

GIJON DECLARATION

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE INFORMAL MINISTERIAL MEETING ON HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE SPANISH PRESIDENCY OF THE EU COUNCIL
13-14 NOVEMBER 2023**

Housing for all in sustainable, healthy, and inclusive built environments

Major challenges have arisen in housing and urban development in the European Union in recent years, which have been aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine. Persistently high house prices, together with an increasing lack of affordable housing supply, are preventing European citizens from accessing housing.

These difficulties gravely affect lower and middle-income households, young people, and vulnerable groups such as the elderly or people with disabilities, many of whom are deprived of the chance to access decent housing. According to the latest Eurostat data, 8.7 % of the population of the European Union, that is, more than 40.8 million people, allocate more than 40% of their income to pay for housing. A percentage that goes up to 20.8% when considering the set of households that reside in a rental dwelling at market price. Additionally, there has been a worrying increase in the number of homeless people over the past decade in most Member States.

Furthermore, with most of the European population living in urban areas, many European households face hurdles when it comes to finding suitable and affordable housing, especially in those areas and neighbourhoods with the highest demand. There is therefore a need to consider how urban and housing development policies can tackle supply challenges. It is also critical to consider the needs of people living in small towns, villages, and rural areas, who require specific strategies and policies. In most member states, the housing stock need to adapt to major challenges such as aging of the population or decreasing of the households' size.

Given this context, the right approach to address housing and urban development challenges in the European Union appears to be one based on collaboration between all levels of government (European, National, Regional and Local) through governance instruments. In this regard, the Urban Agenda for the European Union is a key instrument for multi-level governance.

We are also experiencing a huge transformation of our economic model towards a more sustainable one, guided by the European Green Deal. Sustainability is an area of huge potential for housing and urban development in the European Union, from a social, ecological and resilience perspective, to ensure that housing is adapted for climate change. The European building stock should be adapted to meet the demands ahead, in terms of quality, functionality and accessibility of buildings, as well as energy efficiency and conservation.

In order to put these ambitions into practice, Member States should seize the opportunities offered by the European Union funding from multiannual financial framework and the "Next Generation EU" funds.

We, the EU Ministers responsible for Housing and Urban Development, with this Gijon Declaration, acknowledge the importance of continuing work to guarantee access to decent and adequate housing in the European Union and a sufficient affordable housing stock, while promoting more sustainable, healthy, and inclusive built environments, and fully respecting the national competences.

Therefore, WE:

1. EMPHASISE the need to continue developing policies that ensure the access to decent and adequate housing in the European Union, under the principles of subsidiarity and of cooperation between all levels of government.
2. ACKNOWLEDGE the lack of housing at affordable prices for all and CALL to offer housing or finance solutions to lower and middle-income households, homeless people, and other vulnerable groups, as well as young people and people with disabilities, considering their specific needs. This could include the creation and promotion of affordable and social housing stock.
3. STRESS the need to stimulate an adequate housing stock, particularly, in those areas with a stressing residential market, paying special attention to the supply of affordable housing strengthening regulatory tools and developing a comprehensive strategy in places where barriers have emerged due to phenomena such as short-term rentals, to keep the capacity to develop adequate spaces and equipment in favour of an affordable housing policy, as well as the improvement of administrative procedures linked to housing.
4. RECOGNISE the importance of enhancing financing schemes for housing development, particularly for social or affordable rentals, for instance by enabling the application of public-private collaboration models.
5. VALUE the significant European financial resources available for building renovation, especially the opportunities offered by the Next Generation EU funds and URGE the European Commission to reinforce the actual instruments to complement national, regional, and local support schemes in the housing sector.
6. INVITE the European Commission to assess the definition of social housing that can be considered a service of general economic interest in order to facilitate the application of state aid in housing policies.
7. COMMIT to strengthen the territorial dimension of housing policies, as homes are not isolated but located in urban and rural environments, through an integrated and place-based approach.
8. RECOGNISE that the National Urban Policies referred to in the New Leipzig Charter, within the framework of the Urban Agenda for the EU, are a multi-level governance tool that facilitates coordination between administrations, improves policy coherence and promotes an integrated approach to achieve more economically competitive, environmentally sustainable, and inclusive towns and cities.
9. STRESS the importance of improving the condition of existing housing stock, aiming a life cycle approach, confronting challenges such as adequate conservation, functionality, and accessibility of buildings as well as sustainability, considering residential buildings are responsible for a significant part of energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions in the European Union and CALL that the ecological transition in the buildings sector will be accompanied by social measures.
10. RECOGNIZE that high quality architecture benefits the well-being of all citizens and has broad transformative potential. To guarantee this quality, it is necessary to promote research, innovation,

digitalization, industrialization, and creativity, implementing actions which enable improvements to built environments and the quality of life of citizens, without compromising the quality of life of future generations. On that matter, conservation and promotion of our architectural, urban, and landscapes heritage plays a key role.

11. AGREE that progress must be made in applying the fundamental values of the New European Bauhaus in the field of housing and residential areas, reinforcing the quality of architecture and design to transform places, with benefits for civic pride, inclusion, and sustainability for the common good.

12. CONSIDER it relevant to continue supporting the residential construction industry at all decision-making levels, as a strategic sector in the reactivation of the economy and job creation, stimulating regulatory improvements to reduce barriers to development and promote the sector's growth and sustainability, supporting industrialization, digitalization and modernization.

13. EXPRESSING the will and the desire to be ambitious in the responses to homelessness, to promote strategic national, regional and local frameworks and to implement solutions that fully respect human rights, and that are focused on stable, secure and affordable housing and on personalized support.

In conclusion, the Ministers responsible for matters regarding Housing and Urban Development, with respect for the principle of subsidiarity, emphasize the need to strengthen support for the promotion and implementation of policies to facilitate access to affordable housing for all, while considering the development of a healthy inclusive and environmentally sustainable high-quality built environment, in urban and rural areas, improving governance and sharing good practices and successful experiences from different countries.

Gijón, 14 November 2023