

18 March 1997

A4-0088/97/PART A

REPORT

on the social aspects of housing

Committee on Social Affairs and Employment

Rapporteur: Mr Brian Crowley

PE 219.267/fin./Part A

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By letter of 7 December 1994 the Committee on Social Affairs and Employment requested authorization to draw up a report on the social aspects of housing.

At the sitting of 5 September 1996 the President of Parliament announced that the Conference of Presidents had authorized the committee to report on this subject.

At its meeting of 25 January 1995 the Committee on Social Affairs and Employment appointed Mr Brian Crowley rapporteur.

It considered the draft report at its meetings of 6 and 27 February and 11 March 1997.

At the last meeting it adopted the motion for a resolution by 17 votes to 12, with 2 abstentions.

The following were present for the vote: Hughes, chairman; Menrad and Ojala, vice-chairmen; Crowley, rapporteur; Andersson, Bannasar Tous (for Castagnetti), Boogerd-Quaak, Cabezón Alonso, Colombo Svevo (for Chanterie), Correia, Donnelly, Ettl, Glase, González Álvarez (for Eriksson), Hermange, Hernandez Mollar, Jensen, Kerr (for Blak), Mann, Mendonça, Oddy (for Carniti), Papakyriazis (for Jöns), Pronk, Schiedermeier, Schörling, Skinner, Sornosa Martínez, van Velzen, Waddington, Weiler, Wolf.

The explanatory statement will be published separately.

The report was tabled on 18 March 1997.

The deadline for tabling amendments will be indicated in the draft agenda for the relevant part-session.

A
MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

Resolution on the social aspect of housing.

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Articles 2, 3, 117 and 130a of the Treaty establishing the European Community,
 - having regard to Article 1 of the Agreement on social policy concluded between the Member States of the European Community with the exception of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland,
 - having regard to the report by the Committee of the Wise: 'For a Europe of civic and social rights',
 - having regard to its resolution of 23 May 1996 on the final report from the Commission on the implementation of the Community programme concerning the economic and social integration of the economically and socially less privileged groups in society 'Poverty 3' (1989-1994)¹,
 - having regard to its resolution of 24 May 1996 on the UN Habitat II conference²,
 - having regard to its resolution of 15 November 1996 on the incorporation of the ECSC into the budget³,
 - having regard to the Cork Declaration on a Living Countryside of 9 November 1996,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (A4-0088/97),
- A. whereas up to 18 million people within the European Union can now be considered as being either homeless or very badly housed in substandard or overcrowded conditions;
- B. whereas in the Union there is a general trend among the governments of the Member States towards the abandonment of their responsibilities in terms of housing policy;
- C. whereas the lack of decent housing represents an affront to human dignity and an obstacle to participation in political, economic, social and cultural life for the individuals and families concerned;

¹ OJ C166 of 10.6.1996, p 191

² *ibid*, p 257

³ PV 96-11-15.EN, p 17

- D. whereas the problem of homelessness and poor housing has worsened as a result of property speculation and inadequate financial resources devoted to housing and the growth in number of the long-term unemployed, those in atypical or precarious employment and those falling through social security safety nets;
- E. whereas there is no policy on the prevention of homelessness, and whereas, if a person loses his or her housing and does not receive prompt and appropriate welfare assistance, the temporary problems he or she faces tend to become permanent handicaps;
- F. whereas homelessness and poor housing are both a cause and a consequence of social exclusion, the increase in which is undermining both the fabric and welfare of European societies;
- G. whereas, without effective social corrective measures, the housing market is becoming less and less accessible for persons who do not have secure employment, and whereas, in most Member States, the lack of housing assistance constitutes a serious shortcoming in the social protection system;
- H. whereas homelessness and poor housing hit particularly the most vulnerable groups in society, such as the disabled, the elderly, single-parent families, immigrants, ethnic minorities and the long-term unemployed; whereas these problems are at their most acute during winter;
- I. whereas readily available, good quality housing is an essential factor in attracting investment and business relocation and so is, therefore, important in bringing about social and economic cohesion;
- J. whereas, despite the differences between Member States in the area of housing policy, the increasing difficulties of access to adequate housing, affordable on the basis of individual and family incomes, are problems common to all of them and would be tackled more effectively by common action by the Member States at European level; whereas any projects financed at the European level would be those selected on the basis of proposals from the Member States; whereas this would be in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity;
- K. whereas a housing policy developed at the European level following this report should be an integrated one in which housing is integrated with education, training, employment, social security and financial assistance, social, health counselling and other services and access to these services ensured, an approach which is much more effective in helping to combat poverty and social exclusion and in contributing to the reintegration of the unemployed into the labour market and of the homeless particularly during the "crisis period" of becoming homeless when access to such services is most difficult;
- L. whereas the development of such a housing policy at European level should be based on efforts to provide adequate housing for all,;
- M. whereas such a policy should not be problematic since all Member States have recognised the right to adequate housing for all as a principle by ratifying the 1966 United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;

- N. whereas the establishment of a European housing policy would not be a radical departure given that structural intervention and European instruments already have an indirect impact on national housing programmes and that since 1955 housing programmes and assistance have been run for coal and steel workers on the basis of the ECSC Treaty;
- O. whereas inaction to tackle homelessness and poor housing exacerbates the social and economic problems of the Member States of the Union and places ultimately a greater burden on European economies than a well-constructed and financed policy aimed at eliminating homelessness and poor housing;
1. Calls on the Member States at the InterGovernmental Conference to include within the Treaty provisions which lead to the progressive realisation of the fundamental social rights of people living in Europe, those rights to include the right to decent and affordable housing for all.
 2. Insists that the right to decent and affordable housing for all be given operational reality by concrete policies and measures carried out at the appropriate administrative and institutional level.
 3. Calls on the Member States to shoulder their responsibilities and develop a housing policy: a sufficient supply of housing; high-quality housing of appropriate sizes; a sufficient supply of affordable housing; a high degree of housing security;
 4. Calls on the Member States to take preventive measures, including in the context of the general welfare and housing protection system, to guarantee a minimum level of security for persons facing serious social exclusion problems;
 5. Proposes that the Member States should take measures to combat urban property speculation, not least in the form of deterrents designed to prevent owners from leaving housing unoccupied, whether deliberately or through negligence;
 6. Believes that housing must be seen as an area of general interest, underpinning all other fundamental social rights, to be taken into consideration at all levels of decision-making in the Union.
 7. Suggests that a European housing policy be directed to:
 - the collection, exchange and analysis of information on housing policy in the Member States
 - the evaluation, exchange and promotion of examples of good practice in Member States with respect to housing projects and housing services, particularly those aimed at helping the homeless and those whose economic situation means that they remained trapped in poor quality housing
 - the establishment, with Member States, of minimum objectives for alignment with regard to ensuring access to housing for all and the establishment of terms of reference aimed at achieving these objectives

- the permanent monitoring, for example by a Task Force of relevant Directorates-General in the Commission, of the impact of EU policies on the housing sector, to take into account the possible effects on vulnerable and disadvantaged groups and to lead to the development of integrated strategies and coordination of Community resources to achieve maximum effect
 - the establishment of a European Housing Forum to act as a consultative body formed from representatives of European organizations active in the field of housing policies including social housing providers, researchers, emergency and transitory housing providers, housing developers and funding bodies, associations bringing together and representing less-favoured groups, tenants' organizations and local and regional authorities.
8. Proposes that the Commission launch a Community initiative in the form of a Community pilot programme, to be called IGLOO, aimed at funding integrated housing related projects which address at the same time urban development, housing, education, training, employment, social services and health issues, with the participation of the population groups concerned; expects such projects to be selected in the light of proposals put forward by the Member States and concern not only the building of new housing, but also moves to salvage and restore the existing housing stock.
 9. Believes that Ministers of Housing of the 15 Member States should meet more regularly to give a European housing policy the necessary political impetus and direction, as well as to oversee the actions foreseen in paragraphs 7 and 8.
 10. Believes that, as part of a European housing policy, the European Union should act as a coordinator and facilitator in the question of housing by granting loans or other measures; notes in this context that the ECSC Treaty has, since 1954, permitted European low-cost loans for the housing of coal and steel workers with very positive benefits both for the workers themselves and for the housing areas where loans are granted; believes that this can serve as a model for intervention by the European Union in the question of housing in other sectors, where such intervention may be financed from the Structural Funds post-1999 reform or from ECSC reserves once the Treaty of Paris lapses in 2002; urges the Commission to investigate the feasibility of such an extension; believes that the EU should also look at the utilisation of ESF funding to train the unemployed and homeless, both men and women, in building skills and to build their own homes.
 11. Points out that the development of an integrated European housing policy, especially one which promoted both private and public sector housing investment, would have a beneficial impact on employment, and employment insertion for the socially excluded, across the Union not just in the construction sector but also with respect to the kinds of accompanying services, counselling, advice, training, which would flow from such an integrated housing policy.
 12. Believes that an integrated housing policy is one that takes into account urban and environmental concerns, in particular the implementation of a proper land-use policy, as well as the prerogatives of social and economic cohesion so thereby contributing to sustainable

development; believes that the EU should increase funding for the S.A.V.E. programme to aid energy efficient housing.

13. Stresses, in the context of economic and social cohesion, that properly targeted and integrated housing policies can play a major role in sustaining the economic and social viability of rural, peripheral and ultra-peripheral regions.
14. Points out that the particular housing needs of the disabled and the elderly and women and children at risk must be taken into consideration to ensure not only that decent living conditions are maintained but that they retain a dignified life in the community.
15. Believes that with the present situation regarding rural depopulation and the explosion of urban areas that a policy of rural resettlement should be encouraged and fostered.
16. Believes that all developments must be sustainable and take account of the protection of the environment, conservation of energy and best building practices.
17. Calls on the Member States, when introducing new legislative instruments, to prohibit all forms of discrimination in access to public or private housing, and the implementation of housing policies at all administrative levels.
18. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Committee of the Regions, the Economic and Social Committee, the social partners and NGOs involved in the fight against homelessness and social exclusion.