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*Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality*

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**2012/2293(INI)**

3.4.2013

## **OPINION**

of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

for the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

on social housing in the European Union  
(2012/2293(INI))

Rapporteur: Mojca Kleva Kekuš

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## SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality calls on the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions in its motion for a resolution:

- A. whereas the right to housing should be safeguarded in practice by guaranteeing that citizens and families have adequate housing which meets their needs and secures their well-being, privacy and quality of life, thereby helping to achieve social justice and cohesion and tackle social exclusion and poverty;
- B. whereas Article 11 of the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights<sup>1</sup> recognises 'the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. The States Parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realisation of this right, recognising to this effect the essential importance of international co-operation based on free consent';
- C. whereas social housing policy is an integral part of services of general economic interest to help meet housing needs, facilitate access to property, promote the quality of living space, improve existing living space and adapt housing expenditure to the family situation and resources of the occupiers, while leaving scope for effort on their part;
- D. whereas social housing should be marked by a good relationship between quality and purchase price or rent, should permit energy saving and should be located in an environment which includes green spaces and is suitable for different generations, taking account of the specific needs of children and older persons;
- E. whereas the enforceable right to housing is a fundamental right for every individual and a condition for access to social existence, private life and family life and the ability to look after oneself, to rest, to find a job, to have a bank account or to vote in elections; whereas housing is therefore fundamental to the actual exercise of all other fundamental rights;
- F. whereas in 2010 24.5 % of all women were at risk of poverty or social exclusion;
- G. whereas women with low incomes often find themselves in severe housing difficulties and are therefore at greater risk of living in unsafe and unhealthy environments;
- H. whereas the gender pay gap and, consequently, the gender pension gap, significantly impact women's purchasing power and economic stability and are still one of the main reasons why women find themselves below the poverty line at a later stage in their lives;
- I. whereas the financial and economic crisis and austerity policies have further exacerbated non-employment and increased the already precarious employment situation of certain women and the unemployment rate among women (especially among young women and the 50+ generation ), whereby older women have been particularly affected due to

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<sup>1</sup> *General Assembly, Resolution 2200 A (XXI), 16.12.1966*

persisting labour market discrimination<sup>1</sup>, increased the ranks of those needing more affordable housing and prevented greater progress in providing disadvantaged women with housing options; whereas low income and unemployment make it difficult for women to access bank loans and finance;

- J. whereas the economic difficulties have led to austerity measures, particularly in the public sector, and whereas, in many EU Member States, the public sector is one of the sectors dominated by women, women's wages have been greatly reduced, and therefore more and more women are among the poorest sections of the population in the European Union;
  - K. whereas the effects of the crisis overlap with a pre-existing situation in which women are often the victims of stereotypes and discrimination in both house purchasing and renting, due to their limited financial resources and because single women and female-single-adult headed families with children are often regarded as riskier renters or unreliable subjects in terms of repayment and breaking off the lease due to family resettling;
  - L. whereas single mothers, young families, women in poorly paid jobs, young people at the start of their careers, migrant women, people with disabilities, widows with dependent children, women from minority groups, women who are victims of domestic violence and the elderly, which particularly applies to elderly women on small pensions, are especially affected by the lack of affordable and adapted social housing options; whereas this group is particularly vulnerable to homelessness and often moves into sub-standard private market housing units, which substantially increases the risk of health problems; whereas this group often seeks alternative solutions by moving in with family, friends or acquaintances, thereby hindering proper analysis and transparent documentation of homeless people;
  - M. whereas homelessness is often perceived as affecting mostly men; whereas, however, research has shown that the typical form of homelessness among women appears to be 'hidden homelessness'; whereas women's strategies to avoid ending up in the street by staying with family or friends are in no way appropriate solutions;
  - N. whereas the economic crisis and housing market prices reduce the capability for women to divorce or end co-habitation, limiting their freedom and making them more vulnerable to gender-based domestic violence;
1. Stresses that the Member States should increase the number of affordable housing options and support women in achieving financial independence by providing them with conditions more conducive to reconciling work and family life, bearing in mind their pressing daily schedules and challenges; expresses its concern about country-specific recommendations aimed at limiting Member States' social housing sectors and about the Commission's restrictive approach in competition policy of limiting the definition of social services of general interest to social housing for socially disadvantaged persons only;

2. Stresses the pressing lack of adequate housing options adapted to meet the needs of older

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<sup>1</sup> European Parliament resolution of 13 September 2011 on the situation of women approaching retirement age (P7\_TA(2011)0360).

people and people with disabilities, and more specifically of housing that enables them to live independently for as long as possible;

3. Stresses the importance of a housing health and safety rating system which provides a health-based assessment of housing-related hazards;
4. Emphasises the need for transparent housing policies in order to provide a crucial contribution to gender equality;
5. Recalls that in 2009 there were seven times more single mothers than single fathers; takes the view, therefore, that together with other vulnerable groups or individuals such as single parents, young families, large families, young people at the start of their professional careers, migrant women, people with disabilities and the elderly, single mothers should be given priority when it comes to the allocation of social housing; notes that when the economic crisis first began, it had a greater impact on men than on women, but that as the crisis progressed it increased the unemployment rate of women more than that of men;
6. Stresses that, while the existence of social housing suitable for various people in need of assistance is essential, and considering its important role in combating child poverty through the eradication of family poverty and the prevention of the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage, it is equally important for such housing to be available at an affordable rent, for which reason 'reasonable rent' should be taken to mean a rent below the market rate;
7. Calls on the Member States to collaborate with the private sector and to invest in social housing to avoid social segregation and thus to provide a stable and secure environment, in particular for individuals and groups in vulnerable situations such as women in poorly paid jobs, young families, large families, single parent families, young people at the start of their careers, migrant women, people with disabilities, women from minority groups and the elderly, particularly elderly women on small pensions;
8. Calls on the Member States to take on responsibility for guaranteeing the right to housing for everyone, in particular by launching housing programmes for less well-off citizens, providing incentives to promote controlled-cost housing, constructing social rented housing, promoting and financing self-building programmes, supporting the cooperative sector, launching effective and non-speculative credit policies and regulating a non-speculative rental market;
9. Stresses that the different facets of homelessness among women must be addressed in a holistic way and should form an integral part of all EU policy frameworks; urges the Commission and the Member States to carry out systematic gender impact assessments and monitoring of homeless women's specific situation and needs, to promote assisted living environment projects and the construction of affordable, adapted and energy efficient housing, and to include middle class families – who are often excluded from such schemes – in social housing programmes as they, like other households, can suffer from material deprivation due to the economic crisis;
10. Notes with regret that victims of domestic violence are often more likely to stay in an

abusive environment if they are financially dependent on the abuser and thus unable to seek separate suitable housing for themselves; calls, therefore, for the EU to promote gender sensitive policies, programmes and funding that would increase access to safe and affordable housing for domestic violence victims and calls on the Member States to find affordable solutions to alternative forms of emergency and temporary housing and to increase the number of shelters and rehabilitation centres for victims, as well as other related social services such as integrated services for families (i.e. family justice centres);

11. Calls on the Member States to carry out social impact analysis with an emphasis on gender-based and household-based analysis as part of all social housing policies and programmes particularly taking into account gender disparity in income and financial resources; stresses that all statistical data must be broken down by gender and household types and that more research is needed in order to ascertain exactly how housing policies can support individuals and groups in a vulnerable situation such as women (bearing in mind women's multifaceted role as single parents and as carers for family members and for disabled persons), families, young people, people with disabilities and the elderly;
12. Welcomes the Commission proposal<sup>1</sup> for a directive on credit agreements relating to residential property and notes that many families with mortgages have been victims of abusive foreclosures; calls for exceptional steps to be taken to guarantee housing rights all over Europe; calls on Member States to ensure that the dramatic social consequences of evictions are effectively dealt with;
13. Notes that housing policies and programmes need to be developed in consultation with women with low incomes and from different social backgrounds in order to see which policies best reflect women's needs.

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<sup>1</sup> COM(2011)142

## RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

<b>Date adopted</b>	20.3.2013
<b>Result of final vote</b>	+: 26 -: 0 0: 1
<b>Members present for the final vote</b>	Regina Bastos, Edit Bauer, Marije Cornelissen, Edite Estrela, Iratxe García Pérez, Mikael Gustafsson, Livia Járóka, Teresa Jiménez-Becerril Barrio, Silvana Koch-Mehrin, Rodi Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou, Astrid Lulling, Elisabeth Morin-Chartier, Norica Nicolai, Angelika Niebler, Siiri Oviir, Antonyia Parvanova, Raül Romeva i Rueda, Marc Tarabella, Britta Thomsen, Anna Záborská, Inês Cristina Zuber
<b>Substitute(s) present for the final vote</b>	Silvia Costa, Anne Delvaux, Mariya Gabriel, Mojca Kleva Kekuš, Katarína Neveďalová, Angelika Werthmann