



CHAP. 4

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING EXCLUSION IN EUROPE 2024-2029

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All indications point to housing being a key priority in the next European Commission term. While many crucial details are still to be worked out, Ursula von der Leyen's political guidelines for the next term, announced on the day of her re-election¹, highlight several significant developments, including an unprecedented European affordable housing plan, the appointment of a Commissioner responsible for housing, the creation of a European investment platform for affordable and sustainable housing, and a doubling of the funding available for affordable housing through cohesion policy.

Addressing homelessness and housing exclusion is a fundamental aspect of the European Union's social policy framework. It is also a priority enshrined in the European Pillar of Social Rights². Although housing is not an exclusive competence of the EU, policies and legislation in other areas, including the environment, health, anti-discrimination, migration, citizenship, social affairs, employment, and taxation, among others, can be leveraged. Therefore, it is essential for the European Parliament and other institutions, alongside affected individuals and civil society stakeholders, to ensure that the right to housing and the topic of homelessness are considered in all relevant actions and strategies.

Through these recommendations, the Abbé Pierre Foundation and FEANTSA aim to urge Member States and European institutions to fully harness the EU's potential when it comes to combating homelessness and housing exclusion.

1. A EUROPE UNITED AGAINST HOMELESSNESS

European Platform on Combating Homelessness (EPOCH)

As the EU's first political initiative on homelessness, the European Platform on Combating Homelessness (EPOCH) commits institutions, Member States, and stakeholders to join forces to end homelessness – and make substantial progress towards this goal by 2030. Since its launch with the signing of the Lisbon Declaration in 2021, EPOCH has gradually taken shape. While the platform does not yet have the resources required to achieve its goals, its governance framework and working methods are already established. A series of activities have been initiated in three separate areas: learning, data and analysis, funding.

The La Hulpe Declaration, adopted during the Belgian presidency in April 2024, reinforces the core principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, emphasising the platform's significance and underpinning its authority. Much work remains under this new EU mandate to turn EPOCH into a genuine catalyst in combating homelessness. To ensure that no one is left behind, it is crucial for the EU to maintain a specific focus on homelessness through a series of targeted actions that are set out below.

- Pursue and fine-tune the EPOCH initiative under the new mandate.
- Adopt a Council recommendation on eradicating homelessness, as requested by the ministers responsible for homelessness in February 2024.
- Approve a new EPOCH work programme for the 2024-2028 mandate.
- Continue to develop the three focus areas of EPOCH (learning, data and analysis, funding) and initiate new workstreams, notably on mainstreaming homelessness issues into all relevant European policies.
- Building on the work already undertaken by the OECD, develop tools to better assess both developments in homelessness and the public policies to address it within each Member State.
- Guarantee access to shelter for everyone in Europe, making sure that this temporary solution effectively serves its purpose, which is to enable individuals to quickly transition to adequate housing.
- Develop and promote minimum quality standards for homelessness accommodation and support.
- Bolster the scaling up of Housing First and other proven solutions to address homelessness.
- Reallocate a portion of the structural funds that have not been committed by Member States to combat homelessness during the mid-term review of the current Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF).
- Designate a portion of structural funds for tackling homelessness in the future MFF to the tune of at least 3% of the new European Social Fund (ESF+).
- Examine the feasibility and added value of creating a specific European facility to finance housing solutions for homeless people.
- Ensure that EPOCH is included in the mandate of the next European Commissioner responsible for jobs and social rights, particularly during the first hundred days of the new Commission term.

Strengthening Freedom of Movement

Freedom of Movement is a fundamental right within Europe. Yet, 20 years after the adoption of the directive on the free movement and residence of Union citizens and their family members³, Member States are still violating this right for certain categories of EU citizens – particularly vulnerable mobile workers, who often face financial hardship and come from Eastern Europe.

- Clarify the rights of mobile EU citizens without a home, or those at risk of becoming homeless, within the framework of EU free movement legislation (this is essential to prevent arbitrary expulsions and denial of legitimate access to assistance and social security).
- Mandate the European Labour Authority (ELA) to monitor homelessness among mobile workers in the EU, prevent abusive employment practices leading to homelessness, and ensure that all repatriation of homeless EU citizens to their home countries is conducted in a digni-

fied and sustainable manner with full respect for their rights.

- Given the numerous violations, it is essential to bolster monitoring processes to ensure that the rights of EU citizens are respected, regardless of their economic situation, and to initiate infringement procedures when necessary. To ensure the swift and efficient portability of rights, it is also crucial to improve the coordination of national social security systems.

Ensuring the full exercise of citizens' rights within the EU

- Ensure that homeless voters can participate in European elections and the European Citizens' Initiative, even without a permanent address.
- Ensure that the European Banking Authority (EBA) fully enforces the directive on the right to a basic payment account so that homeless individuals can access a bank account regardless of their residence or financial situation.

2. A EUROPE COMMITTED TO ADDRESSING THE HOUSING CRISIS

Some 9% of Europeans are overburdened by housing costs⁴ and the shortage of affordable housing for low-income households is worsening. Buoyed by the outcome of recent elections and the Commission President's announcement of a future affordable housing plan, the European Union now has the chance to take a more proac-

tive role in tackling the issue. Measures will include financially supporting the production of social and affordable housing, through cohesion policy (Cohesion Fund for example). Additionally, the EU should participate in regulating short-term rentals to prevent price hikes and gentrification.

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European affordable housing plan

- Guarantee that this plan specifically addresses the needs of those facing homelessness and supports tried and tested solutions such as Housing First initiatives.
- Take into account the various national definitions of 'affordable housing' and 'social housing' in the development of the plan, and, if necessary, facilitate dialogue among Member States regarding the concept of affordability.
- Guarantee that the plan contributes to the construction of housing accessible to low-income households and those facing social exclusion.
- Prioritise non-speculative, public, cooperative, and social housing within this plan.
- Strengthen the 'inclusive' and 'affordable' sections of the New European Bauhaus Initiative⁵.
- Conduct a social impact assessment before implementing the plan.
- Take a comprehensive approach to tackling the housing crisis by identifying all available levers of action, such as regulating financial and real estate markets, enhancing household affordability, and optimising allocation systems. Propose measures that promote effective public policies while respecting the principle of subsidiarity and the authority of each governing body.

European Union financing

- Ensure that EU funds and financing are utilised to their maximum potential to support efforts aimed at combating housing exclusion.

- Create the European Investment Platform for Affordable and Sustainable Housing, as announced by the Commission President, with a focus on housing that is affordable and accessible for low-income households.
- Introduce strict social conditions and earmark a portion of the funding specifically for housing accessible to the most disadvantaged as part of the planned increase in the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) allocation for investments in affordable housing.
- Ensure that fiscal and budgetary rules allow Member States to invest in social housing within the framework of EU economic governance.
- Exercise caution with revising state aid rules for housing, as it could destabilise the legal framework for investment, undermining the general interest mission of social housing and ultimately facilitate its commercialisation.
- Launch a call for proposals to address housing exclusion under the European Urban Initiative - Innovative Actions (EUI-IA)⁶, a financing instrument for cities that aim to develop innovative solutions.

Short-term rentals

- Assess the impact of the short-term rentals initiative.
- Take any additional measures needed to ensure that local, regional, and national authorities can enforce their regulations.
- Update existing legislation to hold platforms accountable for publishing illegal listings.

3. A EUROPE ACTING IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE MOST VULNERABLE

While housing difficulties affect a significant number of European citizens due to their specific social or economic vulnerabilities, certain groups are particularly badly impacted. Young people, refugees, LGBTQI+ individuals, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, and single-parent families struggle more than the general population when it comes to finding decent and affordable housing. This is particularly the case when such individuals are poor. It is crucial that these groups receive special attention from the institutions and Member States, with effective measures to combat discrimination and with provisions for support and protection where legislation allows.

Combating poverty

- Fulfil the commitment outlined in the President's Political Guidelines for the new Commission to create the first European Anti-Poverty Strategy. This strategy should establish more ambitious targets than merely reducing the number of adults and children at risk of poverty or social exclusion by 10 million and 5 million respectively by 2030. Special emphasis should be placed on addressing the often-overlooked issue of extreme poverty at European level.
- Implement and further develop the Action Plan to deliver on the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan and ensure effective monitoring of ongoing initiatives.

Combating discrimination

- Develop an EU action plan to progressively eliminate marginalized Roma settlements by 2030, in line with the Council's recommendation^{s7} on ensuring equal access to adequate housing for Roma and combating segregation.
- Verify that Member States fully implement the directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence^{s8}, which are major causes of women's homelessness.
- Guarantee that the forthcoming strategy for LGBTQI+ equality, the gender equality strategy, the recommendation on Roma equality and inclusion, and the strategy on the rights of persons with disabilities all contribute to combating homelessness and housing exclusion.
- Ensure that discriminatory laws do not obstruct access to or retention of housing.

Welcoming displaced persons

Access to adequate accommodation and housing for individuals who seek and receive international protection within the EU should be central to asylum policies. However, the Migration and Asylum Pact⁹, definitively adopted on 14 May 2024, fails to address these issues. Many asylum seekers and refugees currently live in extreme deprivation or in undignified conditions. The

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EU and Member States must ensure material reception conditions that are in line with international law.

- Ensure full compliance with EU asylum legislation; provide adequate reception conditions for all asylum seekers.
- Guarantee unconditional access to shelter for all individuals in need of protection within the EU.
- Allocate sufficient resources to the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and the ESF+, to ensure dignified reception; streamline the procedures for accessing these European funds.
- Allow for the financing of multidisciplinary support for displaced persons through the ESF+.

Child protection

- Verify that the European Child Guarantee¹⁰ – both the action plans and the resources allocated from the European Social Fund Plus – truly reaches the target group of children who are homeless or living in housing exclusion.
- Explicitly include measures to protect children from homelessness and housing exclusion in the Commission's recommendations for developing integrated child protection systems¹¹.
- Oblige Member States to ensure that unaccompanied minors are cared for by integrated services so that they are not forced to live on the streets.

Youth support

Young people in Europe, particularly impacted by the series of health and economic crises in recent years, are finding it increasingly difficult to secure housing. The rising cost of housing has made home-ownership increasingly out of reach and affordable rentals are becoming more scarce. Many young people are forced to stay with their parents and are therefore unable to establish an independent life. The policy guidelines for the next European Commission term emphasise that addressing the situation of these young people should be a priority in the future affordable housing plan.

- Promote measures that facilitate youth access to housing alongside the European Youth Strategy¹².
- Encourage Member States to implement a basic income for young people aged 18 to 25.
- Promote and support the development of housing assistance programmes.

Support individuals living in informal camps and slums

Slums, squats, caravans, and makeshift shelters: a significant segment of the European population is forced to live in inadequate and unsafe conditions. These individuals often lack access to running water, electricity, and sanitation, resulting in extremely challenging living conditions and significant health risks. Frequently situated on the outskirts of major cities, camps

and designated areas for 'travellers' are often cut off from public transportation and essential services, complicating access to healthcare for families and education for children.

- Ensure that the implementation of the directive on the quality of water intended for human consumption¹³ includes measures to guarantee

access to water for vulnerable and marginalised groups, including homeless individuals.

- Urge Member States to develop projects ensuring that individuals living in informal camps have access to basic services (e.g. water, sanitation, electricity, and waste collection) as well as education and healthcare.

4. A FAIR AND INCLUSIVE GREEN PACT

Despite the "Renovation Wave" announced by the Commission in 2020¹⁴, the actual renovation rate of the European housing stock remains woefully inadequate. The record-breaking surge in energy prices has also had dramatic social consequences for the worst-off households – a situation that could worsen with the introduction of the second carbon market for heating and fuels (Emissions Trading System 2 – ETS2)¹⁵. In response, institutions and Member States need to implement the measures adopted in the Green Deal and make sufficient funding available for comprehensive renovations and financial supports for households.

- Verify that the renovation of the European Union's housing stock, supported by the EPBD¹⁶ and EED¹⁷ directives, contributes to combating housing exclusion; make substantial and targeted public subsidies available for the renovation

of unfit housing and homes occupied by low-income households; implement social safeguards such as rent regulation and prevention of displacement due to renovations; and introduce measures to include particularly hard-to-reach households and communities.

- Ensure that the Social Climate Fund (SCF) specifically benefits the most vulnerable groups during the transition.
- Ensure that revenues from the Emissions Trading System (ETS) are used to assist low-income households in renovating their homes.
- Prohibit energy disconnections across the EU and guarantee the right to basic energy services and prevent suppliers from imposing prepayment meters on households struggling to pay their energy bills.

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