Social housing in the European Union

2012/2293(INI) - 11/06/2013 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on social housing in the European Union by 353 votes to 151, with 189 abstentions.

Promoting the social and economic role of social housing: Parliament recalls that access to housing is a fundamental right in the European Union but that this right is under threat dur to a shortage of affordable social housing, as well as because of the continuing economic and social crisis. In fact, on its own, the market is increasingly incapable of meeting the need for affordable homes, in particular in densely populated urban areas. Furthermore, rising housing and energy costs are aggravating the risks of disease, poverty and social exclusion. Parliament therefore calls for measures to address these issues. It expresses particular concern about the direct and indirect impact of some austerity measures in the context of the current social and economic crisis – such as cuts in housing benefit and social services, the taxation of social housing providers, the cancellation of new housing projects and the selling-off of parts of national social housing stocks.

In this context, **Parliament urges compliance with Article 14 of and Protocol No 26 annexed to the TFEU**, under which public authorities are free to determine how the social housing sector is organised and funded. This intervention represents the way for public authorities to respond to the shortcomings of the market in accordance with Articles 16, 30 and 31 of the European Social Charter.

Towards a European Social Housing Policy: Parliament calls on the Commission to:

- **set out a European social housing action framework** for housing policy in such a way as to ensure consistency between the various policy instruments the EU uses to address this issue (State aid, structural funding, energy policy, action to combat poverty and social exclusion, health policy);
- clarify the definition of social housing, bearing in mind that it is conceived and managed in different ways in the Member States.

Parliament stresses the need to monitor social investment as part of a ‘social investment pact’ modelled on the Euro Plus Pact and designed to strengthen the Union’s economic and budgetary governance and on **the need for social investment targets for the Member States to meet** with a view to attaining the social, employment and education objectives laid down under the Europe 2020 strategy.

Parliament also welcomes the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and the Council seeking to impose restrictions on credit agreements relating to residential property and hence **contain excessive household debt**. It calls on the Member States to prevent evicted households from being forced to keep up their mortgage repayments, to ensure that the **dramatic social consequences of evictions** are effectively dealt with and to find a solution to the social hardship caused to those most affected.

Parliament calls on the Council to convene a meeting of the **housing ministers of the Member States at least once a year** to discuss the impact of various EU policies on housing policy and ensure that the economic, social and environmental aspects of the housing sector are mainstreamed more efficiently at EU level.

Parliament calls on the Member States and the Commission to support and promote innovatory exchanges of good practices in upholding the right to housing for particularly vulnerable and marginalised groups. Other measures are proposed including giving greater importance to housing and related services under the Social Protection and Social Inclusion Strategy.

Encouraging investment to boost local employment and the green economy: Parliament considers that investment in social housing should be considered not only as an expenditure but also as a productive investment. It, therefore, encourages the Member States to start a dialogue with the construction industry in order to develop a better business environment for, and better regulation of, social housing. It underlines, in this regard, the considerable leverage effect on investment resulting from the direct impact of the Structural Funds in the social housing sector in the period 2007-2013 and takes the view that **the amounts to be allocated to the Cohesion Funds under the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2014-2020 should not be less than the amounts under the current MFF**.

Parliament welcomes the fact that measures to promote energy efficiency and renewable energy use in social and affordable housing will be eligible under ERDF and Cohesion Funds. It stresses that residential and commercial buildings account for **40% of final energy consumption and total CO2 emissions in Europe**, and that environmentally sustainable building leads to a reduction in building costs and time. In this context, it calls for an adequate budget for the 2014-2020 MFF by mobilising all the necessary tools for this: new integrated development tools (**Community-Led Local Development** and Integrated Territorial Investment), grants from the Horizon 2020 programme and the use of financial instruments and technical assistance programmes offered by the Structural Funds, the EIB, the EBRD, and the European Energy Efficiency Fund (EEEF).

Parliament supports the conclusions of the European Compact for Growth and Jobs regarding its call on the Member States to facilitate and speed up the reallocation of unused monies from the Structural Funds to energy efficiency and renewable energy projects during the 2007-2013 programming period.

The green economy: Parliament calls for the access of young people to new 'green' jobs and 'green industries' to be made easier. It notes that the 'green' sector can provide a plurality of different employment opportunities, in particular in SMEs or at local level drawing on the European Social Fund (ESF).

Combating poverty and promoting inclusion and social cohesion: Parliament expects the Commission to examine **to what extent direct support by housing allowances, or indirect support by social housing itself, is a more effective measure to provide affordable housing for social groups who cannot cover their housing needs**. Noting that many Member States, faced with budgetary imbalances, are suspending operations, programmes and actions designed to facilitate home acquisition, Parliament calls on them to **draw up integrated policies for promoting social inclusion, as well as for guaranteeing universal access to decent, healthy and affordable housing**.

Such policies should aim to:

- support good-quality and healthy social and 'very social' housing;
- establish clear, minimum housing quality standards, particularly for social housing;
- promote linkages between social housing expansion programmes and policies for access to other essential public services and services of general interest;
- address the difficulties commonly encountered by highly vulnerable sections of the population in seeking access to decent housing;
- schemes reinforcing security of tenure;
- prepare specific programmes for the **homeless** based on assessments of the local situation, taking into account the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS) model;
- promote and fund self-building programmes.

Parliament also points out that social housing should be structured to **avoid both gentrification and ghettoisation**.

Combating energy poverty: Parliament expresses concern about the growing incidence of energy poverty which is caused mainly by a combination of low household incomes, poor-quality heating and insulation, and disproportionately high energy costs. It calls on the Commission and the Member States to make sure that the deepening of the internal energy market goes hand in hand with measures to protect vulnerable consumers.

Parliament believes that the **right of access to energy is essential** if people are to lead a life of dignity and calls for measures to be taken to:

- set up specific financial schemes regarding energy costs for the most vulnerable households;
- establish specific regional or national funds to reduce energy poverty;
- support incentives and instructive measures to help residents save energy consumption;
- make use of effective, long-term financial leverage to make residential buildings more energy efficient, by introducing incentive measures at European level;
- provide better information to households by means of targeted information campaigns.