Access to decent and affordable housing for all

2019/2187(INI) - 21/01/2021 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 352 votes to 179, with 152 abstentions, a resolution on access to decent and affordable housing for all.

The EU and its Member States have an obligation to ensure access to decent and affordable housing for all, in accordance with the fundamental rights set out in the European Social Charter and the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Eurofound estimates that inadequate housing costs EU economies EUR 195 billion a year. EU rents and property prices have risen over the past decade. Almost 38% of households at risk of poverty spend more than 40% of their disposable income on housing.

Moreover, homelessness is rising in at least 24 Member States. On any given night in the European Union 700 000 homeless people have to sleep in shelters or on the street, which is an increase of 70 % in the past 10 years. The COVID-19 crisis has aggravated housing insecurity, over-indebtedness, and the risk of eviction and homelessness.

Achieving adequate, energy-efficient and healthy housing

Parliament called for the right to adequate housing to be recognised and enforced as a fundamental human right through relevant European and national legislation. It called on the Commission and Member States to ensure equal access to decent housing for all, including clean and high-quality drinking water, adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene, connection to water and sanitation networks, a quality indoor environment and affordable, reliable and sustainable energy for all.

Members called for EU-wide action for a winter heating disconnection moratorium and a winter truce to be introduced.

The resolution recommended that priority be given to reducing emissions and energy efficiency through housing renovation. It supported the emphasis of the "renovation wave" on tackling energy poverty and the worst performing buildings, in line with the objectives European Green Deal.

Tackling homelessness and discrimination

Members recalled the EU's objective to end homelessness by 2030 and called on the Commission to propose an EU framework for national homeless strategies based on the principle of "Housing First".

Parliament called on the Commission and the Member States to:

- adopt a common framework definition and coherent indicators on homelessness in the EU;

- take measures for young people who reach the age of 18 and are at risk of homelessness;

- end the criminalisation of homeless people and combat discrimination on the grounds of homelessness;

- prepare a gender-sensitive approach to support homeless women, who have often already faced complex traumas and are experiencing new ones, such as domestic violence.

An integrated approach to social, public and affordable housing at EU level

Parliament called on the Commission and the Member States to make housing one of the cornerstones of the Action Plan of the European Pillar of Social Rights and to improve its action to engage all levels of government in the full and systematic implementation of the right to decent housing for all. It welcomed the inclusion of accessibility to affordable housing in the European Semester.

Recalling that 25.1 % of European tenants paying market price rents spend over 40 % of their income on rent, the committee called on Member States and regional and local authorities to put in place legal provisions, including clear rental regulations, to protect the rights of tenants and owner-occupiers.

It requested that the current reference threshold for the housing cost overburden rate, i.e. 40% of a household's disposable income, be re-evaluated.

Members noted with concern the increased financialisation of the housing market, in particular in cities, whereby investors treat housing as a tradable asset rather than a human right. In this regard, they called on the Commission to put forward legislative proposals to counter financialisation of the housing market by mid-2021.

Investing in social, public, affordable and energy-efficient housing

Stressing that the investment gap in affordable housing amounts to EUR 57 billion per year, Parliament called on the Commission and the Member States to further increase investment in the EU in social, public, energy-efficient, adequate and affordable housing, and in tackling homelessness and housing exclusion. It called for investment through the European Regional Development Fund, the Just Transition Fund, InvestEU, ESF+, Horizon Europe and Next Generation EU, and especially through the Recovery and Resilience Facility, Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative (CRII) and the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative Plus (CRII+).