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*Working Document*

**Note on the preparation  
of the housing ministers' meeting**

In the majority of European Union Member States a considerable number of persons is excluded from access to decent housing. About 16% of the EU population lives below the poverty threshold, i.e 78 million persons.

More than ever before, an emergency is felt to implement efficient solutions regarding access to housing of the most vulnerable households.

Hence the question of the effectiveness of access to housing is remains crucial. Although national situations are specific, common points emerge between member States and it is fruitful to discuss positive experiences at the European level (I). This dialogue is further more necessary that, even if housing is not a European Union competence, European rules impact the housing sector. This justifies to question in which way the European Union policies impact national access to housing policies (II).

### ***I- Legal aspects of access to Housing : presentation and implementation***

#### ***Problematic : The effectiveness of access to housing***

The right to decent housing is recognized as a fundamental right in international treaties (in particular, article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 16 December 1966). When ratified by State members, the Revised European Social Charter of 3 May 1996 and in particular, article 31, details the implications of the Right that has to be effective.

But the implementation of this right remains under the entire responsibility of each State. Different approaches have been chosen according to the legal traditions and the importance of the difficulties undergone. While some States favored legal solutions (constitutional recognition and in some countries implementation of enforceable housing rights), other Countries preferred to set up specific programmes, or to implement comprehensive policies for the access to housing. Far from being opposed, these two approaches are complementary and it is important to take them both into account.

Some States decided to focus on target groups in order to concentrate the resources to those who need it most, while others preferred a more universalist/generalist approach.

### ***II- Impact of European Union policies on national access to housing policies***

#### ***Problematic : Interactions between European institutions and the Member States***

Housing is not a EU competence and there is no discussion about transferring this competence to the EU.

However, European rules have had a growing impact on the housing sector, for instance :

- through a support from the EU to fix common objectives, to evaluate and to follow policies implemented to fight against social exclusion (social inclusion strategy) ;
- through housing financing means (by the FEDER for the new Member States under certain conditions) ;
- through inevitable consequences on the cost of housing when implementing the EU rules concerning climate change (housing energy efficiency, respecting the new environment standards) ;

- through a necessary adjustment of the traditional State intervention tools concerning housing (State aids, Social Services of General Interest, VAT).

Thus it could be fruitful that the ministers in charge of Housing could meet regularly to exchange information and if necessary to establish a common position on certain subjects. Considering this, the establishment of working groups on access to housing, energy efficiency and the impact of EU policies could lead to prepare the Minister's meetings.

In addition, a shared comprehension of the issues of homelessness and exclusion is fundamental. A European consensus conference on homelessness could generate valuable dialogue and stimulate a constructive dynamic between the different actors within each Member State. In a second step, the outputs of the conference could also lead to concrete European actions under the social protection and social inclusion open method of coordination (OMC).