

**10th Informal Meeting of EU Housing MINISTERS
Graz, 22-23 October 1998**

Final communiqué

**THE IMPACT OF HOUSING CONSTRUCTION RENOVATION
AND MODERNISATION ON EMPLOYMENT**

I

- 1) The 10th Informal Meeting of EU Housing MINISTERS, which convened in Graz from 22-23 October 1998, and included the traditional participation of the European Commission, examined "The Impact of Housing Construction, Renovation and Modernisation on Employment".

- 2) The MINISTERS reiterate that the challenges of housing policy are tackled by the individual Member States. Because no specific responsibilities regarding housing policy are conferred directly on the European Union, the exchange of information, the discussion of individual experiences and concepts, as well as the formulation of common political statements are of particular significance.

- 3) Aside from the introduction of the Euro, the Agenda 2000, and the debate surrounding possible Eastern enlargement, the fight against unemployment plays a central role in the activities of the European Union during 1998, as already illustrated by the "Summit on Employment" in Luxembourg and the European Council meeting in Cardiff. Initiatives on employment will also be a central topic for the European Council in Vienna.

- 4) According to the European Commission, the construction industry - and to a large extent, housing construction - is one of the major providers of employment in the European Union, accounting for the employment of 8.8 million persons, or 7 percent of the total EU work force. All in all, approximately 26 million jobs in the EU depend directly or indirectly on construction.

- 5) The questionnaire, which was circulated in preparation for the meeting in Graz, provided the first collection of representative data for the entire European Union. The results indicate that from a total employment of about 3.5 million in housing construction, approximately 52 percent of the jobs are in new residential construction and 48 percent are in renovation and modernisation. Furthermore, the majority of the approximately 2 million persons who are self-employed in the construction sector are active in renovation and modernisation, which means that approximately 4.7 million of employed persons (self-employed and wage or salary earners) are active in the residential building and construction industry.

II

6) The MINISTERS agree that in addition to its primary function of providing the population with appropriate housing, in addition to its significance regarding economic stabilisation and social policy, and in addition to the growing recognition of its ecological relevance, housing construction also makes an important contribution to the labour market.

7) Furthermore, the MINISTERS agree that the EU-wide trend towards renovation and modernisation, including the improvement of housing environments, offers many potential opportunities. In particular, the high multiplier effect of housing construction on employment is even stronger in the specific case of renovation and modernisation. The MINISTERS point out, however, that the benefits of a steady and adequate level of new housing construction should not be neglected.

8) The MINISTERS also agree that various measures to promote employment in new home-based service jobs, which are under discussion, or which have already been implemented in some Member States, have the potential to provide social benefits, as well as to stimulate employment. These service jobs are in mobile social services, such as in-home health and child care and care of the elderly, various ecological services (energy and waste consultants, etc.), tele-work, home delivery and home caretaker services, etc.

9) The majority of the MINISTERS of the Member States participating in the Monetary Union agree that the introduction of the Euro will tend to have a positive effect on housing, despite the complications and costs which are likely to arise during the transition phase.

III

10) The MINISTERS welcome Austria's readiness to prepare a further evaluation of the housing sector, based on the responses to the questionnaire (which was sent to all Member States in preparation for the informal meeting of European Housing Ministers 98), and to present the results of this study to the Member States and to the European Commission.

11) The MINISTERS believe that at the European level an exchange of experiences of national policy measures and their effectiveness would be particularly desirable, also in future, as a means of assessing the impact of housing construction, renovation and modernisation on employment.

The MINISTERS further reiterate their wish that the European Commission should support the co-operation of the member states and the exchange of information in the field of housing policy, e.g. under the title of "The Fight Against Social Exclusion", to the extent that such co-operation and exchange of information is permitted by the Amsterdam Treaty.

Within this framework the MINISTERS have also heard the representa-

tives of CECODHAS and FEANTSA who expressed their concern about the housing situation of the most disadvantaged members of society.

12)The MINISTERS agree that a regular exchange of information should include both quantitative and qualitative aspects of housing and housing policy. For this reason it is intended on the one hand to continue the publication of "Eu-Housing Statistics" - for example at least on a two-yearly cycle - and on the other hand to produce brief annual national "Housing Policy Progress Reports".

The exact content and form of the two publications, "EU-Housing Statistics" and a collection of the national "Housing Policy Progress Reports" (and also questions of how these publications are to be organised, their cost, use of the Internet, etc.), will be discussed at a meeting of national experts to which the European Commission will also be invited. This meeting will take place in the first half of 1999, preferably in Brussels, possibly as part of the preparation of the next meeting of Housing MINISTERS.

13)The MINISTERS share the opinion that in view of the problems created by the world-wide growth of urbanisation, the significance of housing and urban development is on the rise. The MINISTERS therefore agree that until the Special General Assembly of the United Nations, "Istanbul + 5", convenes in New York in the year 2001, every possible means should be used in the realisation of the HABITAT Agenda.

14)The MINISTERS welcome Sweden's plans to host a European housing exhibition in 2001 in Malmö (B001). The MINISTERS believe that such an exhibition would provide a fine opportunity of presenting modern, cost-efficient and sustainable construction technologies and methods of European states. The MINISTERS therefore request the European Commission to support B001 in Malmö. The MINISTERS justify their request by the expectation that initiatives such as B001 will be suitable to accelerate the implementation of the Construction Products Directive, to intensify competition in the European construction industry, and ultimately to create additional jobs.

15)The MINISTERS welcome Denmark's invitation to an experts' meeting on the subject of "Sustainable Urban Development" to be held in the first half of 1999.

16)At the invitation of Finland, which will assume presidency of the EU during the second half of 1999, the MINISTERS agree that the next informal meeting of housing MINISTERS will take place on September 9 and 10, 1999 in [Kuopio](#).

The main theme of this meeting will be Housing for the Elderly. There will also be discussion of the progress report on sustainable housing and building which was the theme last year in Amsterdam, and on the report of the experts' meeting in Denmark on Sustainable Urban Development mentioned above.