

EDITORIAL

The war in the Ukraine has both highlighted and added to Europe's ongoing housing emergency. This crisis is hitting the poorest households hardest, severely affected by soaring prices, as well as homelessness services, which have seen an increase in the number of their clients. There is every indication that the solidarity shown by European countries in welcoming refugees fleeing the conflict now needs to be backed up by long-term housing solutions.

The context is worrying, but the situation is not new. At least 895,000 people are homeless in Europe. This estimate – based on patchy data and focusing only on the most visible forms of homelessness – highlights the failure of European countries to make housing a fundamental right: every night in Europe, a population comparable to that of a city like Marseille or Turin is homeless. Unfortunately, the phenomenon is still increasing in the majority of Member States. So far, only Finland and Denmark are making

demonstrable progress in reducing homelessness. Turning the tide will require unprecedented political efforts and bold structural measures.

With the launch of the European Platform on Homelessness in 2021, all Member States signed up to work towards ending homelessness by 2030. Since then, the European Commission, governments and stakeholders have taken steps to develop effective cooperation. While there is still a long way to go, the strategies initiated to improve data collection, release funding and promote mutual learning are promising signs.

The average quality of European housing has improved overall over recent decades. However, unfit housing remains a daily reality for millions of people. Damp and mould, overcrowding, difficulty in maintaining an adequate temperature, exposure to pollution, inadequate sanitation, fire risk and structural defects: unfit housing can take many forms that are often difficult to measure. Unevenly distributed across

Europe, poor housing conditions, which affect the most deprived segments of the population both more frequently and more severely, have significant consequences. Living in unfit housing seriously damages health, increases poverty and fosters exclusion. The problem also has a huge societal cost, not least because it generates endless medical expenses.

The need to improve the quality of Europe's housing stock is the subject of growing political attention in the context of the climate and energy crisis. Announced by Europe as part of its Green Deal, the "renovation wave" aimed at reducing carbon emissions could also provide an opportunity to tackle energy poverty and unfit housing. However, safeguards are required to protect households from increased housing costs: public subsidy and accompanying measures will have to be deployed to support poor homeowners and low-income tenants.

Poor housing is by no means inevitable. The public policies needed to put an

end to it are well-known and proven: effective regulation of the housing market, massive investment in the construction and renovation of social housing, a strengthening of social protection systems and comprehensive strategies to combat homelessness.

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