
TENTH OVERVIEW OF HOUSING EXCLUSION IN EUROPE

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Fondation pour le Logement - FEANTSA

EUROPE ENTERS A NEW POLITICAL CHAPTER IN THE FIGHT AGAINST HOMELESSNESS

The appointment of a new College of Commissioners, under the presidency of Ursula von der Leyen for the 2024–2029 term, marks the start of a new political chapter for the European Union. This mandate offers an opportunity to take stock of European efforts to combat homelessness and to consider future courses of action, in a context marked by fragile gains and persistent uncertainty.

The Lisbon Declaration and the launch of the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness (EPOCH) in 2021 marked a historic milestone – for the first time, the European Commission initiated a dedicated approach to this issue, accompanied by a collective pledge from all 27 Member States to end homelessness by 2030. EPOCH has been structured around three pillars: the development of comparable and reliable data, mutual learning among Member States, and improved access to funding.

With regard to data collection on homelessness, two recently published statistical surveys shed new light on the scale of the phenomenon across the European Union:

- The 2023 EU-SILC survey included a one-off set of questions on homelessness, providing a new EU-wide estimate: **4.9% of Europeans have experienced homelessness at some point in their lives, rising to 8.5% among those at risk of poverty or social exclusion.**
- In addition, the **population and housing census carried out in each Member State in 2021 identified a total of 1,185,585 people in the EU as 'homeless or living in non-conventional forms of housing'**, providing useful insights into the distribution and characteristics of these communities. These figures, however, should be interpreted with caution given methodological differences between countries.

Despite these advances, the figures remain uneven and difficult to compare across countries, underlining the need for more consistent data collection methods and clearer definitions, in order to produce reliable and comparable data across Europe.

In the absence of fully standardised European data, the most reliable, if imperfect way to document the scale of homelessness in Europe remains through analysis of national statistics. These statistics paint a deeply alarming picture, showing homelessness on the rise in most countries and even escalating sharply in some Member States:

- In **Finland**, the country recorded its first increase in homelessness in more than a decade in 2024, with 3,806 people counted on 15 November – an 11% rise compared with 2023. This development, directly linked to cuts in housing support, is putting a system long held up as a model for its 'Housing First' strategy to the test.
- In **Denmark**, 5,989 people were recorded as homeless in 2024, representing an increase of 3% since 2022 and 20% compared with 2009.
- **Ireland** has seen the most dramatic increase of all, with the number of adults accommodated in emergency shelters rising from 2,385 in June 2014 to 9,347 in December 2023 – a surge of 292%. This is the sharpest rise within the European Union among countries with comparable data.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING: A SOLUTION TO HOUSING EXCLUSION?

European housing policy is shifting, marked by the creation of a Commissioner for Housing and Energy and plans for a European Affordable Housing Plan in 2026. But the language of 'affordable housing', vague and inconsistently applied, covers many different realities and risks fuelling misunderstanding.

In several countries, the emergence of this concept has coincided with a gradual shift in housing policy towards **market-driven approaches, reducing the supply available to the most disadvantaged households**. The experiences of France, Italy, the United Kingdom, and Sweden, despite their different institutional settings, reveal common patterns – public withdrawal offset by the attraction of private capital, the progressive transformation of social housing into an investment product, and a reorientation towards middle-income households at the expense of the poorest. In this context, building more 'affordable housing' without questioning the mechanisms, the rent levels, or the actors involved is not enough and may even exacerbate the existing housing crisis.

From a public policy perspective, this approach calls for coordinated action combining regulation of the private rental market, financial support for households, and more social housing, the supply of which remains far too limited in most European countries (averaging just 8% of the housing stock in the EU, down three percentage points since 2010).

AFFORDABLE HOUSING NEEDS TESTED BY REALITY

It is essential that European political action be guided by real needs, particularly those of people experiencing housing exclusion.

The rise in housing costs across Europe is now well documented: between early 2010 and the end of 2023, average rents in the EU increased by nearly 25%, while the average cost of buying a home jumped by 50% between mid-2010 and mid-2023. The housing crisis is also widely perceived by Europeans as a social emergency. The results of the latest Eurobarometer survey (January–February 2025) confirm the scale of this concern with some 61% of respondents across the EU saying they feared no longer being able to pay their rent or mortgage, and more than a quarter of them (27%) described this concern as 'serious'.

- **Low-income households are disproportionately affected by the housing crisis.** In 2024, households living below the poverty threshold devoted on average 36.9% of their disposable income to housing, compared with 19.2% for European households as a whole. On average, a household below the poverty line in the EU spent €459 per month on housing in 2024 – an increase of 25.3% over ten years and 17% in just three years (2021–2024). Inter-quintile analysis shows that the poorest 20% are especially exposed: **29.9% of households in the lowest income quintile face a housing cost overburden, compared with 8.1% in the second quintile.**
- **Single-person households face the highest housing cost overburden (22.8%), followed by single parents with one dependent child (16.6%),** while couples with two children show a much lower rate (5.4%).
- **Private tenants are the most exposed group,** with 20.3% facing a housing cost overburden compared with some 5% of homeowners. And the gap between the two groups also appears to be widening. Between 2010 and 2019, the share of income spent on housing by homeowners fell from 18% to 16%, while for tenants it rose from 28% to 31%.

- **Age has a relatively limited influence**, which calls into question the dominant narratives about the difficulties faced by 'young people' and the idea of a 'generation rent'. It is true that 25–29 year olds show a slightly higher-than-average rate (10.6%), but the differences between age groups remain modest compared with the disparities linked to income or housing tenure. Inequalities within generations carry more weight than those between generations.

A simulation carried out in 18 European cities has also highlighted the difficulties low-income households face in accessing housing. It draws on an analysis of the incomes of six representative household types from the poorer half of the population – such as an elderly person living alone on a minimum pension, a single person on income support, or a single parent earning the minimum wage – compared with median rents in the private rental market. The results are unequivocal: in almost all of the cities studied, private rental housing is largely out of reach for most of these households. Overall, the poorest households are left with access only to social housing – where it exists and is available. Otherwise, they are forced to move further away from urban centres or to accept substandard housing conditions.

As housing has become the largest fixed expense for European households, its constant rise is forcing low-income families to make increasingly painful trade-offs. Spending a disproportionate share of their income on housing undermines their financial stability and sharply reduces the resources available for other essential needs such as food, healthcare, education, and transport. **In 2024, 29% of households in the European Union reported having difficulty 'making ends meet', compared with 22% in 2023 – an increase of 31.8%.**

Estimating housing needs is crucial to establishing realistic housing production targets in both national and European contexts. A simple 'supply shock' will not be enough to resolve the shortage of affordable homes. Production must be grounded in a clear understanding of real needs, including a focus on urgently addressing housing exclusion, which is itself a direct consequence of high housing costs. To ensure that housing needs assessments do not overlook these realities, it is vital to include certain key categories, beyond a simple analysis of housing cost overburden:

- **more than 1.1 million people are homeless across the EU (2023);**
- **nearly 18 million people are facing severe housing deprivation (2023);**
- **75 million people are living in overcrowded conditions (2024);**
- **69 million people are living in substandard housing (2023); and**
- **around 64 million households are reporting a housing cost overburden.**

These categories cannot simply be added together, as some households fall into multiple categories. Still, they serve as key reference points for assessing housing needs realistically and comprehensively, helping to guide production and renovation targets beyond demographic shifts and the current housing situation.

Despite the difficulty of the task, **the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)** recently published an estimate of affordable housing needs at both global and European levels. Based on an analysis of several factors, including the number of homeless people and households facing severe housing cost overburden, the organisation **estimates that nearly 11 million affordable homes would need to be built in Europe by 2030 to address housing exclusion.**

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE EUROPEAN AFFORDABLE HOUSING PLAN

FEANTSA and the Fondation pour le Logement make the following recommendations to the European Commission for the forthcoming Affordable Housing Plan:

1. **Respect subsidiarity:** housing policy should remain the responsibility of national, regional, and local authorities.
2. **Prioritise real needs:** the plan should focus on housing needs as distinct from housing demand.
3. **Step up efforts to fight homelessness:** the Affordable Housing Plan should set out a roadmap for the large-scale roll-out of the Housing First model, along with other housing-led solutions. The EU should support these approaches through funding, technical assistance, mutual learning, knowledge exchange, and capacity-building.
4. **Protect and expand social housing:** the plan should safeguard and promote social housing. It offers a unique opportunity to revive social housing in Europe, in order to meet the needs of low- and middle-income households as well as those of disadvantaged groups with particularly urgent socio-economic needs.
5. **Ensure sufficient European funding:** the EU budget must complement, not replace, national, regional, and local housing investment.
6. **Set minimum standards for tenants:** within the framework of European consumer law, the Commission should establish common minimum standards to protect tenants with rental contracts, as is already the case for mortgage loans.
7. **Use economic governance to unlock investment:** the EU should adapt its fiscal framework to make more room for public spending on social housing.
8. **Guarantee a socially just transition:** public subsidies and renovation programmes should give priority to households affected by energy poverty and those living in inadequate housing.
9. **Support the non-profit sector:** the Commission should back the non-profit sector and work with it to combat homelessness and housing exclusion, particularly in the current climate of hostility towards NGO participation in shaping European policy.
10. **Go beyond housing supply:** expanding the housing stock alone will not solve Europe's housing crisis. The Plan should also provide analysis and guidance on the full range of policy measures needed, including eviction prevention, regulation of the private rental market, fiscal and monetary policies, and income support.