



***UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO HOUSING THAT IS DECENT,  
SUSTAINABLE AND AFFORDABLE***

**Mr Luca JAHIER**

**President  
of the  
European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)**

**Speech**  
(English version)

**EESC, room JDE 63  
10 September 2020**

---

*Seul le texte prononcé fait foi*  
*Check Against Delivery*

Ladies and gentlemen,

*Love begins at home* (...) said Mother Teresa and indeed, housing is not only buildings. Housing is everyone's living space and the focal point of everyday life where we relax, where we have fun, where we raise a family. It is peace, love, family, belonging, security. It is priceless.

Housing in the stricter sense, however, exerts a very great financial pressure on the family budget with a high risk of over-indebtedness, a loss of social status or social exclusion.

*Home life ceases to be free and beautiful as soon as it is founded on borrowing and debt* – pointed out the Norwegian playwright and poet, Henrik Ibsen in his famous play, *A Doll's House*.

The growing shortage of decent and affordable housing in a large number of Member States of the European Union is an undeniable factor of increasing inequalities which is of the utmost concern.

Poor housing can also be a source of health problems. In the framework of the "SOS TAUDIS" programme, the Abbé Pierre Foundation is committed to the fight against unworthy habitat. Rebuilding walls is often equivalent of rebuilding lives.

The links between housing and health problems are obvious with regard to people who are homeless, who live in makeshift housing or who stay in the different forms of accommodation offered by public services, as well as all those who live in overcrowded housing very often in the most rudimentary, unhealthy, damp or very degraded sanitary conditions, sometimes without daylight, with all the known consequences on physical or mental health.

We can also add exposure to biological, chemical or physical factors or energy poverty, the latter occurring when a household finds it difficult or impossible to ensure adequate heating at an affordable price.

Many studies have shown that residents of disadvantaged neighborhoods are in poorer health than residents of wealthier neighborhoods.

Moreover, the health, economic and social crisis of COVID-19 has intensified the severity of the affordable housing crisis that Member States have been facing for years, particularly for homeless people, overcrowded households, residents of working class neighbourhoods and seasonal workers and immigrants – victims of housing conditions that have directly affected the COVID-19 infection rate.

Therefore, it seems obvious that our Committee is strongly committed to housing which is not only financially affordable for all citizens, but which is also decent.

In the same way as the “building” plan of the Green Deal is concerned with the energy efficiency of residential buildings, the action plan of the European Pillar of Social Rights should promote financial accessibility and sanitation of housing.

The Green Deal's buildings plan and the European Pillar of Social Rights should thus be used as an opportunity, with due regard for the policies and practices of the Member States, to give concrete and clear form to the EU's housing policies.

For, as the famous architect Le Corbusier stated: *Si le soleil entre dans la maison, il est un peu dans votre Coeur.* - If the sun enters into the house, it also enters into your heart.