

ENSURING THE RIGHT TO HOUSING: WHAT CAN LOCAL AND REGIONAL POLITICIANS DO?



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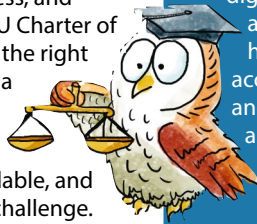
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HOUSING: EVERYONE'S RIGHT TO BUILD A LIFE

Housing is more than just four walls and a roof: it is a human right and the cornerstone of human dignity, well-being, and social cohesion. Article 31 of the Revised European Social Charter requires Parties to promote access to housing of an adequate standard, prevent and reduce homelessness, and make housing affordable. The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights recognises the right to housing assistance, ensuring a dignified existence for all.

Yet, in many towns, cities and regions, access to decent, affordable, and sustainable housing remains a challenge.

Local and regional authorities play a crucial role in promoting and protecting the right to housing, by implementing innovative solutions that foster inclusive and resilient communities.



A home is not a sheer commodity to be traded: it is where people build their lives, the basis of stability and security for individuals and families and the centre of their social, emotional and economic lives, where it should be possible to live in peace, security and dignity, and feel safe. Without adequate and affordable housing, individuals struggle to access education, employment, and healthcare. Homelessness and housing insecurity lead to social exclusion and economic instability, making it imperative for local and regional authorities to address these pressing issues with innovative policies and strategies.

CHALLENGES TO OVERCOME

Despite the recognition of housing as a human right, many communities still face significant obstacles, including:

- ▶ **Housing affordability:** rising rental and purchasing costs and interest rates, inflation and stagnant wages make housing increasingly inaccessible for low- and middle-income households.
- ▶ **Discrimination:** people in vulnerable situations, including migrants, low-income families, older persons and youth face difficulties in securing stable housing, with increased risk of homelessness.
- ▶ **Gentrification:** Rent gaps and the use of capital for upgrading of declining neighbourhoods often leads to displacement and exclusion, widening social inequalities.
- ▶ **Climate change & sustainability:** Energy-inefficient housing contributes to environmental challenges and energy poverty.

Some facts

- In 2022, 8.7% of European households spent 40% or more of their disposable income on housing*.
- In 2021, approximately 700,000 people in the European Union were either sleeping rough or living in temporary accommodation for the homeless**.
- In Europe, about 60% of people aged 25-34 live with their parents.

* EU statistics on income and living conditions.

** Fondation Abbé Pierre and Feantsa (2021), Sixth Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe, Brussels, Paris

WHAT CAN WE DO AS LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES?

Local and regional authorities across Europe must continue championing the right to housing by:

- ▶ **Exploring the local potential for social innovation initiatives** in social and community housing, by mapping existing practices and initiating a dialogue with local stakeholders, and embracing an open attitude to address their needs;
- ▶ **Looking at the specific challenges for people in vulnerable situations**, to promote greater agency and participation, foster social inclusion and intercultural mixing, and combat gentrification and displacement;
- ▶ **Increasing their strategic role in public-private partnerships** to develop affordable and sustainable housing solutions;
- ▶ **Implementing *ad hoc* measures to regulate the local housing market** to curb the speculative use of housing stock;
- ▶ **Supporting initiatives** aimed at repurposing existing stock, to combat homelessness effectively.

INNOVATIVE APPROACHES: GETTING INSPIRED

By embracing innovative approaches to social housing, local and regional governments can turn the right to housing into a reality for all. Some inspiring initiatives include:

- ▶ **Vienna's social housing model (Austria)**: with over 60% of its residents living in municipally supported housing, Vienna sets a global benchmark for affordability and quality through mixed-income housing policies.
- ▶ **Barcelona's anti-eviction strategies (Spain)**: the city has introduced rental subsidies and legal assistance programmes to prevent evictions and homelessness.
- ▶ **"Eco-neighbourhoods" in Freiburg (Germany)**: sustainable housing developments emphasise energy efficiency, affordability, and community well-being.

Do you want to know more? Stay tuned for the forthcoming publication of the new Congress report on Social housing innovations.

"A safe and stable home is the foundation of a just society: let's work together to ensure that no one is left without one."



Gudrun Mosler-Törnström, Austria (L, SOC/G/PD), Standing Rapporteur on Human Rights, Mélanie Lepoultier, France (L, ILDG) and Peter Drenth, Netherlands (R, EPP/CCE), Deputy Standing Rapporteurs on Human Rights

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities has a long-standing commitment to human rights promotion and protection, by supporting local and regional elected officials to shape environments where citizens can enjoy their human rights every day. Rooting human rights at the local level further reinforces good governance, creates stronger relationships with the community, and helps building trust in political and public institutions.

In 2023, the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe in Reykjavík marked a pivotal moment where member states explicitly recognised the Congress unique role in human rights promotion and protection at local level, and called on national authorities for a better sharing of responsibilities in defending human rights in the territories.

Since then, the Congress adopted a new Human Rights Strategy to:

- promote a culture of human rights at local and regional levels,
- mainstream and address human rights in all Congress work,
- facilitate stronger political dialogue and cooperation between local, regional, national and international authorities.

www.coe.int//en/web/congress/human-rights

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The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all the members of the European Union. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities is an institution of the Council of Europe, responsible for strengthening local and regional democracy in its 46 member states. Composed of two chambers – the Chamber of Local Authorities and the Chamber of Regions – and three committees, it brings together 612 elected officials representing more than 130 000 local and regional authorities.

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