

Ending Child Homelessness in Europe: From Crisis Response to Children's Rights



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Following a Human Rights Talk held in Brussels on 22 September 2026 by FEANTSA, Housing Rights Watch and the UN Human Rights Representation to the EU, this article explores what it will take to end child homelessness in Europe. It highlights the need to move beyond emergency responses, uphold children's rights to adequate housing and hold governments accountable for turning European policy commitments into concrete action.

On 22 September 2026, FEANTSA, Housing Rights Watch and the UN Human Rights Representation to the EU co-organised a **Human Rights Talk in Brussels** on ending child homelessness, bringing together European and international institutions and civil society to explore solutions. Drawing on the exchanges, this article examines what it will take to make ending child homelessness a reality across Europe.

From managing homelessness to ending it

FEANTSA and the Fondation pour le Logement des Défavorisés estimated that around 400,000 children experienced homelessness in Europe in 2023. Millions more live in inadequate housing, while one in four children in the EU lived in overcrowded housing that year. Single-parent and larger families face particularly high risks of housing exclusion.

For too long, homelessness has been treated primarily as a crisis to manage through emergency accommodation and temporary solutions. But managing homelessness is not the same as ending it. Ending homelessness means preventing people from losing their homes wherever possible, ensuring that homelessness is brief when it occurs, and enabling people to access stable, adequate housing.

For children, emergency accommodation can provide essential protection, but it cannot replace a permanent home. Preventing child homelessness requires early intervention, eviction prevention, adequate income support and greater access to affordable and social housing.

At the event, FEANTSA member Fédération des acteurs de la solidarité (FAS) presented evidence from France illustrating the gap between political commitments and the reality of child homelessness, reminding us that commitments alone are not enough to end homelessness.

Housing is a human rights issue

International and European human rights law establishes a framework of obligations relevant to ending child homelessness. Alongside the right to adequate housing and States' duties to prevent and reduce homelessness, this framework

includes children's specific rights, notably the principle that the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in all actions concerning them (Article 3 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child). The Convention protects children's specific rights, including the right to a standard of living adequate for their development (Article 27). They also require States to support parents and caregivers where necessary, including through material assistance and support programmes addressing housing needs (Article 27(3)).

The European Social Charter provides an additional and particularly important framework in Europe. Article 31 requires States to promote access to adequate housing, prevent and reduce homelessness, and make the cost of housing accessible to those without adequate resources. The Charter also protects children and families and requires action to combat poverty and social exclusion.

These legal obligations require States to go beyond responding to homelessness once it occurs. They call for measures to address housing unaffordability and shortages, prevent forced evictions and ensure that families at risk receive timely support. They also require assessing whether these measures effectively protect children from homelessness and enable those affected to access adequate, stable housing. The availability of emergency accommodation alone is not sufficient to demonstrate that these obligations are being fulfilled.

Europe has the tools, now comes the accountability test

There is reason for cautious optimism. Housing has become an unprecedented priority within European institutions, and the policy landscape has changed significantly.

The European Child Guarantee recognises children at risk of poverty and social exclusion as a priority and includes access to housing among the areas requiring action. In May 2026, the European Commission adopted its first EU Anti-Poverty Strategy, strengthened the European Child Guarantee and proposed a Council Recommendation on fighting housing exclusion. The new framework brings poverty, housing exclusion and homelessness together and places prevention and access to stable housing at the centre of the response.

The European Platform on Combatting Homelessness has likewise brought governments, civil society and other stakeholders together around a commitment to end homelessness through integrated, person-centred and housing-led approaches.

These developments matter. But recognition is not the same as accountability. If child homelessness is already recognised as a policy priority, we need to be able to assess whether policies are actually preventing it.

This remains difficult. European homelessness data are fragmented; definitions differ between countries and important information about evictions and homelessness among children and families is missing. Better data are not an end in themselves, but without reliable information on how many children are becoming homeless, how long families remain in temporary accommodation, and whether they are ultimately rehoused into adequate and stable homes, it is difficult to hold governments to account.

The test of Europe's new housing agenda

For a child, a home is a place of safety, continuity and belonging. Losing it can mean changing school, losing friends and community connections, living without privacy and growing up with constant uncertainty. These experiences must remain at the centre of Europe's housing debate.

Ending child homelessness is also a question of equality, human dignity and children's rights.

Europe has the legal frameworks and policy tools; the challenge now is to turn them into effective action. The success of Europe's new housing and anti-poverty agenda should be measured not only by strategies adopted, investment announced or homes built, but by concrete outcomes: fewer children becoming homeless, more families protected from losing their homes, and children who do experience homelessness moving quickly into safe, adequate and stable housing.

Ending child homelessness should be one of the clearest measures of Europe's progress towards ending homelessness altogether. No child should grow up without a place to call home.