

EU RESPONSES TO CRISIS

Implications for affordable housing

CONFERENCE ON 27TH OCTOBER 2010 / BRUSSELS / www.housingeurope.eu

Programme

(with background information for each session)

09.00 – 09.15: WELCOME

Vít Vaníček, President of CECODHAS Housing Europe

09.15 – 10.30: **OPENING DEBATE:** Which role for affordable housing in a fair society?

Moderation: Nick Bennett, CEO Community Housing Cymru

Key note address:

- Prof. Richard Wilkinson, Nottingham University : *Income inequalities, social problems and housing*



This opening session aims at analysing and putting forward the contribution of affordable housing in the vision of a fair society.

Over the last ten years, on average in the EU, housing (in the rental market) has been less and less affordable. A conjunction of decreasing disposable incomes (not least since the last 2 years), low increase of housing allowances and steady increase of rents has pushed up the burden that housing costs represent for households. All the studies show that low-income households suffer more from this degraded affordability of housing than non-poor households. It could be therefore argued that the lack of housing affordability therefore fuels inequalities in society.

What is to be done then?

Prof. Richard Wilkinson in his book "The Spirit Level", co-written with Prof. Kate Pickett, reminds of the correlations between income inequalities and the level of social problems in a society.

Is affordable housing to be seen as a way to help alleviate the social problems (drug use, early school leaving...) (curative approach) or can affordable housing be a way to reduce income inequalities and prevent the occurrence of social exclusion (preventive approach)? If yes how?

The EU has developed an approach of social inclusion policies based on the cooperation between member states. The fight against the extreme forms of housing exclusion (homelessness) has been identified as one field for this cooperation.

How can (and should) the EU supports national and regional housing policies so that they be an instrument of greater cohesion in society?

10.30 – 11.45: Session 1

Housing costs and the EU initiatives against poverty and social exclusion: what the best way to help the most in need?

Moderation: Nick Bennett, CEO Community Housing Cymru



The expert view: Hans Dubois, the Living Conditions and Quality of Life research programme, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

Debate with: Michele Calandrino, Unit Social Inclusion, European Commission, Martin Schmalzried, COFACE and the audience

The Treaty on the European Union recalls that one of its objectives is the promotion of the well-being of the European citizens. This is the reason why the EU has adopted an objective of reduction of social exclusion and poverty in its overall policy strategy (Europe 2020). National governments and EU institutions will have to monitor their progress in meeting those objectives. The existence of EU-wide housing-related indicators (affordability and quality) will make possible for Member States and the EU to include housing situations as part of their national objectives.

How should the question of housing affordability in particular be integrated in the European strategy to combat poverty and social exclusion, in particular the Flagship initiative “European Platform against Poverty”? How to integrate the question of energy poverty in that debate? What kind of funding opportunities in the field of training, new services to adapt to the evolving needs of the people the EU can promote?

11.45 – 12.00: Coffee Break

12.00 – 13.15: Session 2:

Financing public services and affordable housing in times of budget constraints: what can the EU do and not do?

Moderation: Gene Clayton, President, Irish Council for Social Housing



The expert view: Claude Taffin, World Bank

Debate with: Sven Bergenstrahle, President of International Union of Tenants and ... the audience

With the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the institutional context has significantly changed. Firstly, the Charter of Fundamental Rights, which recognises the fundamental nature of public service obligations has become legally binding with the Lisbon Treaty. Several articles of the Charter are directly linked to the notion of general interest. SGEIs have a crucial role to play in securing those rights. In fact, Article 36 of the Charter states that access to SGEIs is a fundamental right protected by the Union. Secondly, the Lisbon Treaty has significantly amended ex-Article 16 EC by giving the EU institutions to possibility to act by means of a regulation on this matter.

Bearing in mind this evolving context, investing in infrastructures that answer the basic needs of citizens need to be prioritised and new financial rules developed (revolving funds versus grants for example). Social housing is paid back by rents in the long term, and therefore represents a no-risk investment for public authorities. It is an asset which can be used to generate finances. The more social housing we build, the more assets we create which increases the investment capacity in the long term, while answering the needs of the local economy. Limiting the debts capacity of local authorities reduces such investments and in some cases, forces local authorities to sell their current stock as a means of achieving budget equilibrium. Long-term as opposed to short-term needs to become a criterion in public debt assessment. Investment which can be reimbursed should be considered differently in public debts rules.

As there is a widespread consensus (not only in the EU) that public services are necessary to cope with market failures and enhance social cohesion, this is the duty of the public authorities and public institutions to support them.

How does an international institution involved in development of emerging countries support public services? Are there lessons to be drawn for the European Union, in particular on the vehicles and framework for long-term investment? Considering the national specificities, is it possible to make social housing fit into a general regulatory and financial framework aiming at supporting public services?

13.15 – 14.30 – Lunch

14.30 – 15.45: Session 3:

**Achieving a resource-efficient EU through investment in affordable housing:
which pathways?**



Moderation: Nick Bennett, CEO Community Housing Cymru

Debate with Karima Delli, MEP, member of REGI Committee, Vice-Chair of the Urban Intergroup, Marie Donnelly, Director, DG ENER, European Commission, Sebastien Relland, Energy Efficiency Coordinator, Head of Prospective Analysis, Council of European Development Bank and ... the audience

The European Commission has announced in its Communication of March 3rd 2010 on the Europe 2020 Strategy, that, as part of the Flagship Initiative “Resource efficient Europe”, they will “adopt and implement a revised Energy Efficiency Action Plan and promote a substantial programme in resource efficiency (supporting SMEs as well households) by making use of structural and

other funds to leverage new financing through existing highly successful models of innovative investment schemes; this should promote change in consumption and production patterns”

How will housing be integrated in this initiative? Will the EU and member states provide the appropriate finance and regulation to bring about improvement of energy efficiency as well as reduction of consumption? What kind of partnerships are possible between housing providers, energy providers, public authorities and financial institutions to deliver the change needed? Are those partnerships to be agreed at the EU, member state, or regional level?

16.00 – 17.15: Session 4:

Future EU policies and resources: *can housing fit in the future policies and budget of the EU after 2013?*

Moderation: Gene Clayton, President, Irish Council for Social Housing



The expert view: Ms Jesse Scott, Programme Leader – Europe in the World, E3G

Debate with: Göran Färm, MEP, SURE Committee (tbc), Carole Ulmer, European Think-Tank “Confrontations Europe” and ... the audience

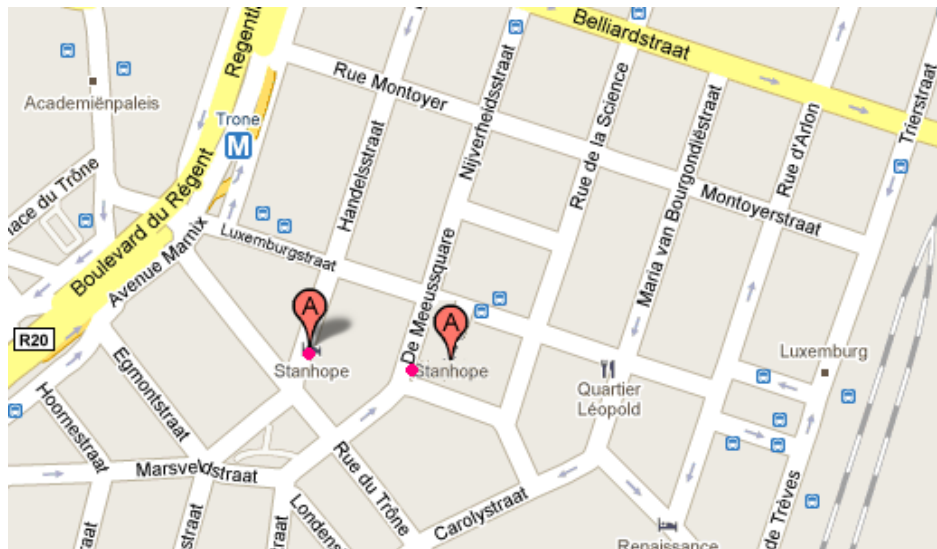
For the future budget of the EU (programming period starting on January 1st 2014), different positions are heard at the moment: while some national government call for a reduction of the budget, arguing that at a time when national governments have to make very deep cuts, people can't understand why the Commission and Parliament would want to protect the EU budget, the European Commissioner on regional policy wants regional policy to keep its current budget. Regarding the policy priorities, there will also be tensions. There are claims to redirect spending from agricultural policy to the EU's economic renewal, climate change and energy and foreign relations and others to dedicate more finance to social issues despite the low level of competences of the EU in that field.

How could housing policies and the housing sector benefit or on the contrary suffer from the future size and priorities of the EU budget, in particular in the future cohesion policy of the EU?

17.15 – 17.30: Concluding remarks

Christos Doulkeridis: Secretary of State in charge of Housing, Brussels Capital Region, representing the Belgian Presidency of the EU

The conference will take place at the StanHope Hotel (9, Rue du Commerce, Brussels).



Registration and contact



To register, please send an email to Alessandro Cesale (alessandro.cesale@cecodhas.org) by Friday 1st October 2010 at the latest.

Participation is free of charge and interpretation in English, French and German will be provided.

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