



**February 2020**

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## New Initiative Report of the European Parliament on housing



The EP committee for Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL) decided to present a new initiative report on housing. 7 years after the report of **Karima Delli MEP** (Greens/EFA) on social housing<sup>1</sup> the European Parliament will pick up this important theme again- enlarging the scope of the recommendations from social to decent and affordable housing. The **IUT Brussels office** will contribute to this extremely relevant initiative launched again by the group of Greens/EFA.

## Urban Intergroup of the European Parliament re-established

The **URBAN Intergroup**<sup>2</sup> at the European Parliament will be re-established. It is a cross-parties and cross-committees grouping with a horizontal approach to discuss urban related issues. Their work focuses on a number of subjects linked to sustainable development of urban areas such as:

- environment and energy efficiency,
- urban transport,
- housing,
- social aspects (social exclusion, migration, ageing of the population),
- services of general interest,
- local public finances.

The URBAN Intergroup was set up 2005 to ensure that urban related problems are reflected in European Parliament's decisions.

1

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+REPORT+A7-2013-0155+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

2 <http://urban-intergroup.eu/members/>



**President Jan Olbrycht (Poland)**

Group of the European People's Party (EPP)

**Jan Olbrycht** is a Polish politician and Member of the European Parliament since 2004 for Silesian Voivodeship with the Civic Platform party.



**Vice-president Andreas Schieder (Austria)**

Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament (S&D) **Andreas Schieder** is an Austrian politician and Member of the European Parliament since 2019. He served as parliamentary leader of the Social Democratic Party in the National Council. He was also state secretary in the Ministry of Finance in the government of Chancellor Werner Faymann from 2008 to 2013.



**Vice-President Fabienne Keller (France)**

Renew Europe Group

**Fabienne Keller** is a French politician, Member of the European Parliament since 2019. She previously was the mayor of Strasbourg, France, from March 2001 to March 2008.

## Housing First as urgent action to address the situation of homeless people in Europe

During the plenary session 13th January in Strasbourg the European Parliament debated on “Housing First” as urgent action to address the situation of homeless people in Europe<sup>3</sup>. The debate was introduced by **Nicolas Schmit**, European commissioner for the portfolio jobs and social rights.



**Nicolas Schmit**, European commissioner

“We estimate that around three million homeless people in Europe, and more 400,000 people sleep in our streets every night. This is a day to day problem, is palpable and really call on us to take action. The causes of these problems are multiple and very complex but if you look at the market and how it works with housing, that has a massive impact on homelessness which is an extreme form of exclusion, which specially affects the most vulnerable parts of our population, people that suffer from disabilities and migrants” said the Commissioner.

“The housing crisis is linked to a lack of investment. The high-level task force on investments in social infrastructure in Europe estimated in its 2018 report that investment

<sup>3</sup>[https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/situation-of-homeless-people-in-europe-debate\\_I182850-V\\_v](https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/situation-of-homeless-people-in-europe-debate_I182850-V_v)

deficits in affordable housing amount to almost 57 billion euros in the European Union. Although the Union does not have the competence on housing -which is often a local competence in the Member States- social housing and homelessness play an important role within the EU's social policy agenda", the Commissioner continued.

MEP's reacted: "Today we do not have any single instrument which can improve the homelessness crisis across Europe. We need to roll up our sleeves and get down to this and political debate is part of that, how can we promote education for young families for example to prevent problems before they start, because we need to tackle things at both ends" stressed out **Dennis Radtke** (EPP, Germany)

**Leila Chaibi** (GUE/NGL, France): "How it is possible that on one hand the European social rights and the European Chart of Fundamental rights are references to housing, but on the other, those who invest on social housing are sanctioned by the European Commission, saying that they are distorting competition of the sacred internal market. Commissioner, housing is not a commodity, if you agree with me, you should prove it and scrap the 3% rule of public investments on social housing, because in order to be able to live and to dream you need to know where you will be sleeping".

## EU Cities Forum 2020: Together we shape a sustainable urban future

The 4th Cities Forum, organised in Porto 30-31 January 2020 by the European Commission and the City of Porto, is a place for all stakeholders to capitalise on common achievements and reflect on the future directions of urban development within Cohesion Policy including the future of the Urban Agenda for the EU and its Action Plan for affordable housing. In a workshop "Cities engaging on the right to housing" moderated by **Laura Colini**, **URBACT expert** and **jury member of the European Responsible**

**Housing Awards 2019** stated: "Today, more European cities and social movements are calling governments at all levels to take responsibility for reaffirming housing as a right and not as a commodity. They are also showing the way by trying out concrete actions to implement the right to housing."



From the left: **Laura Colini** (URBACT expert), **Michaela Kauer** (City of Vienna, Co-Coordinator EU UA Affordable Housing Partnership), **Merja Haapakka** (European Commission - DG REGIO).

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In many cities throughout Europe, house prices and rents are increasing whilst living standards continue to stagnate. According to Eurostat, 82 million people in Europe are spending more than 40 % of their income on housing costs. And yet, globally, the real estate sector builds more wealth than any other sector, representing more than 3,5 times the total global GDP, with residential real estate accounting for more than two-thirds.

This workshop explored the role of cities in working to implement this fundamental right. Building on the experience of UIA<sup>4</sup> and URBACT<sup>5</sup> cities, the EU urban agenda partnerships<sup>6</sup>, practitioners and activists, it explored collective, cooperative, social and municipal-led initiatives, as well as strategies preventing speculation on land and housing in European cities- as presented in the EU Action plan for affordable housing.

<sup>4</sup><https://www.uia-initiative.eu/en/uia-cities>

<sup>5</sup><https://urbact.eu/housing>

<sup>6</sup><https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/housing>

## EU action plan for affordable housing now available in 10 languages

The EU Urban Agenda Housing Partnership Action Plan is now available in the following languages<sup>7</sup>:

- Czech
- German
- French
- Latvian
- Dutch
- Polish
- Portuguese
- Slovenian
- Swedish
- English

The **Housing Partnership** was one of the first to be established within the framework of the Urban Agenda for the European Union. As stated in the Pact of Amsterdam, its 'objectives are to have affordable housing of good quality. The focus is on public affordable housing, state aid rules and general housing policy'. IUT together with other stakeholders was part of the partnership and is action leader on good policies, governance and practices for a more just and equalitarian housing market in Europe<sup>8</sup>.

## Housing solutions for Portugal-conference report now available

In november 2019, Portuguese and international policy experts, scholars, activists, practitioners and policymakers, including representatives of the **Tenant's Associations of Barcelona, Berlin, Lisbon and IUT Brussels** came together in Lisbon to discuss European solutions for the housing crisis at the international conference 'Housing for all in Europe – What problems? What

<sup>7</sup><https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/housing/translated-action-plans-partnership-housing-cs-de-fr-lv-nl-pl-pt-sl-sv>

<sup>8</sup>[https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/system/files/ged/final\\_action\\_plan\\_euua\\_housing\\_partnership\\_december\\_2018\\_1.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/system/files/ged/final_action_plan_euua_housing_partnership_december_2018_1.pdf)

solutions?'. The event was organised by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation Portugal, the CICS.NOVA Research Center and the Collective Urbanólogo, in collaboration with the Goethe-Institut Portugal.



The conference came at a time when housing has gained particular prominence in the European landscape. In accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, the European Union has no competence to legislate on housing matters, however, it is undeniable that different measures of various European institutions have an influence on access to housing in the Member States.

The conference report is now available and can be downloaded here:

[https://fes-portugal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Report\\_HousingforallinEurope\\_15.11.2019-2.pdf](https://fes-portugal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Report_HousingforallinEurope_15.11.2019-2.pdf)

## United Nations Report of Special Rapporteur Leilani Farha on adequate housing



**Leilani Farha** United Nations special rapporteur on adequate housing

The report of Leilani Farha contains Guidelines for the Implementation of the Right to Adequate Housing<sup>9</sup> focusing on the key

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[https://undocs.org/A/HRC/43/43?mc\\_cid=9635eddac1&mc\\_eid=5ed05664ef](https://undocs.org/A/HRC/43/43?mc_cid=9635eddac1&mc_eid=5ed05664ef)

requirements of effective rights-based responses to emerging challenges. The current global crisis in housing is unlike any previous crisis. It is linked to growing socioeconomic inequality, large-scale financialization of housing and land and unsustainable housing systems that treat housing as a commodity. In the Special Rapporteur's experience, States are not always aware of how human rights obligations apply in the context of housing and, more importantly, of how those obligations can be translated into concrete actions to address the crisis. The Guidelines provide States with a set of implementation measures in key areas of concern, including homelessness and the unaffordability of housing, migration, evictions, climate change, the upgrading of informal settlements, inequality and the regulation of businesses. All of the implementation measures are informed by the urgent need to reclaim housing as a fundamental human right. **IUT president Marie Linder** contributed to the UN hearing preceding the report with an IUT position paper.<sup>10</sup>



## IUT joins BBC panel debate “The World’s Housing Crisis”

The state of affordable housing in major cities around the world is an issue of increasing concern to politicians -and of course to the growing population of large cities. Germany, Berlin is the first city in German history to impose a rent freeze.

<sup>10</sup>

[https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Housing/IUT\\_position\\_paper.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Housing/IUT_position_paper.pdf)



**Barbara Steenbergen** (IUT head of EU liaison office) at the BBC Studio in Brussels

In London, an inquiry into the disastrous fire in an inner city high rise block has highlighted the quality and safety concerns surrounding affordable accommodation in the capital. Everywhere urban planners are asking: can large cities provide affordable quality accommodation for residents? A panel of experts, including **Barbara Steenbergen** from **IUT** and **Alice Charles** from **World Economic Forum**, discuss the big challenges facing local authorities and city dwellers around the world. Please listen to the 53 minutes podcast here:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/w3csydf3>

## Report of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Dunja Mijatovic on right to affordable housing



The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, **Dunja Mijatović** stresses the

alarming housing situation in many CoE region countries. Member States should guarantee the right to housing to their citizens, including accepting to be bound by Article 31 of the revised European Social Charter, adopting and implementing sustainable national housing strategies, stepping up investment in social and affordable housing in view of eradicating the housing cost overburden and preventing and eradicating homelessness, in particular among children and other disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.<sup>11</sup>

IUT is involved in the Council of Europe<sup>12</sup>, Strasbourg as NGO with consultative status with the right to launch the collective complaint procedure if human rights are violated.

## Financing the green transition: the European Green Deal Investment Plan and Just Transition Mechanism

The European Union is committed to becoming the first climate-neutral bloc in the world by 2050. This requires significant investment from both the EU and the national public sector, as well as the private sector. The **European Green Deal's Investment Plan** - the Sustainable Europe Investment Plan, presented January 14 by Commissions' President Ursula von der Leyen, intends to mobilise public investment and unlock private funds through EU financial instruments, notably InvestEU, which should lead to at least €1 trillion of investments.

While all Member States, regions and sectors will need to contribute to the transition, the scale of the challenge is not the same. Some regions will be particularly affected and will

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<sup>11</sup> [https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/the-right-to-affordable-housing-europe-s-neglected-duty?mc\\_cid=9635eddac1&mc\\_eid=5ed05664ef](https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/the-right-to-affordable-housing-europe-s-neglected-duty?mc_cid=9635eddac1&mc_eid=5ed05664ef)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/about-us/who-we-are>

undergo a profound economic and social transformation. The **Just Transition Mechanism** is set up to provide tailored financial and practical support to help workers and generate the necessary investments in those areas<sup>13</sup>.

The IUT Housing Policy Working Group, chaired by **Dan Nicander** from the **Swedish Union of Tenants**, will meet March 25-26 in Brussels to debate IUT's main demands towards to EU Green Deal.

## EU Commission presents first reflections on building a strong social Europe for just transitions

January 14<sup>th</sup> the Commission presented the communication on the action plan to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights<sup>14</sup>. It describes the multiple challenges Europe is facing: climate action, digitalisation and demographic change and puts forward relevant initiatives. Europe needs an ambitious social policy moving forward. The Commission is launching a broad discussion with all EU countries, regions, and partners on how to deliver progress at EU, national, regional and local level.

The intention of the Commission is to upgrade Europe's social market economy to fit the opportunities and challenges of today and tomorrow and ensure **just transitions** for all.

The key actions in 2020 include:

- Fair minimum wages for workers in the EU
- A European Gender Equality Strategy and binding pay transparency measures
- An updated Youth Guarantee

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<sup>13</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/newsroom/news/2020/01/14-01-2020-financing-the-green-transition-the-european-green-deal-investment-plan-and-just-transition-mechanism](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/newsroom/news/2020/01/14-01-2020-financing-the-green-transition-the-european-green-deal-investment-plan-and-just-transition-mechanism)

<sup>14</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1487>

- Green paper on Ageing
- Strategy for persons with disabilities
- Demography Report
- European Unemployment Re-insurance Scheme.

The Commission invites all partners to present their views until **30 November 2020**<sup>15</sup> on new policy action or legal initiatives needed on different levels (EU, national, regional, local) for concrete commitments as a Member State, region, city or organisation towards implementing the Pillar.

## Panel debate hosted by Brando Benifei MEP on the "European Pillar of Social Rights and ESF+"

In 2017, the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission proclaimed the **European Pillar of Social Rights**<sup>16</sup> at the Social Summit for Fair Jobs and Growth in Gothenburg, Sweden. Article 19 of the Pillar is on housing.



On 28 January 2020, Social Platform and Brando Benifei MEP (S&D, Italy) hosted a conference on the Social Pillar and the European Social Funds Plus (ESF +). The **Social Platform** is the largest network of European rights- and value-based civil society organisations working in the social sector and IUT is a member.

The conference analysed the link between the Social Pillar and the **European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) programme**<sup>17</sup>, which is the European Union's main financial instrument

<sup>15</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/8257efae-81ed-bee9-ccab-e143deae5ea2>

<sup>16</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/social-summit-european-pillar-social-rights-booklet\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/social-summit-european-pillar-social-rights-booklet_en.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS\\_BRI\(2018\)625154](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI(2018)625154)

for improving workers' mobility and employment opportunities and strengthening social cohesion, improving social fairness and increasing competitiveness across Europe for the 2021-2027 period.

The objective of the meeting was to debate how ESF+ can support the implementation of the Social Pillar through legislation and policies, both at EU and national level. The proposed ESF+ could support the concrete implementation of the Social Pillar, if it is given the adequate budget to reach the goals set in the Commission's proposal. This issue is at stake in the current trilogue negotiation on ESF+ between the Council of the EU, the European Parliament, and the European Commission.

The meeting was opened by Social Platform President **Piotr Sadowski** and **Brando Benifei** MEP.

Brando Benifei MEP stressed that in order to deliver the best policies for people across and to create a more social Europe, all stakeholders, including civil society organisations, must work together. Therefore, he highlighted the importance of the regulation containing strong provisions on partnership, including committing 2% of available funds to capacity building of civil society organisations and social partners.



From the left: **Nicolas Schmit** (EC), **Catherine Naughton** (Social Platform Vice-President), **Brando Benifei** (MEP), **Piotr Sadowski** (Social Platform President), **Germana Viglietta** (Permanent representation of Italy), **Anja Freytag** (Permanent representation of Germany), **Alexis Ridde** (Permanent representation of France), **Heather Roy** (Social Platform Treasurer).

European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, **Nicolas Schmit** described in his keynote speech several significant challenges that Europe is facing. He also talked about housing that in his opinion is going to become a big problem in Europe because more and more people have difficulties to find affordable housing.

But, as he pointed out, the biggest challenge we have in Europe is a lack of social convergence. He highlighted the need to have active social policy-making to reduce social gaps. He also underlined the importance of concluding the ESF+ negotiations swiftly. **Heather Roy**, Social Platform Treasurer, presented its contribution<sup>18</sup> to the European Commission consultation on the programme: “The EU level has a role to play in supporting and guiding Member States’ allocation of public resources; existing budgetary rules do not differentiate between investment and current expenditures. This means that to respect the rules laid down in the Stability and Growth Pact, member states cannot differentiate between cuts to social protection and services and cuts to other expenditures such as military spending. This system fails to take into account increasing evidence of the economic and social returns of certain kinds of public expenditure, particularly: early childhood education and care; primary and secondary education; training and active labour market policies; and affordable and social housing.”

## **Affordable and decent housing solutions: European investment for the most deprived**

Rough sleeping and homelessness are increasing. According to estimates, at least 700,000 homeless people are sleeping rough or in emergency/temporary accommodation in the European Union. Furthermore, more than 9% of the poorest members of society

<sup>18</sup>[https://www.socialplatform.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Social-Platform-answer-to-consultation-on-ESF-and-social-inclusion\\_submitted.pdf](https://www.socialplatform.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Social-Platform-answer-to-consultation-on-ESF-and-social-inclusion_submitted.pdf)

faced severe housing deprivation in the EU, with highest share of 36.7% in Romania. To analyse the situation, the European Policy Centre invited January 31<sup>st</sup> to a launch event of its new EPC Task Force on “Affordable and Decent Housing Solutions – making European investment a reality for the most deprived”. The task force is composed by the EPC, the King Baudouin Foundation, Schneider Electric and Feantsa.



From the right: **Michelle Noris** (Housing Finance Agency), **Ruth Owen** (Feantsa), **Claire Dhéret** (EPC), **Christophe Poline** (Schneider Electric), **Georgia Efremova** (DG Economic and Financial Affairs, EC), **Katarina Ivanković-Knežević** (Director for Social Affairs, DG Employment, EC).

**Claire Dhéret**, European Policy Centre, stressed that there are new finances in the social and in particular in the housing sector, e.g. the future financing for the New Green Deal.

The work of the task force has the objectives:

- Mapping the EU territory;
- Identify good practices in the housing sector;
- Implementation of the InvestEU funds and close operation with stakeholders

The keynote speaker, **Katarina Ivanković-Knežević**, Director for Social Affairs, DG Employment of the European Commission, said that housing is priority for the Commission especially because the real estate prices and homelessness are increasing across Europe and housing is less affordable. She presented the different funds accessible in Europe to fight the lack of affordable housing in Europe, as the ESF and ERDF. But she stressed the larger responsibility of the Member states to fight homelessness and housing unaffordability.



## Rejected referendum in Switzerland for more affordable housing

The people's initiative for more affordable housing<sup>19</sup>, initiated by the **Swiss Tenants' Union**, sought to introduce a minimum of 10% not-for-profit and cooperative housing in Switzerland, compared to the 5% at present.

Unfortunately, the majority of Swiss voters has rejected the people's initiative. The final results show 42.9% Yes votes against 57.1% No votes.

Five cantons (Waadt, Geneva, Basel-City, Neuenburg and Jura) out of the 26 voted in favour of the initiative, as well as many cities with consent rates of more the 60%.

In view of the massively financed counter-campaign of the real estate lobby, the result is nevertheless impressive. As those opponents of the referendum claimed for local solutions to solve the housing crisis, the **Swiss Union of Tenants** is asking them to fulfill their promises- at least in those cantons and towns, where the majority is reached. As one result of the referendum, the national housing funds for not-for-profit housing ("fonds de roulement") is increased by 250 million Francs. According to **Carlo Sommaruga**, president of the **Swiss Tenant's Union**, this is not enough. He claims also to decrease rents when defining the next reference rate cut.

## Munich Tenant's Association masters first step in 6 years' rent freeze referendum

Berlin first, Bavaria second: The **Munich Tenant's Association**, together with many other progressive allies, started a referendum to freeze the rents for 6 years.

<sup>19</sup> <https://logements-abordables.ch/>

The initiative managed to collect the signatures for the first hurdle in a minimum of time. Main claims:

- No rent increases in running contracts for 6 years
- Exception for rents in new construction
- Maximum of the local comparative rent in re-lettings and after modernization
- Leeway for fair landlords: rent increases up to 80% of the local comparative rent possible



Munich Tenant's Association (with director of DMB-Bavaria **Monika Schmid-Balzert** at the left) collecting 52.000 votes for the referendum for a 6 year's rent freeze

## The European Responsible Housing Initiative gets a revamped online presence



Responsible Housing

The European Responsible Housing Initiative (ERHIN), a project implemented by DELPHIS, Housing Europe and the International Union of Tenants, with a view to lead the way towards better embedding CSR in the social

housing sector. Since its start in 2013, the consortium kept the initiative alive organising the 2014, 2016 and the 2019 editions of the **European Responsible Housing Awards**. The work for the next steps has already started by **Ilaria D’Auria** from **IUT** and **Michalis Goudis** from **Housing Europe** and getting new online looks was just the beginning. Visit [www.responsiblehousing.eu](http://www.responsiblehousing.eu) and stay tuned!

@ IUT Brussels

Barbara Steenbergen

Head of the IUT EU Liaison Office

[barbara.steenbergen@iut.nu](mailto:barbara.steenbergen@iut.nu)

## European Housing Action Day announced for March 28, 2020

With the slogan “Housing for people, not for profit”, the European Action Coalition announces demonstrations all over Europe.<sup>20</sup>

The slogan was adopted because it delivers a universal message everybody can identify with, even if different European housing markets create largely diverse circumstances.



Joining organizations from German cities are partners from Bucharest, Belgrade, Barcelona, Bruxelles, Budapest, Cluj, San Sebastián, Glasgow, Lisbon, Madrid, Porto, Prag, Zagreb, Athens and Nicosia. In France alone, where the semi-annual winter eviction ban ends in March, 22 cities so far intend to participate.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.housing-action-day.net/index.php/en/>

<sup>21</sup> [https://umap.openstreetmap.fr/de/map/european-housing-action-day-28032020\\_401185#4/47.34/20.21](https://umap.openstreetmap.fr/de/map/european-housing-action-day-28032020_401185#4/47.34/20.21)