

HOUSING: A MATTER OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The article stresses that housing is a fundamental right. They outline how, while rising housing costs and speculation worsen access, the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness pushes for affordable housing, tenant protections, and the "Housing First" model. The article also highlights the need for coordinated EU action to address homelessness and ensure social equity.



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Housing is a fundamental right essential for an individual's personal and professional development. However, 895.000 individuals are homeless on any given night in Europe,¹ a severe limitation and violation of their European citizenship rights.

The European Commission launched the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness (EPOCH) in 2021, following the signing of the Lisbon Declaration, with the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) heavily involved in its steering board. Despite this positive step forward, housing is increasingly becoming a speculative asset throughout the European Union. Rising house prices are pushing many people further away from the possibility of owning a home, severely impacting people experiencing homelessness or housing exclusion, as well as youth, women, migrants, and other vulnerable groups.

Social actors and civil society must urgently campaign for the incorporation of housing policies into the political agenda. It is crucial for progressive forces to strengthen their discourse by recognising housing as the backbone of a just society.

According to the EESC, the lack of access to decent housing exacerbates inequalities and limits opportunities for social and labour integration. In our own-initiative opinion, 'For an EU framework for national homeless strategies based on the principle of Housing First', we advocate for an EU strategy on homelessness, fully embedding the EPOCH Platform. This integration would allow national policies to combat homelessness to be included in the European Semester process. This strategy should also be supported by a Council Recommendation on homelessness. Additionally, we must address the issue

¹ 8th Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe, FEANTSA and Fondation Abbe Pierre.

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of human rights violations, and therefore urge the Fundamental Rights Agency to prioritise addressing the criminalisation and penalisation of people living on the streets as a key human rights concern.

In the European Union, access to adequate housing is a growing challenge. This increase highlights the urgent need for effective policies to ensure housing access. Our opinion emphasises the fact that investments in affordable housing not only benefit individuals but have a positive impact on the economy by reducing costs associated with homelessness, such as emergency services and healthcare.

To combat homelessness and ensure that housing is no longer a speculative asset, we need coordinated action and robust public policies that guarantee access to adequate housing for everyone. This includes measures such as regulating the rental market, building social housing, and implementing policies that protect tenants from unjust evictions. Additionally, EPOCH must continue to actively promote Housing First as a systemic solution to the chronic issue of homelessness. In our EESC opinion, we propose launching a European training programme to increase the acceptance of this solution.

Eradicating homelessness in Europe requires integrating homelessness measures across all European social policies. To this end, we urge the Commission to continue addressing homelessness in all relevant EU actions and strategies. We advocate for the European Commission to conduct a study on the growing number of persons experiencing homelessness despite employment, as we are concerned about the scope and nature of this issue, as well as the increasing number of homeless mobile EU citizens. Therefore, we propose that the European Labour Authority provides guidance to Member States on how to address these issues.

The newly elected European Parliament has a crucial role to play in this challenge. As progressive forces, we must be firmly committed to the cause of housing, understanding that without decent housing, there can be no real social progress or improvement in people's quality of life. It is time for governments and European institutions to take decisive action to ensure that housing is treated not as a mere investment asset, but what it truly is: a fundamental human right. Only then can we build a more equitable and solidary society.

One of the greatest challenges we face as a society is recognising that without solving homelessness and housing access, there can be no equity or social justice. Adequate housing is essential for people to reach their full potential and actively contribute to society. Addressing this crisis is crucial to building a fairer future rooted in the principle of solidarity. In short, building the Europe we all want.

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