

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 2024

9th OVERVIEW OF HOUSING EXCLUSION IN EUROPE



FEANTSA - FAP



AN ISSUE HIGH ON THE POLITICAL AGENDA

Europe seems to have woken up to the seriousness of the housing crisis. While many crucial points are still to be worked out, the political guidelines published by the newly re-elected President of the European Commission highlight several significant developments: an unprecedented European affordable housing plan; a Commissioner responsible for housing; a European investment platform for affordable and sustainable housing; and a doubling of funding for affordable housing through cohesion policy.

In recent years, the issue of homelessness seems to be gradually gaining political legitimacy at EU level. This is reflected in the La Hulpe Declaration, ratified in April 2024 by the Parliament, the Commission and the majority of Member States. The text underscores the **importance of maintaining the issue as a top political priority and supporting national programmes that tackle it directly**. It also confirms the central role of the **European Platform on Combating Homelessness (EPOCH)**: a robust political mandate gives reason to hope that it will be able to encourage other stakeholders to invest more, by highlighting the effective measures being implemented at local level.

TOWARDS A MORE SYSTEMATIC APPROACH

While the exact size of Europe's homeless population cannot yet be determined with precision, existing national statistics can be used to give an estimate: **Europe counts approximately 1,287,000 people living rough, people in night shelters and people in temporary accommodation for the homeless**. This figure, which is up on last year, probably reflects both objective trends in homelessness and improvements in the accuracy and coverage of the counts carried out in some countries.

There has been much laudable progress regarding the quantitative evaluation of homelessness in Europe. Some national and regional surveys were systematised and refined in 2023 and 2024. These improvements are evidence not only of a growing desire to understand the problem more comprehensively, but also of the methodological harmonisation that is ongoing at EU level – all these studies explicitly refer to the categories from FEANTSA's **ETHOS Light** typology.

- In **Germany**, for the second year running, the Federal Statistics Office has carried out a particularly in-depth survey on people staying in accommodation centres: a total of **372,060** people were counted at the beginning of 2023.
- In **Austria**, on the basis of a study aimed at improving the collection system, the administrative data used to calculate homelessness has been revised and expanded: **19,667** people were identified as homeless in 2022.
- In **Belgium**, with the support of the regional authorities, the King Baudouin Foundation presented in 2024 two extrapolations based on the results of local counts: Flanders and Wallonia would respectively count **19,479** and **19,055** people without a home.

The idea that statistical measurement of homelessness contributes to guiding policy interventions seems to be gaining ground, including in the EU institutions. By funding the **European Homelessness Counts project**, the Commission is following the lead of researchers who have long been calling for an EU-wide evaluation of the issue. At the same time, efforts to gather and compile the latest available data in order to provide a comprehensive overview of the situation is ongoing, as shown by the results of

the recent **research published by the OECD**. A total of 26 Member States have taken part in drawing up a very comprehensive catalogue that enabled homelessness to be estimated, with varying degrees of precision depending on the country.

CHILDREN FACING HOMELESSNESS AND POOR HOUSING: A EUROPEAN REALITY

Europe is clearly facing a profound challenge. In one of the world's most prosperous regions, **nearly 400,000 minors live on the streets or in emergency or temporary accommodation**. The situation is particularly alarming in the **United Kingdom**, where tens of thousands of children are being cared for with their families in emergency accommodation. In **Germany**, the latest statistical survey reveals that over 28% of people living in accommodation and support structures are minors. In **France**, the latest available figures show that over 1,500 children are living rough.

In addition to these homeless children, there are those living in unfit housing conditions. In the European Union, **a quarter of minors – and more than a fifth of children under the age of 6 – were living in overcrowded housing** in 2023. Young people are clearly overexposed to the problem: in comparison, the rate of overcrowding among the overall population was 17%. That same year, **nearly 14.5 million young Europeans were living in housing showing signs of insalubrity** (leaks, damp foundations, mould). In ten years, the proportion of poor households with children living in such housing increased by more than half in **Spain (+55%), Malta (+57%) and France (+65%)**. More than **5 million households were in a situation of energy poverty** - 11% of European families. On average, this situation affected almost a quarter of households with children living below the poverty line, and more than two out of five families in economic difficulty in **Greece (+40%), Bulgaria (+42%) and Cyprus (+55%)**.

This wholly unacceptable situation in one of the world's most prosperous regions is doubly harmful to children: **not only do the multiple detrimental effects of homelessness or poor housing conditions affect their current lives, but they may also hinder their future prospects and opportunities**.

Living rough, between temporary shelters or in inadequate housing can be **dangerous for children's physical and mental health**. These health problems are often exacerbated by the lack of access to care, with homelessness presenting a significant barrier to receiving medical attention. In **Czechia**, data showed a higher infant mortality rate among Romani communities, with poor housing conditions identified as a key factor.

Instability and overcrowding also affect **family cohesion** and **social relations**. In **Hungary**, housing problems are among the main reasons for intervention by child protection services. In overcrowded accommodation, children are often obliged to live permanently under the gaze of others. In **Germany**, minors accommodated in refugee centres suffered acutely from this lack of privacy, particularly due to toilets that do not lock.

Poor housing conditions can also have an **impact on learning** and have a **significant effect on school achievement**. Overcrowding affects reading skills, long-term memory, and attention span. Moreover, homeless children face numerous **barriers to schooling**: lack of a permanent address can complicate school registrations and evictions disrupt the continuity of their education.

Addressing homelessness and poor housing where children are concerned requires **significant structural changes**, such as raising wages and social transfers, regulating the housing market and

rents, increasing the supply of affordable housing for families, and expanding and renovating social housing. Additionally, a variety of measures that have already been tried and tested across Europe could be scaled up to address the immediate needs of homeless children: **identifying situations of housing exclusion among children, preventive measures to thwart evictions and loss of housing, adaptation of shelter and temporary accommodation facilities, integrated services with providers that are trained to support families, production of affordable housing situated in suitable surroundings.**

POOR HOUSING FIGURES IN EUROPE

- Poverty is stagnating in the European Union: in 2023, **almost 71.9 million people, i.e. 16 % of the population, were living below the poverty line.** However, the number of people experiencing material and social deprivation rose by 3 % between 2020 and 2023.
- **Both house prices and rents are on the rise overall:** the average house price and rent indices have risen by 17 % and 6 % respectively between 2020 and 2023. It should be noted that inflation in house prices has stabilised over the past year.
- The **proportion of household income spent on housing reached 20 %** in the EU in 2023, an increase of 7 % since 2020. For poor households, this share reached **38 %** – more than half of the budget of these households was devoted to housing in Denmark (57 %) and Greece (62 %).
- The **proportion of households overburdened by housing costs** – for whom housing costs represent more than 40 % of income – stood at **9 %** in 2023. This rate is even higher among **foreign nationals (19 %)** and **people with disabilities (11 %)**.
- The rise in energy prices has led to a particularly **worrying increase in energy poverty: one household in ten** (and more than **one poor household in five**) faced this problem in 2023. Since 2020, the proportion of the population affected has risen by **41 %**.
- **No less than 7 % of the total population and 16 % of poor households have difficulty paying their current bills.** The proportion of poor households affected increased in 11 countries between 2020 and 2023, particularly in **Germany (+64 %), Luxembourg (+65 %) and Austria (+77 %).**

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EUROPEAN ACTION

To effectively combat homelessness and poor housing in the context of the 2024-2029 European mandate, FAP and FEANTSA propose the following recommendations:

Continue the fight against homelessness at European level

It is essential that the new Commission continues to **invest in EPOCH's activities by strengthening its prerogatives** and continuing to develop its three areas of work: producing reliable data on homelessness, developing practice learning between Member States and promoting European funding in the fight against homelessness.

FAP and FEANTSA advocate **guaranteeing access to accommodation for everyone in Europe**, ensuring that this transitional solution serves its intended purpose, which is to enable people in accommodation

to find adequate housing as quickly as possible. The aim is also to develop and promote minimum quality standards for accommodation and support services.

In the future multi-annual financial framework, it must be possible to allocate **part of the Structural Funds to the fight against homelessness** – at least 3% of the new European Social Fund (ESF+).

For a Europe committed to tackling the housing crisis

The new affordable housing plan mentioned by the President of the European Commission must **give priority to the most vulnerable households**, particularly the homeless, and prioritise the production of non-speculative, public, cooperative and social housing.

The measures that will be taken in this context will have to be accompanied by coherent public policies, particularly with regard to the **regulation of private housing markets**.

Protecting the most vulnerable

The European institutions must **fight poverty more effectively and protect the most vulnerable groups in the housing market from all forms of discrimination** based on gender, sexual orientation, nationality, real or supposed origin.

In particular, they must draw up a **European action plan aimed at gradually ending marginalised Roma settlements** by 2030, based on the Council's recommendations on equal access to adequate housing for Roma and combating the segregation of settlements.

The aim is also to **protect children and young people from homelessness and poor housing** by strengthening the European guarantees dedicated to them.

For a fair and inclusive Green Deal

The institutions must **ensure that the renovation of the European Union's housing stock**, supported by the EPBD and EED directives, **contributes to the fight against poor housing**. This means providing massive, targeted public subsidies for the renovation of substandard housing and housing occupied by low-income households.

They must also **deploy social safeguards** – such as rent regulation and renovation prevention – and measures to **include the hardest-to-reach households and communities**.