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**Finding together a solution to the growing housing crisis especially for vulnerable groups and young people**

**At a high-level conference, the EESC, the EU’s home of organised civil society, sounded the alarm: the shortage of decent and affordable housing is a matter of increasing concern, especially for vulnerable groups and young people, and the European Union must pull together the resources to fight it.**

More and more Europeans are worried about not being able to find decent accommodation they can afford. The risk is inadequate housing, financial pressure, housing insecurity and even homelessness. Unaffordable housing can affect people’s health and well-being, give rise to unequal living conditions and opportunities and result in healthcare costs, lower productivity and environmental damage.

The conference held by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) in Brussels on 20 February 2024 sent a clear warning: the housing crisis in Europe is getting worse and this is bringing about a number of side effects.

Currently, housing is a major cause of the gradual erosion of economic, social and territorial cohesion. Access to affordable and decent housing is both a social need and a social right, but is constantly being challenged by the different crises the EU has been facing in the past few years.

The availability, accessibility and sustainability of decent housing are increasingly important concerns for EU citizens, especially for the most vulnerable groups. Many households are confronted with excessive housing costs, with housing being their main consumer expenditure item and an excessive burden, to the detriment of other basic needs.

According to a recent Eurofound study, the housing crisis affects young people in particular, preventing them from moving out of their family home. The age at which at least 50% of people in the EU were living outside their parental home increased from 26 to 28 between 2007 and 2019. Between 2010 and 2019, Spain, Croatia, Italy, Cyprus, Belgium, Greece and Ireland faced the largest increases in people aged 25–34 living with their parents.

**The EESC has been warning about the housing crisis for a long time**

Over the years, the EESC has sought to flag up housing issues across the EU. In 2020, the Committee adopted an opinion on [*Universal access to housing that is decent, sustainable and affordable over the long term*](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/universal-access-housing-decent-sustainable-and-affordable-over-long-term) drafted by **Raymond Hencks** and **András Edelényi** and called for a **European action plan on housing**.

The EESC urged the EU to adopt a strategy including a comprehensive set of measures to help Member States, regions and cities in Europe to sustainably boost the supply of social and affordable housing and effectively combat homelessness.

Though housing policy remains a national competence, the Committee proposed the following to fight the shortage of decent and affordable housing in the EU:

* organising an **annual EU summit on affordable housing** bringing together all stakeholders, based on an annual report on the state of housing in the EU;
* enshrining a **real universal right to housing**, particularly by means of a sector-specific regulation under the ordinary legislative procedure;
* creating a **European fund for investment in affordable, decent and suitable housing**, aimed at creating and maintaining low-cost housing.

The Committee will now put together its recommendations (to be published on the [EESC website](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/agenda/our-events/events/conference-housing-crisis-europe-way-forward) shortly) and take them to the Housing Ministerial Conference being held in Liège on 4‑5 March 2024 under the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU. In this way, the EESC intends to give political impetus to the debate and ensure that the EU housing crisis appears on the 2024-2029 agenda of the new European Parliament and Commission.

**High-level speakers**

The conference was organised by the EESC’s Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society (TEN) and saw the participation of prominent speakers.

‘Today, Europeans are increasingly concerned about the availability, accessibility and sustainability of decent housing and the EESC is fully engaged to address these concerns with many concrete proposals. Civil society organisations are key to promoting an affordable housing policy that involves all stakeholders at local, national and EU level.’

**Oliver Röpke**, EESC President

‘Europe is facing a housing crisis, this is undeniable. The right to access decent and affordable housing is at the heart of the strong Social Europe we want, and it is clearly enshrined in the European Pillar of Social Rights. Making sure everyone can access affordable housing is complex but it is an imperative. It is urgent that we act now, at all levels, putting in place effective policies and investments.’

**Nicolas Schmit**, European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights

‘We need an initiative for an integrated EU strategy for social, public and affordable housing. We need the inclusion of housing within the Decision on the list of economic services of general interest (SIEG) but without the need to mention a group (disadvantaged citizens or socially less advantaged groups) as this may limit the possibility of offering social and affordable housing for everyone.’

**Estrella Durá Ferrandis**, MEP, Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats

‘The right to housing is a fundamental right. Ensuring access to decent and affordable housing is the best way to prevent increases in homelessness and housing exclusion. The affordable housing crisis is a European reality that transcends national borders and affects the economic and social cohesion of the European Union.’

**Christophe Collignon**, Wallonia’s Minister of Housing and Local Authorities

‘Housing is at the heart of the European Economic and Social Committee. We have not ceased to stress that access to good quality and affordable housing is a basic need of European citizens. It is, at the same time, key to achieving a number of economic, environmental and social policy objectives and to promoting equal opportunities, social inclusion and mobility.’

**Baiba Miltoviča**, President of the EESC’s Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society

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*The European Economic and Social Committee represents the various economic and social components of organised civil society. It is an institutional consultative body established by the 1957 Treaty of Rome. Its consultative role enables its members, and hence the organisations they represent, to participate in the EU decision-making process.*

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