

Housing and regional policy

2006/2108(INI) - 10/05/2007 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Alfonso **ANDRIA**(ALDE, IT) on housing and regional policy by 469 votes in favour, 38 against and 46 abstentions. It stated that the lack of decent housing at affordable prices directly affected the lives of citizens, restricting their options for social integration and mobility in both urban and rural areas. Many European Union cities were experiencing great problems with housing, such as overabundant or insufficient supply, homelessness, soaring costs of purchase and maintenance and buildings in a bad state of repair. Difficulties in gaining access to housing were a cause of social segregation and ghettoisation. In addition, the combination of low incomes, high energy prices and inadequate heating and insulation systems results in energy poverty and energy exclusion.

Parliament considered that the right to adequate and good-quality housing at reasonable prices was an important fundamental right that is recognised in a number of international charters and constitutions of the Member States. It called for the identification, at European level, of a series of quality indicators defining the concept of "adequate housing"./It was important for the EU to adopt a European Declaration on housing based on the charter adopted by Parliament's Urban Housing Intergroup. Parliament also insisted on the need – in the context of the Lisbon Strategy – to strengthen the right to housing benefits, so that worker mobility could become a reality. It emphasised the need for housing policies to be formulated as part of a spatial planning policy that fosters social balance and a social mix.

With regard to the principle of subsidiarity, Parliament felt that housing-related problems, as a national issue, should be dealt with predominantly at local level and municipalities should be supported. The provision of European guidance would contribute to improve the capacities to solve problems. Given the complexity of the issues affecting housing, an integrated approach, rooted in the principles of subsidiarity and proximity, should be adopted, so as to ensure the simultaneous introduction of various factors which would promote access to housing, improve building quality, improve quality of life for all generations and promote the attractiveness of both urban and rural environments. An integrated approach would have a greater chance of success if it were taken by the local and regional authorities, which could provide an overall view, optimal coordination of the policies and measures implemented in the urban area and a long-term vision of the development of the urban area in question. Member States were encouraged to involve cities in the programming and management of structural funding designed to co-finance urban actions that are eligible under the operational programmes, and to delegate implementation to them.

Parliament went on to stress the need for greater coordination of financial flows and policies affecting housing, in particular ensuring that the actions supported by the ERDF, the Jessica and Jeremie financial instruments, the Seventh Framework Programme for Research and the other measures concerning housing and urban redevelopment were complementary, and specifically ensuring that residential buildings in historic city districts were renovated. In the context of the revision of the regulations governing cohesion policy planned for 2009, it hoped that the debate would be reopened on extending access to Community funds for the renovation of social housing to all Member States in order to save energy and protect environment, which is currently provided for only for certain countries, given that housing needs are critical throughout Europe. The Commission and the EIB were asked to implement the Jessica initiative under the same conditions in all countries.

Parliament emphasised how important it was for spatial management authorities to take into account the accessibility of housing, public services and urban transport for disabled and elderly people and to plan exercise and recreation areas for children and young people when framing spatial planning policies.

Lastly, it encouraged the EIB Group and the Commission, under Jeremie and in synergy with the Jessica initiative, to establish a strategy for boosting the building sector, chiefly in the new Member States, which would constitute structural aid for developing housing and involve the mobilisation of local and regional resources geared to urban projects.