

Access to decent and affordable housing for all

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The Committee on Employment and Social Affairs adopted an own-initiative report by Kim VAN SPARRENTAK (Greens/EFA, NL) on access to decent and affordable housing for all.

Access to adequate housing is a fundamental right must be seen as a precondition for the exercise of, and access to, other fundamental rights and for a life in conditions of human dignity. Despite this, homelessness is rising in at least 24 Member States. On any given night in the European Union 700 000 homeless people have to sleep in shelters or on the street, which is an increase of 70 % in the past 10 years. The COVID-19 crisis has aggravated housing insecurity, over-indebtedness, and the risk of eviction and homelessness.

Achieving adequate, energy-efficient and healthy housing

The report supports the Renovation Wave's focus on tackling energy-poverty and worst performing buildings, in line with the objectives and principles of the European Green Deal. The Renovation Wave should be prioritised in the multiannual financial framework and Next Generation EU.

In addition, Members called on the Commission and the Member States to:

- ensure equal access for all to decent housing, including clean and high-quality drinking water, adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene;
- prioritise emissions reductions and energy efficiency through housing renovation;
- support the circular economy in the construction sector;

Combating homelessness and fighting discrimination

Members recalled the EU's goal to end homelessness by 2030 and called on the Commission to propose an EU framework for National Homelessness Strategies. According to Members, the provision of permanent housing to homeless people should be prioritised. Financial support should be provided for young people and people with disabilities to promote independent living and to women and children who are particularly exposed to the housing crisis.

The committee called on Member States to prohibit and tackle discrimination on the grounds of homelessness or other housing status, and to repeal all laws and measures that criminalise or penalise people for being homeless or behaviours associated with being homeless, such as sleeping or eating in public spaces. Exceptional measures are needed to protect homeless people during the COVID-19 crisis.

An integrated approach to social, public and affordable housing at EU level

The report called on the Commission and the Member States to make housing one of the cornerstones of the Action Plan of the European Pillar of Social Rights. The Commission should urgently develop an integrated EU-level strategy for social, public, non-segregated and affordable housing, creating an enabling framework for national, regional and local authorities to ensure the provision of safe, healthy, accessible and affordable quality housing for all.

Member States are encouraged to collaborate on financing social investments aimed at solving housing problems with the social partners, civil society and the private sector, many of whom play and can play a key role in the development and maintenance of adequate housing solutions for those in vulnerable situations.

Recalling that 25.1 % of European tenants paying market price rents spend over 40 % of their income on rent, the committee called on Member States and regional and local authorities to put in place legal provisions, including clear rental regulations, to protect the rights of tenants and owner-occupiers.

Members noted with concern the increased financialisation of the housing market, in particular in cities, whereby investors treat housing as a tradable asset rather than a human right. In this regard, they called on the Commission to put forward legislative proposals to counter financialisation of the housing market by mid-2021.

Investing in social, public, affordable and energy-efficient housing

The report called on the Commission and the Member States to further increase investment in the EU in social, public, energy-efficient, adequate and affordable housing, and in tackling homelessness and housing exclusion. They called for investment through the European Regional Development Fund, the Just Transition Fund, InvestEU, ESF+, Horizon Europe and Next Generation EU, and especially through the Recovery and Resilience Facility, Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative (CRII) and the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative Plus (CRII+).