

We need an EU strategy in social and affordable housing, says EESC



The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) calls for more robust EU housing policies and, at a public conference held in Brussels on 4 December 2019, has asked the EU to adopt urgent common measures in this field: housing policies at European level must make affordable houses available for all Europeans.

The European Union needs to speak with one voice and act accordingly in the field of social housing. Given the housing crisis that Europe is currently experiencing, urgent measures are needed. The real danger of excessive housing costs no longer affects the most disadvantaged only, but also an ever-growing part of the rest of the population.

Housing policies at European level must not be restricted to assisting vulnerable individuals and people in need, but must be broadened with the aim of supplying affordable homes for all. In particular, policies should match family needs, promote high-quality and energy-efficient housing, encourage a social mix within buildings and urban areas, and tackle segregation.

At the public conference on Social housing: a service of general interest to guarantee decent, energy-efficient and affordable accommodation for all?, held in Brussels on 4 December 2019, the EESC took stock of the different EU housing policies and called for a joint strategy at European level.

Pierre Jean Coulon, president of the EESC Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society (TEN), underlined that the energy transition could only be successful if the social dimension of housing was reaffirmed. *There is no fight against climate change without the social dimension of housing. Better social housing is the guarantee of success in taking climate action: quality housing means a better life for citizens and this will bring about a successful climate transition*, he stated.

Echoing his words, **Raymond Hencks**, president of the EESC Temporary Study Group on Services of General Interest, pointed to the challenge of definitively including these issues on the political agenda of the new European Commission in order to resolve the housing crisis that has continued to grow since 2008. *The right to housing is an international obligation of the Member States which the EU is bound to respect and is stated in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and in the Lisbon Treaty. It is the responsibility of the Union and the Member States to respect access to services of general economic interest, including the right to housing*, he said.

The event addressed the challenges related to the 19th principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights, according to which “access to social housing or housing assistance of good quality shall be provided for those in

need”.

Social housing is a service of general economic interest, something which also falls within the scope of the provisions of the Treaty regarding the European Union’s shared values and is related to fundamental rights such as human dignity and treatment. It is intended for those households which cannot afford decent accommodation on the traditional property market any longer because, after deducting housing costs, their available income is not enough to meet their other basic needs.

The ability to exercise the right to housing depends on sufficient availability at affordable prices. Today, housing is the main household consumption item, to the detriment of other basic necessities. A household that has to spend more than 33% of its disposable income is considered to be exposed to excessive housing costs and to the high risk of over-indebtedness and/or exclusion.

The EU currently lacks a unified housing strategy. Nevertheless, whilst continuing to comply with the subsidiarity principle, EU housing policies are being increasingly mainstreamed into other European measures.

For further information on the [event](#) and the work and activities carried out by the [TEN](#) section, please consult our website.