
Recommendation relating to the right to decent housing for all

Adopted by the Conference of INGOs on 10 April 2019

CONF/PLE(2019)REC1

Context:

On the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty on 17 October 2018, the Conference of INGOs held a seminar on Article 31 of the European Social Charter, which provides that everyone has the “right to housing” and sets out the measures to be taken by states to ensure the effective exercise of the right. Yet although it is fundamental, this right is very far from being guaranteed in many Council of Europe member states.

There is a whole “population” of millions of people who live on the street, in emergency accommodation or overcrowded, substandard dwellings or end up being evicted because they are too poor to pay rent.

Children are becoming the largest group living in emergency shelters or even on the street. Young Europeans are increasingly being excluded from the housing market. Women, single mothers, workers on low incomes, Roma, migrants and ex-prisoners are particularly vulnerable. Housing costs are rising sharply, in particular in capital cities with high levels of employment. However, if housing takes up 75% of a low income, what is there left to live on? In some countries, up to 30% of the population are affected by substandard housing. Various towns and countries in Europe have made living on the street an offence. Administrative or criminal-law measures are taken to make the homeless less visible in public places where they are deemed undesirable. That targets individuals who are already very vulnerable.

That is why the right to housing is an urgent concern of INGOs and their members that has to be raised with the various players: national policymakers, international bodies, social workers and housing organisations, etc. The struggle for access to housing must necessarily involve those concerned. Failure to respect the right to housing has serious consequences for the relevant individuals, their health and their access to employment, schooling, protection, privacy and independence; in short, their right to a decent life. Article 31 is therefore a cornerstone, compliance with which is vital to guaranteeing the other fundamental rights set out in the European Social Charter

The seminar provided an opportunity to present and analyse practical situations, share experiences and compare approaches and positions with a view to proposing avenues for action to all the relevant stakeholders. The recommendation below is based on the exchanges held and proposals made at the seminar.

Recommendation:

The Conference of INGOs:

Drawing on the commitments made in the joint declaration of the Chair of the Committee of Ministers and the Presidents of the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe on the occasion of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, “Acting together to eradicate extreme poverty in Europe”, Strasbourg, 17 October 2012,¹

Referring to the commitment and grassroots work by many INGO members of the Conference to promote the implementation of social rights as enshrined in the European Social Charter and other relevant Council of Europe instruments,

Actively supporting the Turin Process for the European Social Charter and the promotion of social rights through its co-ordinating committee set up specifically for that purpose,

Referring to the relevant recommendations and reference texts adopted by the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe in the area of social rights and combating poverty,²

Drawing on the work and proposals of the seminar held by the Conference of INGOs on “*The Right to Decent Housing for All*” on the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty on 17 October 2018,

The Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe:

Recommends that Council of Europe member states take all necessary measures to ensure the effective implementation of the right to decent housing for all,

Calls on the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and bodies set up by the European Social Charter to continue and step up their efforts to ensure the right to housing for all and to assess progress in this area on a regular basis,

Draws the attention of all relevant stakeholders to the following principles and measures in particular:

Principles and policies

1. Individuals and their rights must be central to the measures for implementing the right to housing; the relevant individuals must be regarded as responsible partners and fully-fledged players;
2. The right to housing must be recognised as vital for effectively accessing other human rights;

¹ Joint declaration, “Acting together to eradicate extreme poverty in Europe”:

<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168059e710>

² See the compendium of texts published in 2014 by the Conference of INGOs concerning the eradication of poverty (texts adopted by the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities) – Commitments of States within the framework of the Council of Europe, <https://rm.coe.int/16806f54fa>

3. Housing policy must be comprehensive and not consist of piecemeal measures; all measures must be conducted on an ongoing basis and require a comprehensive and concerted commitment by all players at the various levels of responsibility;
4. The poor must be involved in the drafting and implementation of the policies; the policies must provide for the establishment of active participation bodies in the organisations responsible for social housing, with the involvement of people living in poverty;
5. Implementation of measures concerning the right to housing must not just be theoretical, but practical and effective; the legislation enacted must be followed by implementing decrees and backed up by practical measures to ensure the effective implementation of the right;
6. The defence of the rights of the homeless and poorly housed must be based on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the measures taken must be regularly assessed in connection with the 2030 Agenda.

Specific measures

1. make up for the lack of relevant indicators and data for ensuring the effective implementation of the right to housing;
2. increase the number of social housing units; increase funding for public-sector housing developers and introduce social housing quotas geared to assessed needs; promote the co-operative building and housing model to avoid speculation;
3. develop housing alternatives suited to needs, income levels and the various types of lifestyles;
4. curb rent speculation and inflation; tax empty housing units, monitor rent systematically and increase the rental housing stock through measures to boost its attractiveness and consistency in taxation;
5. upgrade substandard housing, which has a very harmful effect on health, and promote an inclusive health system;
6. remove the obstacles to access to decent housing for the most vulnerable groups; ensure that no one is excluded from the processes for social housing assessment and applications by assessing each individual case and providing a response;
7. put an end to evictions without decent, long-term housing alternatives and ensure access to basic services;
8. identify and share good practices developed in the member states by various players and partners for putting the right to housing into practice.