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DRAFT REPORT

on Access to decent and affordable housing for all
(2019/2187(INI))

Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

Rapporteur: Kim Van Sparrentak

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on access to decent and affordable housing for all (2019/2187(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Treaty on European Union (TEU), in particular Article 3(3) thereof, and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), in particular Articles 9, 14, 148, 151, 153 and 160 thereof and Protocol 26 thereto on services of general interest,
- having regard to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, in particular Title IV (Solidarity) thereof,
- having regard to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,
- having regard to the concluding observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of September 2015 on the initial report of the European Union to the Committee of June 2014,
- having regard to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by world leaders in September 2015 and endorsed by the Council, which voiced its commitment to their implementation, and in particular SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities calling for specific targets for 2030 to ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums and to enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanisation and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries,
- having regard to the Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing and its aim to ‘ensure access to decent, adequate, affordable and healthy housing for all’¹,
- having regard to the European Pillar of Social Rights proclaimed by the European Council, the European Parliament and the European Commission in November 2017, and in particular its principles 19, ‘Housing and assistance for the homeless’, and 20, ‘Access to essential services’,
- having regard to the revised European Social Charter, and in particular to Article 30 on the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion, Article 31 on the right to housing, and Article 16 on the right of the family to social, legal and economic protection,
- having regard to the Action Plan of the EU Urban Agenda Housing Partnership of 2018²,

¹ https://www.unecce.org/fileadmin/DAM/hlm/charter/Language_versions/ENG_Geneva_UN_Charter.pdf

² https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/system/files/ged/final_action_plan_euaa_housing_partnership_december_2018_

- having regard to the report of the High-Level Taskforce on Investing in Social Infrastructure in Europe 2018³,
- having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions of 2017, ‘Towards a European Agenda for Housing’⁴,
- having regard to the statement by Eurocities of 2016 on state aid and local public services⁵,
- having regard to the final communiqué of the 19th informal meeting of the EU housing ministers held on 9 and 10 December 2013⁶,
- having regard to the resolution of 2014 of the mayors of big European cities on the right to housing⁷,
- having regard to the Commission staff working document of 26 April 2017 entitled ‘Taking stock of the 2013 Recommendation on “Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage”’ (SWD(2017)0258),
- having regard to the Commission’s Social Investment Package of 2013,
- having regard to the Commission recommendation of 20 February 2013 on ‘Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage’ (2013/112/EU),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 5 April 2011 entitled ‘An EU Framework for Roma integration strategies up to 2020’ (COM(2011)0173) and to the subsequent implementation and evaluation reports,
- having regard to its legislative resolution of 10 July 2020 on the proposal for a Council decision on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States⁸,
- having regard to its resolution of 10 October 2019 on employment and social policies of the euro area⁹,
- having regard to its resolution of 13 March 2019 on ‘European Semester for economic policy coordination: Employment and Social Aspects in the Annual Growth Survey 2019’¹⁰,
- having regard to its resolution of 30 November 2017 on implementation of the

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³ Report of the High-Level Task Force on Investing in Social Infrastructure in Europe: ‘Boosting Investment in Social Infrastructure in Europe’ by Lieve Fransen, Gino del Bufalo and Edoardo Reviglio (January 2018).

⁴ <https://dmsearch.cor.europa.eu/search/opinion>

⁵

http://nws.eurocities.eu/MediaShell/media/EUROCITIES%20statement%20on%20state%20aid%20and%20local%20public%20%20services_16%2001%202016%20final.pdf

⁶ <http://www.iut.nu/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Housing-Ministers%C2%B4-Communiqu%C3%A9.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/resources/docs/resolution-for-social-housing-in-europe.pdf>

⁸ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2020)0194.

⁹ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2019)0033.

¹⁰ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2019)0202.

European Disability Strategy¹¹,

- having regard to its resolution of 16 November 2017 on combating inequalities as a lever to boost job creation and growth¹²,
 - having regard to its resolution of 24 October 2017 on minimum income policies as a tool for fighting poverty¹³,
 - having regard to its resolution of 7 July 2016 on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), with special regard to the Concluding Observations of the UN CRPD Committee¹⁴,
 - having regard to its resolution of 5 July 2016 on ‘Refugees: social inclusion and integration into the labour market’¹⁵,
 - having regard to its resolution of 26 May 2016 on poverty: a gender perspective¹⁶,
 - having regard to its resolution of 14 April 2016 on meeting the antipoverty target in the light of increasing household costs¹⁷,
 - having regard to its resolution of 24 November 2015 on reducing inequalities with a special focus on child poverty¹⁸,
 - having regard to its resolution of 24 November 2015 on cohesion policy and marginalised communities¹⁹,
 - having regard to its resolution of 11 June 2013 on social housing in the European Union²⁰,
 - having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (A9-0000/2020),
- A. whereas access to housing is a fundamental right that must be seen as a precondition for the exercise of, and for access to, other fundamental rights and for a life in conditions of human dignity;
- B. whereas growing numbers of people living in the EU in low or medium income brackets face affordability limits, an excessive housing cost burden and unhealthy, low-quality, energy-inefficient or overcrowded housing situations, or are homeless or at risk of

¹¹ OJ C 356, 4.10.2018, p. 110.

¹² OJ C 356, 4.10.2018, p. 89.

¹³ OJ C 346, 27.9.2018, p. 156.

¹⁴ OJ C 101, 16.3.2018, p. 138.

¹⁵ OJ C 101, 16.3.2018, p. 2.

¹⁶ OJ C 76, 28.2.2018, p. 93.

¹⁷ OJ C 58, 15.2.2018, p. 192.

¹⁸ OJ C 366, 21.10.2017, p. 19.

¹⁹ OJ C 366, 21.10.2017, p. 31.

²⁰ OJ C 65, 19.2.2016, p. 40.

eviction;

- C. whereas the COVID-19 crisis has aggravated housing insecurity, overindebtedness, and the risk of eviction and homelessness;
- D. whereas the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) addresses in its Principle 19 the issues of housing assistance and homelessness;
- E. whereas there is a shortage of social, affordable and accessible housing;
- F. whereas inadequate housing conditions negatively affect not only people's health, wellbeing, and quality of life but also their access to employment and to other economic and social services;
- G. whereas in defining and implementing its policies and activities, the European Union aims to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation;

Achieving adequate, energy-efficient and healthy housing

1. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure access for all to decent housing, including clean and high-quality drinking water and adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene, and to affordable, reliable and sustainable energy, hence contributing to eradicating poverty in all its forms; reaffirms its call for EU-wide action for a winter heating disconnection moratorium; calls on the Member States to meet the standards laid down by the World Health Organization (WHO) for adequate housing temperature; demands that the revision of the air quality regulation be aligned with WHO standards;
2. Calls on the Commission to prioritise emissions reductions through housing renovation in the social housing sector and for worst performing buildings in the Renovation Wave, while tackling inadequate housing and housing accessibility and eliminating energy poverty in order to ensure a socially just transition to a climate-neutral economy that leaves no one behind; stresses, therefore, that tenants and owner-occupiers should be fully informed and involved in renovation projects and should not see overall costs increase because of them;
3. Calls on the Commission to prioritise the Renovation Wave within the Multiannual Financial Framework and Next Generation EU, placing people in vulnerable situations at the centre of the recovery policies, and to ensure equal access to renovation projects for all; calls on the Member States to prioritise renovation in their recovery and resilience plans in order to contribute to achieving deep renovation of 3 % of the European building stock per year;

Combating homelessness and fighting discrimination

4. Calls for an EU-level goal of ending homelessness by 2030; calls on the Commission to take stronger action to support Member States in reducing and eradicating homelessness as a priority in the context of the action plan on the EPSR; calls on the Commission to propose an EU framework for national homelessness strategies; calls on the Member

States to prioritise the provision of permanent housing to homeless people; stresses the importance of reliable data collection on homelessness;

5. Reiterates its call for an end to the criminalisation of homeless people;
6. Calls on the Member States to ensure that exceptional measures to prevent homelessness and protect homeless people in the context of the COVID-19 crisis are maintained as long as needed and are followed up with adequate and permanent solutions;
7. Calls for a comprehensive and integrated anti-poverty strategy with a designated poverty reduction target, including for child poverty; calls for a European framework for minimum income schemes;
8. Calls on the Member States to ensure equal access to housing for all and safeguard non-discrimination on all grounds stipulated in Article 21 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights; calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure the implementation of the Charter as well as of the Racial Equality Directive; calls on the Council to swiftly adopt the horizontal anti-discrimination directive; calls on the Commission to launch infringement procedures against Member States which do not enforce EU anti-discrimination legislation or which criminalise the homeless;
9. Notes with deep concern that the living conditions of Roma continue to be extremely worrying; calls on the Member States to promote spatial desegregation and engage Roma beneficiaries in housing projects, to prevent forced evictions, and to provide halting sites for non-sedentary Roma; emphasises the urgent need for public investment in this regard;

An integrated approach to social, public and affordable housing at EU level

10. Recalls that EU policies, funding programmes and financing instruments have a great impact on housing markets and citizens' lives; calls on the Commission to develop an integrated strategy for social, public and affordable housing at EU level to ensure the provision of safe, accessible and affordable quality housing for all;
11. Welcomes the inclusion of housing affordability in the European Semester; urges the Commission to ensure that all country-specific recommendations contribute positively to the implementation of the principles of the EPSR; stresses the need to refine the House Price Index indicator and to set the reference threshold for the housing cost overburden rate at no higher than 25 % of the disposable income of a household;
12. Urges the Commission to provide more accurate data on housing markets, including at subnational level, through Eurostat (European Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC));

Ensuring security of tenure and inclusive housing markets

13. Calls on the Member States and regional and local authorities to put in place legal provisions to protect tenants and owner-occupiers from eviction and to ensure security of tenure by favouring long-term rental contracts as the default option, together with

rent transparency and rent control measures;

14. Invites the Member States to pursue housing policies that are based on the principle of neutrality between home ownership, private rented accommodation and rented social housing; calls on the Commission to respect this principle in the European Semester;
15. Notes with concern the increased financialisation of the housing market, in particular in cities, whereby investors treat housing as a tradable asset rather than a human right; calls on the Commission to assess the contribution of EU policies and regulations to financialisation of the housing market and the ability of national and local authorities to ensure the right to housing and, where appropriate, to put forward legislative proposals to counter financialisation of the housing market by mid-2021; calls on the Member States and local authorities to put in place taxation measures to counter speculative investment, and to develop urban and rural planning policies that favour affordable housing, social mix and social cohesion;
16. Points out that the expansive growth of short-term holiday rental is extracting housing from the market and driving up prices, and has a negative impact on liveability; calls on the Commission to set up a regulatory framework for short-term accommodation rental that gives wide discretion to national and local authorities to define proportionate rules for hospitality services; urges the Commission to include in the Digital Services Act a proposal for mandatory information-sharing obligations for platforms in the short-term accommodation rental market, in line with data protection rules;

Investing in social, public, affordable and energy-efficient housing

17. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to close the investment gap for affordable housing as a matter of priority; calls in this regard for a reform of the Stability and Growth Pact allowing for increased fiscal space for sustainable public investments, in particular in affordable housing; calls, furthermore, for a harmonised accounting for amortisation methodology for affordable housing investments;
18. Urges the Commission to adapt the target group definition of social and publicly funded housing in the rules on services of general economic interest, so as to allow national, regional and local authorities to support housing for all groups whose needs for decent and affordable housing cannot be met within market conditions, while also ensuring that funding is not steered away from the most disadvantaged, in order to unblock investment and ensure affordable housing, create socially diverse neighbourhoods and enhance social cohesion;
19. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to further increase investment in the EU in affordable and energy-efficient social housing and in tackling homelessness and housing exclusion, through the European Regional Development Fund, the Just Transition Fund, InvestEU, ESF+, Horizon Europe and Next Generation EU, and to ensure greater synergies between those instruments;
20. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Already before the pandemic it had become clear that there is a clear lack of adequate and affordable housing in Europe. Many Europeans are living in unhealthy, low quality, energy-poor, or overcrowded spaces; or worse, facing eviction or homelessness. There are 80 million people in the EU overburdened by housing costs and some 10% of the EU-28 population spent 40% or more of their income on housing, including a quarter of those paying private sector market rents. The housing cost overburden is significantly higher among the EU population at risk of poverty and low income households. Eurostat shows that 4% of the EU population experienced severe housing deprivation in 2017¹. Housing deprivation is at the heart of poverty and social exclusion and closely linked with unemployment.

The affordability crisis is foremost an urban phenomenon, while rural areas face their own problems regarding housing such as depopulation. The situation differs greatly between different regions in Europe and a great variety of local, regional and national housing solutions exists. In Southern and Eastern Member States social, public and cooperative housing is less prevalent and the security of tenure is a lot less ensured through housing policies and regulations. This needs specific attention.

With sheltering in place being the cornerstone of the fight against Covid-19, it has become even more clear that the fundamental right to live in an affordable, adequate and healthy home with access to services, shops and outdoor space should be guaranteed to everybody. The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) recognises the right to social housing and housing assistance for those in need, the right to adequate shelter and services to the homeless and recognises the need of protection against eviction of vulnerable people. The rights enshrined in the Pillar now need to be turned into reality and the report provides ample proposals for this.

Achieving adequate, energy-efficient and healthy housing

In the EU, 21,7% of the low income population lives in a dwelling with a leaking roof, damp walls, floors or foundation, or rot in window frames or floor. Housing quality problems are more widespread in Central and Eastern European Member States where in some countries around 15 % of low-income households lack even basic sanitary facilities.² It is also estimated that more than 50 million households in the European Union are experiencing energy poverty. Ensuring access to healthy, adequate, energy-efficient and affordable housing is a core element of any antipoverty strategy. Moreover, for every €3 invested in improving housing conditions, €2 would come back in savings in one year.³

This is why the Renovation Wave should serve a triple goal of tackling the climate emergency, improving housing conditions and kick-starting the economy whilst ensuring a just transition that leaves no one behind. Investment in renovation and affordable housing can be an important cornerstone of an economic recovery that puts the Green Deal at its core. It would be a countercyclical intervention with a huge job-creating and energy-saving potential. The Renovation Wave should be strongly supported by the MFF and Next Generation EU and Member States should prioritise renovation in their recovery and resilience plans. This should

¹ Eurostat EU-SILC.

² Eurostat EU-SILC.

³ Eurofound (2016), Inadequate housing in Europe: Costs and consequences, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

contribute to achieving deep renovation of 3% of the European building stock, per year.

Combatting homelessness and fighting discrimination

Homelessness is on the rise in the European Union: 24 Member States report that homelessness has increased over the last decade⁴. Finland is the only MS where homelessness has declined. At least 700,000 people are sleeping rough on any given night in the EU, 70% more than a decade ago⁵.

The COVID19 crisis and the subsequent lockdown has shown that we can shelter and house homeless people and stop evictions when there is the political will. Emergency measures taken by governments to protect homeless people in the context of COVID19 must be maintained as long as needed and be followed up with adequate, permanent solutions.

The European Pillar of Social Rights has given a strong mandate to the European Commission to act and Commissioner Schmit has on several occasions, including in the Plenary of the European Parliament, underlined the importance of taking action against homelessness. The European Union can act as a moral beacon and based on its values declare together with the key stakeholders the goal to eradicate homelessness in the European Union by 2030 and thereby also contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Europe.

Combatting homelessness is not an insurmountable task. Member States need to develop national homelessness strategies that combine preventive and reactive measures and put central emphasis on the provision of permanent housing to homeless people. The criminalization of homeless people and discriminatory practices used to prevent them from accessing social services and shelter that we are witnessing in several Member States are unacceptable. The Commission should not turn a blind eye and challenge these measures.

It is high time to ensure equal treatment for all and non-discrimination in the search for affordable housing. Housing is a basic right for everyone, but not everyone has equal access at this moment. The Black Lives Matter protests following the death of George Floyd have also turned the spotlight on racial discrimination in the EU, with strong evidence regarding its prevalence in the housing field. The Fundamental Rights Agency's report 'Being Black in the EU' pointed out that one in five respondents of African descent (21 %) felt racially discriminated against in access to housing and that one in two respondents live in overcrowded housing (45 %), compared to 17 % of the general population in the EU-28.⁶

At the same time, the conditions of Roma continue to be extremely worrying with many often living in segregated settlements characterised by substandard living conditions. Forced evictions and spatial segregation need to be stopped. In a political climate where LGBTI people's rights are being put under pressure, it is important to stand up for them, also when it comes to housing. According to the Fundamental Rights Agency LGBTI Survey II, of EU respondents, 14% of lesbian women, 8% of bisexual women, 6% of bisexual men, 10% of gay men, 20% of intersex people and 21% of trans people experienced discrimination when trying to rent or buy housing in the last 12 months⁷. We also see that lack of affordable and accessible housing means that many persons with disabilities and older persons are practically

⁴ Baptista, I and Marlier, E (2019) Fighting homelessness and housing exclusion in Europe: A study of national policies, European Commission/European Social Policy Network.

⁵ FEANTSA (2019), Fourth Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe.

⁶ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2018), Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey Being Black in the EU, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

⁷ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2020), EU LGBTI Survey II, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

“prisoners” in their own homes. It also means that they might have to move to institutions and cannot stay in their own homes even if they wanted to.

Social, public and affordable housing: integrated approach and investment

Whilst the EU does not have a direct mandate on housing, EU policies, funding programmes and financing instruments have great impact on housing markets. An EU integrated strategy would look at the impact of European policies in different domains on housing affordability from different angles ensure a framework is created for local, regional and national authorities to define, steer and invest in housing provision. In the European Semester housing affordability should be further integrated, taking into account the fragmentation of national housing markets and the diversity of tenures.

The investment gap in social housing stands at €57 billion per year; public investment in the sector that could boost the supply keeps falling⁸. Governments are often focusing on incentives to private developers while housing support for low income households is increasingly being given in the form of social welfare type payments. Changes to the EU’s state aid rules would enable regions and local authorities to invest more in social housing and provide all groups whose needs for decent and affordable housing cannot be met at market conditions while ensuring that funding is not steered away from the most disadvantaged. This would also contribute to creating socially diverse neighbourhoods and enhance social cohesion.

Member States should also be allowed to invest more in social, public and affordable housing under the EU’s fiscal rules. We need to see this reflected in the reform of the European Stability and Growth Pact. Funding for social, affordable, healthy, adequate and energy-efficient housing and for tackling homelessness and housing exclusion should also be provided through the EU budget.

Ensuring security of tenure and inclusive housing markets

The fact that the recovery from the Covid-Crisis should not be a return to ‘business as usual’ has been widely recognised. We need to ensure that there is no repetition of the wave of evictions we have witnessed after the Global Financial Crisis of the last decade. Therefore better protection of tenants and mortgage borrowers needs to be put in place at national and local level. We now often see that housing policies are favouring home-ownership over renting in an imbalanced way and this should be changed.

We need to avoid a repetition of the pattern where an economic crisis leads to a further financialisation of the housing market. Housing is increasingly seen as a vehicle for wealth accumulation rather than a social good. The Joint Research Centre’s ‘Future of Cities’ report warns that ‘recent scale-up of foreign and corporate investments in residential urban property has transformed patterns of ownership, raising concerns on the social fabric of a city and on who can be held accountable for citizen’s rights to adequate and affordable housing.’⁹

Member states and cities should redefine their relationship with private investors, international financial institutions and financial markets to reclaim housing as a human right. The Commission should assess whether EU regulation on competition, free movement of

⁸ Lieve Fransen, Gino del Bufalo and Edoardo Reviglio (2018), Boosting Investment in Social Infrastructure in Europe. European Economy Discussion Paper 074, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

⁹ Joint Research Centre (2019), The Future of Cities: opportunities, challenges and the way forward, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

capital and provision of services, amongst others, is contributing to the financialisation of the housing market and if needed propose legislative changes to counter it by mid-2021. In addition, transparency on real estate ownership and transactions is vital to prevent distortions in the housing market and to prevent money laundering and tax evasion in this sector.

The expansive growth of short-term holiday rental in cities and popular tourist destinations is extracting housing from the market, driving up prices and has a negative impact on liveability. We want to give cities more control over rentals short term accommodation platforms and ensure that these platforms share information with the cities, respecting data protection rules.

How we organise housing policies and the housing market is one of the areas where a new approach, putting people at the centres and their right to adequate and affordable housing above the market logic, is desperately needed. The rapporteur believes that this report can contribute to putting this new approach in place.

ANNEX: LIST OF ENTITIES OR PERSONS FROM WHOM THE RAPPOREUR HAS RECEIVED INPUT

The following list is drawn up on a purely voluntary basis under the exclusive responsibility of the rapporteur. The rapporteur has received input from the following entities or persons in the preparation of the draft report:

Eurofound
Renovate Europe
European Citizens' Initiative on Affordable Housing For All
Build Europe
Housing Europe
European Housing Forum
FEANTSA
AEDES
International Union of Property Owners
International Union of Tenants
European Economic and Social Committee
L'union Sociale Pour L'Habitat
Municipality of Amsterdam
Architects Council of Europe
Leilani Farha UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing
EUROCITIES
European Disability Forum
ARDI Intergroup
ILGA
Manuel Aalbers (Professor at KU Leuven)
European Commission (DG EMPL, DG GROW and DG ECFIN)
ERGO Network
Equinet Europe
Sjoerdje van Heerden (Researcher JRC European Commission)
Michaela Kauer (Urban Housing Partnership)
Habitat for Humanity
Community Land Trust Brussels
Javier Buron (City of Barcelona)
EU Urban Agenda Housing Partnership
Habitat for Humanity
Community Land Trust Brussels
Javier Buron (Housing Manager Barcelona City Council)