

EDITORIAL

Let's start the Seventh Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe on a positive note for once: for the first time in the European Union's history, an agreement to eradicate homelessness by 2030 was signed in June 2021, formally committing all EU Member States.

The alarm that we have been sounding for years appears to only have been partially heard. Some governments included housing measures in their post-pandemic recovery plans and some municipalities have taken new initiatives to begin the necessary shift towards guaranteeing the right to housing for all. However, this impetus is still hopelessly inadequate and will not achieve the new key goal of eradicating homelessness. As we have repeatedly pointed out, housing is not an isolated issue. It goes hand-in-hand with several other major challenges facing the European Union, i.e. extreme pressure on low-income households, worsening inequality, an unprecedented surge in energy costs, and reaching the vital goals of the energy transition and climate neutrality. Ensuring that each individual has access to decent, affordable housing is undoubtedly one of the most important public responses to these challenges.

Among the essential changes to be made in the area of housing is the deployment of prevention policies so that we can avoid returning to, or indeed exceeding, the worrying levels of rental evictions seen before the pandemic. These policies must provide better support and protect vulnerable households as well as those who benefitted from temporary safeguarding measures during the pandemic and those newly at risk of finding themselves even more

destabilised by the current high levels of inflation. At a time when the fight against housing deprivation is becoming a priority across Europe, eviction cannot continue to be normalised, as it is today in many European countries. Eviction without alternative accommodation should be an exceedingly rare occurrence.

Considering that the increase in people facing housing exclusion or homelessness is, among other things, the result of a dysfunctional housing market, the solutions must also lie in structural responses. These include: carrying out energy renovations in a socially just manner; creating dignified, affordable, and adequate housing; investing in social housing; and making the private rental sector more affordable and more adequate.

The transformations required directly concern political leaders as well as national and local administrations, but they should also involve economic players, including private sector stakeholders, who need to start considering the widespread harm caused by housing exclusion. Civil society needs to play a role too, as do all Europeans without whom these transformations will take significantly longer to materialise at the scale required.

We have neither the time nor the right to wait until we are in the midst of a worse environmental and social catastrophe to act, when we have both the methods and resources to do so now.

Freek Spinnewijn
(Director, FEANTSA)

Christophe Robert
(Managing Director, Abbé Pierre Foundation)