such as simple theft or theft involving violence, prostitution and other sexual crimes, sorcery, trafficking in prohibited goods, and the list is extensive.

Consequently, although transferring beneficiaries to social housing may constitute a solution to the housing problem from which they had suffered, it does not, under any circumstances, resolve their financial difficulties. A low-income person remains dependent on the same limited income, and a person without income remains in the same condition. Nor does

such transfer change those among them who have already engaged in criminal conduct. Rather, relocating them to decent dwellings exposes them to new requirements that had previously been absent from both their thoughts and aspirations. No one thinks about internet access in a marginalized neighborhood that sometimes lacks even sewage systems, and no one thinks about furnishing a tin dwelling built from materials that are unsuitable for construction in the first place and that lacks the most basic safety conditions. However, this mode of thinking becomes a reality for a large segment of them once they move into social housing. This increases their motivation toward crime in an attempt to satisfy needs that they now perceive as necessary for their new life, and as compensation for the years lost in huts and fragile, cramped dwellings unsuitable for decent living.

2- The Type of Neighborhoods in Which the Beneficiaries of Public Rental Housing Previously Lived

As long as those entitled to benefit from the public rental housing formula are classified within the category of poverty, it is natural and logical that, before benefiting from this formula, they were living or residing in informal neighborhoods⁴, which are known, first, for being located outside the scope of the urban fabric, and, second, for lacking most components of infrastructure, whether in its material or technological dimension. They may also have lived in tin neighborhoods, known for constructions erected using metal sheets and materials that bear no relation whatsoever to proper building standards.

Since the residential neighborhood is an institution of socialization, similar to the family, and exerts an influence on the individual's personality—perhaps even a greater influence than the family, especially among young people⁵—neighborhoods that do not meet the requirements of dignified life and adequate living conditions may become spaces for producing a counter-social culture. This results from the feelings

of marginalization and social exclusion that contributed to the persistence of a sense of isolation among the beneficiaries of this housing formula. From their perspective, the housing units have changed, but the condition of isolation has remained the same. In the past, they lived in fragile, informal, and shanty dwellings situated on the outskirts of the city; today, they live in decent housing that is also located on the urban periphery.⁸

This situation was further exacerbated by the urgent need to enable beneficiaries to access their social housing units as quickly as possible. This urgency was accompanied by the handover of residential neighbourhoods before the completion of all development works, particularly those related to the provision and activation of essential facilities and services. Consequently, in some cases, housing units that formally belong to planned or model neighbourhoods were delivered within an urban environment whose level of development resembled that of informal settlements. This has meant that beneficiaries perceive the change in their living conditions only inside the housing unit granted to them, whereas in other aspects of daily life, the situation has largely remained unchanged.

In addition, housing the same social category within a single residential concentration has contributed to the persistence of the cultural patterns acquired in the neighbourhoods from which these residents originated. This has led to the absence of a guiding social model or formative reference for them. It is generally accepted that, throughout the process of human development, individuals learn from those around them and acquire new cultural traits and personal characteristics, whether positive or negative. When individuals interact with people who possess constructive cultural values and positive qualities, they may gradually, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, adopt similar patterns and acquire comparable attributes. If they resist this process, they may be rejected by the group and find themselves

they implant in the individual when compared with other residential environments.⁶

Accordingly, when these individuals are transferred to new housing complexes, they effectively escape fragile dwellings or dwellings that do not meet the minimum conditions of human life. However, they do not escape their own minds or the feelings these minds contain, including marginalization, incapacity, inferiority, and backwardness in relation to other individuals within the same society. This is particularly the case because these negative feelings have taken shape within them as convictions that are difficult to change, given that what they experienced constitutes part of their past and a real period of their lives.

3- The Reality of the Public Rental Housing Complexes That Were Distributed

study conducted in the new city of Ali Mendjeli in the province of Constantine, focusing on one of its residential units, showed that 40% of the residents of this unit had come from shantytowns, while 34% had been relocated from informal settlements. Residents originating from old housing represented 20%, whereas beneficiaries who had previously lived in apartment-block housing occupied the last rank, with a proportion of 06%. These figures indicate that the new city accommodates different segments of society and, consequently, contains a socially heterogeneous population with diverse mentalities, temperaments, and cultural backgrounds. This diversity has created difficulties in social interaction and in the establishment of stable neighbourly relations among residents. It has also made mutual adaptation more difficult, leading some residents to form opposing groups. As a result, an assault by one group against an individual belonging to another group may develop into violent clashes that sometimes require the intervention of a large police force to restore order.⁷

Furthermore, the location of most, if not all, public rental housing programmes in areas relatively distant from city centres has

shanty settlements, either individually or as part of organised gangs.

The delay in opening security stations also contributed to direct confrontations between law-abiding residents and these gangs. Such confrontations resulted from the attempt of habitual offenders to impose a situation in which the residential complex was treated as their own territory and placed under their control. Within this imposed order, residents were expected either to become part of the criminal gangs or to submit to their practices and crimes. Those who refused became potential victims and direct targets of these gangs, particularly through acts of violence and threats of violence. Such violence may be physical, psychological, or material in nature, especially when directed against property, particularly private property, through acts of vandalism, destruction, and deliberate damage.

Second: Measures Required to Prevent Crime in Public Rental Housing Complexes

Despite the existence of criminal law provisions that address all criminal acts committed within public rental housing complexes, and despite the enactment by the legislator of Ordinance 20/03 on the prevention and combating of neighbourhood gangs, which introduced preventive measures and criminal provisions covering all acts related to neighbourhood gangs, together with severe penalties, as part of the broader strategy to combat crime in residential neighbourhoods, this type of crime in particular continues to expand.

¹⁰This is confirmed by the lived reality of citizens and by what is observed daily in news reports and on social media platforms. This situation suggests that even this law may have failed to achieve the purpose for which it was enacted. Consequently, it has become necessary to reconsider the development of an effective and comprehensive preventive policy or strategy grounded in practical realities, rather than merely producing legal texts whose effect ends with the document in which they are written.¹¹

socially isolated, a condition that is difficult to endure because human beings are naturally shaped by an innate social disposition. However, when individuals continue to live within a group that shares the same culture, characteristics, and behavioural patterns, this inevitably contributes to the persistence and stability of their previous condition, even if their place of residence changes repeatedly. The place of residence may change, but the culture and personality remain unchanged.

04- Delay in Opening Urban Security Stations in Public Rental Housing Complexes

A study conducted in the Harathen residential complex in the province of Jijel found that 96% of the respondents stressed the necessity of establishing an urban security station within the neighbourhood, in addition to organising continuous security patrols. This demand emerged in the absence of an urban security station, despite the fact that residents had been settled in this neighbourhood since the end of 2014. The absence of such a security facility left the neighbourhood exposed to the control and domination of gangs involved in drug trafficking, as well as in provoking daily disputes and clashes among residents.⁹

Most residential complexes developed under the public rental housing formula have experienced delays in the construction and opening of urban security stations. This situation has made it necessary, on an exceptional basis, to rely on security patrols. In practice, however, these patrols remained limited because they were already linked to the duties assigned to them within their original areas of jurisdiction. This situation closely resembled the conditions that had previously prevailed in marginalised neighbourhoods. as a consequence, an environment conducive to violent confrontations emerged among habitual offenders seeking to impose control over the new neighbourhood and to resume the criminal activities that some of them had previously practised in fragile, informal, or

2- Reconsidering the Conditions Required to Benefit from the Public Rental Housing Formula

The aforementioned Decree 08/142, in Articles 03 to 06, sets out the conditions that must be met by applicants for public rental housing, in addition to the documents that must be attached to the housing application¹². It is noticeable, however, that the required conditions or documents do not include any evidence proving the applicant's integrity or good conduct. This requirement has become necessary in light of the growing crime affecting these residential complexes, especially since, in essence, it does not conflict with any constitutional or legal right. It is not logical for the responsibility of housing a habitual offender to fall upon the state. Nor is it reasonable for the state to seek to grant housing to a criminal who may transform it into a place of deviance and criminal activity, particularly since the public rental housing formula is, according to the explicit wording of the legal text, intended for persons classified as low-income or without income, not for individuals who spent their youth engaged in crime and within prison walls, and who continue to follow the same path.

It has therefore become necessary to amend the aforementioned Decree 08/142 by expressly requiring that the file attached to the application for public rental housing include the applicant's criminal record certificate. This certificate should be required to be free from any judgments or decisions of conviction for crimes involving assaults against persons, funds, or property, as well as offences related to the consumption or trafficking of narcotics and psychotropic substances. It is also necessary to emphasise the requirement that documents for renewing a housing application file be submitted personally by the person concerned, in order to prevent the renewal of the file of any housing applicant who is in a penal institution serving a custodial sentence.

In addition to the criminal record certificate, the district committee, as the collective body

Accordingly, this section presents a set of measures that may contribute, at least, to limiting the activities of criminal gangs in public rental housing complexes in particular, and in residential complexes in general.

1- Reconsidering Economic Policy and Its Related Dimensions

As long as the principal cause behind the emergence of informal, fragile, and shanty neighbourhoods is poverty resulting from the ineffectiveness of the adopted economic policy, and its inability either to increase the income of low-income groups or to provide employment opportunities for those without income, and as long as poverty remains one of the most important factors contributing to human deviation and involvement in crime, particularly when individuals are forced to live in an environment created by such poverty and lacking even the minimum requirements of decent human life, it becomes necessary to consider and implement ways of reducing poverty. This would enable individuals to secure housing by their own means and to meet their daily and circumstantial needs. By contrast, seeking merely to provide housing without removing individuals from the state of poverty and deprivation in which they live will not alter reality and will not deter them from the path of crime. As long as need persists, the propensity toward deviation remains significantly present.

It would therefore have been more appropriate for the Algerian state to consider investing the funds allocated to the construction of social housing, in addition to the substantial financial resources later devoted to combating crime, into the economic cycle with the aim of creating employment opportunities and raising individual income. Such an approach would, at the very least, contribute to reducing poverty, restraining crime, and benefiting from taxation and individual consumer spending, together with their role in stimulating the economy.

a path that they remain constantly within the sight of those responsible for enforcing the law and those who possess the authority to deter them.

Coordination is also required among all ministerial sectors connected with housing programmes, particularly with the Ministry of Interior, concerning the prior provision of all human and material resources needed for the security stations to be established within residential complexes. Synchronising the actual entry into service of security stations with the beginning of the use of the urban pole or residential complex has a significant impact on residents, regardless of their social category. Adequate security presence gives law-abiding individuals a sense of safety and, at the same time, suppresses the idea of criminal conduct among individuals who are predisposed to deviance, because they become certain that punishment for any criminal act they commit will be both inevitable and swift.

4- Establishing a Reporting System That Does Not Require the Identity of the Informant

Several considerations have led citizens to refrain from fulfilling their duty to report crimes that they witness, and sometimes even crimes of which they themselves are victims. This has directly caused the security services to lose an important source of assistance in detecting crimes, and has deprived the judiciary of evidentiary proof capable of supporting the conviction of perpetrators, particularly through witness testimony.

When citizens witness, on a daily basis, incidents that confirm the growth of crime, which has come to dominate society in general and their residential surroundings in particular, and when they observe crimes being committed in places that are supposed to be safe, they reconsider many times before reporting any crime, out of fear of retaliation and harm to the physical and psychological safety of their families if they report it using their real identity. This is because they know very well that their

responsible for preparing the lists of beneficiaries, should be granted the authority to request the security services to conduct administrative investigations of a security nature concerning all individuals included in the list of beneficiaries. The final decision as to whether a person is eligible to benefit from housing should remain within the competence of the district committee, according to what it deems appropriate.

3- Reconsidering the Method of Implementing Public Rental Housing Programmes

It has become necessary for those responsible for preparing public rental housing programmes to undertake a fundamental reconsideration of the methods used to implement these programmes, in a manner that ensures the avoidance of all factors that may contribute to the emergence and growth of crime. This is particularly relevant with regard to examining the possibility of abandoning the construction of residential complexes exclusively dedicated to public rental housing, and instead distributing those entitled to benefit from this formula across urban poles developed under other housing formulas, according to carefully studied proportions. This would provide these citizens with the opportunity to begin a new life in an environment unrelated to the one from which they were relocated.

At the same time, the planning and architecture of these residential poles should facilitate residents' adaptation to their new environment, particularly by implicitly rejecting housing models that are reproduced across all housing formulas and that facilitate monitoring of the complex, smooth access to it, and security operations within it by law-enforcement agencies. In addition, the inclusion of camera surveillance systems in all new urban poles should be considered a basic security standard for the safety of these areas. Such systems would contribute to establishing security for both persons and property, while also creating a sense among anyone from the residential pole who may consider crime as

psychotropic substances and narcotics who conduct their trade away from the eyes of the security services and in a professional manner that makes their activities difficult to detect.

Conclusion

This study concluded that a complex network of causes has led public rental housing complexes to shift from urban neighborhoods reflecting urbanization and progress into neighborhoods that reflect little beyond the spread of crime and social ills of various kinds. Some of these causes were rooted in the areas or neighborhoods where the beneficiaries of social housing had previously lived, while others were produced by the housing policy applied to this housing formula. This requires a complete redrawing of housing policy in Algeria, away from a management pattern directed toward achieving political gains or illusory forms of appeasement.

Accordingly, this study reached a set of findings, presented as follows:

- The State's provision of housing for poor families does not eliminate their continued need, which leaves the door wide open for their possible entry into the world of crime.
- The State's failure to understand the composition of the citizen with whom it is dealing has led it to seek only to satisfy his material needs, without giving sufficient importance to his other needs. This ultimately resulted in the absence of any real change in the personality of the individual transferred from marginalized housing to urban housing.
- Relying solely on a deterrent strategy, as emphasized through Ordinance No. 20/03 on the prevention and combating of neighborhood gangs, to reduce crime in public rental housing neighborhoods—despite the fact that no tangible effect has yet appeared in reducing crime rates—demonstrates that the solution to this problem lies in reorganizing housing policy, alongside reconsidering many other policies, rather than in increasing the severity of deterrence.

report will sooner or later send the reported person to prison.

At the same time, however, they also know very well that the person they reported may take revenge against them upon release from prison, unless that person's criminal partners take revenge on his behalf before then. It is impossible to ignore the declining effectiveness of the penal system in reducing crime and deterring offenders from returning to criminal conduct. This is clearly and unambiguously reflected in the state of recidivism that has become widespread among a large proportion of inmates in penal institutions, as well as in what citizens experience in their own neighborhoods. Who does not know criminals in his neighborhood who have entered prison repeatedly, yet remain involved in crime, with criminal conduct that has even become more serious than before?

Therefore, it has become necessary to establish an electronic reporting system connected to the security authorities, the Public Prosecutor's Office, and even the Ministry of Justice, which would accept reports of crimes through videos, photographs, or even documents, without requiring the entry of the reporting person's personal information and without any electronic tracking feature identifying the location from which the report was submitted. This constitutes an indispensable solution for activating citizens' contribution to combating crime and deterring criminals. This type of system has proven highly effective in confronting crime, particularly through what is known on the social networking platform "Facebook" as the Algeriano page, as well as the Neighborhood Gangs Combat page. These pages have become an appropriate destination for citizens to report crimes by publishing video clips or photographs of criminals who have committed various crimes, recorded or captured by citizens using their mobile phones and then sent to these pages. They have also become a center for collecting information about neighborhood gangs and traffickers of

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For this reason, and for this purpose, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Redrawing economic policies in a manner that reduces poverty, thereby preventing the State from needing, in the first place, to provide social housing, or at least reducing the number of those entitled to benefit from it.
- Reconsidering the housing strategy for low-income or no-income groups, especially with regard to taking into account their distribution across residential complexes developed under other housing formulas, while providing psychological care that helps them adapt to the new environment to which they have been transferred.
- Working to generalize the camera surveillance system and considering it a top priority, in order to avoid the enormous expenditure that increases day after day in response to the growth of crime.
 - Reconsidering the methods of reporting crimes, even at the expense of certain considerations, in a manner that ensures the reduction of crime and the resumption by citizens of their role in combating criminality, as long as it is logically and rationally accepted that an exceptional situation requires exceptional conduct.

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¹⁰ Ordinance No. 20/03 of 30 August 2020, concerning the prevention and combating of neighborhood gangs, Official Gazette No. 51, 2020, p. 05.

¹¹ Although the National Committee for the Prevention of Neighborhood Gangs, entrusted with preparing the national strategy for the prevention of neighborhood gangs, was established pursuant to Ordinance No. 20/03 concerning the prevention and combating of neighborhood gangs, issued on 30 August 2020; and although the composition of this committee, as well as that of the provincial committee for the prevention of neighborhood gangs, and the procedures governing their functioning were determined on 29 March 2021 pursuant to Executive Decree No. 21/123; and although the members of the National Committee were appointed on 23 May 2021 pursuant to the decision issued by the Minister in charge of the Interior, the members of this committee were not actually installed until 20 April 2026 for the 2026/2029 term. Furthermore, the study of the draft national strategy for the prevention of neighborhood gangs did not begin until 15 June 2026. Official website of the Ministry of Interior, Local Authorities and Transport, <https://interieur.gov.dz/ar/>, accessed on 18 June 2026.

¹² Please see Articles 03, 04, 05, and 06 of the aforementioned Executive Decree No. 08/142.

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² Article 02 of Executive Decree No. 08/142 of 11 May 2008, establishing the rules for granting public rental housing, Official Gazette No. 24, 2008, p. 18.

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