



Access to Housing

Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> November 2008



**Draft Joint Declaration Urban-housing  
intergroup and European Housing forum**

13.11.08

**Members of the European Housing Forum, together with the Urban-Housing Intergroup, are proposing a declaration for the informal meeting of EU Housing Ministers.**

- Taking stock of the Housing Charter endorsed by the Intergroup and of the 'Housing in Regional Policies' report of Mr. Alfonso Andria MEP, both showing the interlinkages of EU policies and national housing policies and how they are mutually reinforcing to reach the overall EU objectives of economic, territorial and social cohesion;

- Having regard to the increasing difficulties for vulnerable households, key workers, working poors to have access to housing and that there is an emergency to supply affordable housing;

- Having regard to the impacts of the current financial crisis on the cost and on the amount of (mortgage) credit available, the supply of affordable housing is not likely to be sufficient to cover the needs and specific measures will need to be implemented. As this crisis is global, Housing Ministers could benefit of exchanging information and best practice on policy development;

- Having regard to the current level of energy prices, instable and very high and its impacts on the energy bills of households, energy efficiency should today be an EU priority; and,

- Having regard to the scarcity of land to build new housing, the need to ensures sustainable urban development and as well as the need to deal with the constant increase of land price, thus increasing significantly housing costs.

**Consider that to implement effectively the right to housing and to use the full potential represented by the housing sector to reduce energy consumption and ensured economic stability at local level, the Urban/housing intergroup and the European housing Forum ask the Housing Ministers in Europe :**

**1. To commit to organise an annual Ministers meeting to monitor the evolution of housing needs and impacts of EU law and policies and housing in order to take the required decisions and actively take part to the debate.**

**2. To work efficiently, we believe it is necessary that EU member States and institutions can rely on :**

- Homogenous statistics and adequate indicators
- A accurate knowledge of the share of responsibilities and competencies from local to EU level (vertical) and with all concerned actors (horizontal) (public authorities, NGOs, housing providers..., this will allow to implement integrated approach effectively to housing delivery

**3. To support actively, promote, engage and participate to:**

- The European year to fight against social exclusion and poverty In 2010
- A ambitious policy to renovate and built energy efficient housing (to reduce both costs for users and green gaz emissions);
- Social policies to support households and individuals in difficulties (employment, education, Social services...);
- In active economic policies to support the housing sector in the long-term as a major employment creation potential and a key to local economic sustainability;

- in policies to control the price of land but also the construction prices
- Active environmental policies linked to housing (urban planning, territorial cohesion, ecocities)
- specific policies to eradicate homelessness based on common definition which should be delivered by a consensus conference on this issue

In more details :

### **1. Energy policies and housing:**

Today, the residential sector is one of the largest emitters of Green House Gasses and, according to the 2006 Energy Efficiency Action Plan has an energy saving potential of 27% by 2020.

Security of supply and going towards a low carbon economy are key objectives for the European Union.

Housing Minister shall contribute to the EU debate and policies aiming in first instance at reaching the Kyoto targets and then the Copenhagen agreements. To achieve a low-carbon society, urban development patterns will need to be reviewed.. Housing is key to sustainable development and urban planning. Support to exchange between local decision-makers and new tool kits to help actors in their decision-making should be promoted.

Housing Ministers shall consider special measures to address energy poverty, e.g. by improving energy efficiency. But the main challenge is the refurbishment of the existing stock; for that objective, the use of structural funds for effective refurbishment improving energy efficiency has to be implemented; and the development of financial tools to support energy efficiency (green loans) should be promoted at EU level. The upcoming revision of the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive also presents a great opportunity. Awareness raising and proper labelling, availability of affordable energy saving measures and an increase in competent energy inspectors are key.

Finally, the Commission's proposal on reduced VAT rate on green products will need to be carefully assessed as an option to finance green refurbishment.

### **2. Cohesion policies and housing: ensuring equality between territories**

**Future cohesion policy shall be designed to improve quality of life in all places**, thus ensuring social, economic and territorial cohesion by developing global grant schemes (mixing ERDF and ESF). The overarching objective of cohesion policy shall be to support regions into their transition towards low-carbon territories socially cohesive.

Impact analysis with territorial and housing dimensions at EU level to improve coherence of EU policies and develop **methodological guidelines for cities to help them to develop an integrated approach of urban development with a clear housing dimension** and to encourage different authorities to work together.

Improved governance at all levels **involving effectively people directly concerned by the decisions** taken, be they on the management of the Structural funds or for the implementation of local development scheme. As key local partners, social housing organisations should be associated

### **3. Anti-poverty policies and housing: access for people to housing: tackling housing exclusion**

#### **Anti-Poverty Policies and Housing**

People cannot live a life in dignity without guaranteed access to decent and affordable housing. Ensuring access to housing for vulnerable people must be an essential component of public anti-poverty policies. Housing exclusion (also in its most extreme form – homelessness) is a growing problem in many EU member states and should be addressed as

an matter of urgency. The recent economic and financial crisis has further increased the housing strain for vulnerable groups.

The role of public housing policies to effectively address poverty and social exclusion will be an important focus of EU policies in the coming years. Homelessness and housing exclusion have been identified by the EU Member States as issue of key concern for the EU Strategy for Social Protection and Social Inclusion and the newly launched Active Inclusion Strategy. In the framework of the EU Social Protection and Social Inclusion Strategy the Member States will address the issues of homelessness and housing exclusion as a thematic priority in 2009.

During the EU Year against Poverty in 2010 homelessness and housing exclusion will without any doubt get substantial attention following the call of the European Parliament (Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou report). At the last EU Round Table on Poverty and Social Exclusion on the 16 October 2008, the stakeholders involved in the fight against poverty (public authorities, NGOs, and people experiencing poverty) called for a European consensus conference on homelessness to take place in 2010, a request which was endorsed by the European Ministers' Meeting immediately following the Round Table. The European Parliament recently called for more action and ambition in the area of housing to address poverty and social exclusion in several reports such as the Andria report (2007) and the Zimmer report (2008). In April 2008 more than 400 MEPs signed a written declaration to call for an EU wide-commitment to end street homelessness and a stronger role for the European Commission in monitoring member states' progress towards this aim. There is indeed a lot of ambition and actions planned to advance housing policies as major contributors to reducing poverty and social exclusion. It is important that the EU Housing Ministers Meeting stay a breath and contribute to these new initiatives during the next couple of years.

#### **4. Internal market, competition rules and housing**

The compatibility of State aids to housing providers is defined by the Monti/Kroes package. In 2009, Housing Ministries will answer a detailed questionnaire to describe their implementation of this decision. Adequate housing solutions require integrated services in many cases. The integrated approach of the mission to deliver answers to different types of housing needs to be recognised and protected.

. Access to both quality Services of General Economic Interest (SGEI) and Social Services of General Interest (SSGI) are pillars of active inclusion and thus special attention to housing policies should be paid. We are concerned about the current court cases and their potential negative impact on the social role of housing providers considered as SGEI providers

**Given the 4 stakes listed below, we consider a necessity for Housing Ministers to meet annually and be fully active partners in conceiving the EU policies contributing to housing policies goals. We call for the creation of permanent working parties of representatives of Housing Ministries on these 4 issues and we offer our cooperation to their success.**