



[Joint press statement] Tackling poor housing is the first step towards reducing health inequalities

“When the EU discusses social inequalities, housing is the big elephant in the room. It is plainly evident that, at a European level, we are failing to associate health and housing. Poor dwelling conditions perpetuate social exclusion. More than 100 million people in the EU are deprived of proper and decent housing, which is, as the WHO recognises, a source of illness,” said Karima Delli MEP (France, Greens/EFA), Vice-President of the EP URBAN Intergroup.

Brussels, January 25 – On January 22, the European Public Health Alliance (EPHA) and the European Federation of Public, Cooperative and Social Housing (CECODHAS Housing Europe) held a joint conference with the European Parliament’s Urban Intergroup. The event focused on **the connection between health inequalities and affordable housing and emphasised that investment in good quality housing can bring returns in health and environmental outcomes.**

We cannot ensure a productive population, able to recover from the crisis without creating the living and working conditions for people to prosper. **Housing is arguably the most important determinant, with good housing enabling children to live healthy and safe lives, to flourish and meet their potential.** Investments in housing improve health, education and their environment. **We need public investment in good quality, affordable housing, and this is a golden opportunity to use this investment in order to help European recovery.**

By means of the forthcoming Social Investment Package, the European Commission appears willing to favour better public spending through enhanced prevention policies. **The potential gains of increased social spending are vast: improved public health, a reduction in health inequalities, more accessible and improved housing, better environmental protection.** We need urgently a set of minimum standards for quality housing which includes thermal comfort such as warmth and ventilation; safe transport links that allow walking and cycling, and good access to key services and affordable food as well as green areas. These would go a long way to improve quality of life for millions living in cities.

Speakers’ quotes

“This event marks a very important first step to bring housing public health back together. Improving housing for workers was one of public health’s first areas at its birth. We need to rethink these synergies to ensure that we enjoy good quality public housing to reduce the impact of poverty and build healthy populations and communities,” said Monika Kosińska, Secretary General of the European Public Health Alliance (EPHA).

“In the long run, smart investment in social infrastructures will relieve the burden in public health budgets and social assistance. If more people have better access to a quality living environment from the start, the costs of tackling the devastating and costly effects of social and health inequalities would be much lower,” pointed Özgür Öner, Vice-President of CECODHAS Housing Europe

“Public housing is an area neglected in Europe. Market principles long gained the upper hand here, with in many cases, a disregard to people’s needs. To meaningfully help millions of have-nots, we have got to make sure that housing becomes way more affordable than it is today,” according to Alejandro Cercas (Spain, S&D) MEP and shadow rapporteur of the EP report on social housing.

“To tackle housing issues once for all, one has to look at the environmental dimension. In this sense, a scheme to point to is the European Energy Efficiency Directive which will push to cut energy waste all across the board. In addition, Member States could make more use of possible flexibility in VAT to help such schemes. If we manage to get it right, the EU can play a key role to keep houses better isolated and warmer. Cold dwellings do not only mean more clothing layers and blankets at

bed time: it stops millions from realising their full potential, weakening them when job hunting, and triggering recurrent health conditions,” pointed Jean Lambert MEP (UK, Greens/EFA).

*“Our cities can do much better when it comes to bring together all social groups into their shared space. Driving through many European cities, the ghetto phenomenon arises as a feature fracturing our towns into a patchwork of isolate groups with little interaction among each other. National and local housing policies play a crucial role in the promotion of social cohesion. **The EU should support strong housing policies, be it financially or via a favourable legislative environment. In turn, better integrated cities will help fix many of the issues troubling dwellers’ life,**”* said Françoise Castex MEP (France, S&D).

*“It is hardly news that there is a huge difference in housing conditions of poor and rich households. Low-income households often have to put up with too small and low-quality dwellings, where overcrowding and low thermal comfort affect people’s quality of life. Adequate dwellings should not be the privilege of some. **Europe’s problem is not precisely the lack of housing – it is the existence of low-quality homes and their uneven distribution within the population.** The rehabilitation of this deprived housing stock must become an integral part of housing policy and will generate a variety of benefits on health and wellbeing,”* pointed Matthias Braubach, Technical Officer Housing and Urban Planning at the WHO European Centre for Environment and Health .

EPHA and CECODHAS Housing Europe calls on the European Commission:

- To urge Member States to renew public support to affordable housing (renovation and new construction) as a way to enforce a prevention policy for public health. The Annual Growth Survey and the Country Specific Recommendations are good starting points to embrace this urgent shift.
- To seize the existing momentum embodied on the various EU schemes designed to reinforce the cooperation between public health and affordable housing sector.

We also call the Council of Ministers and the EU Member States to take the opportunity of the current reflection process on a closer monetary and economic union to propose alternative definitions of public deficits in order to reward future investment in public health and housing.

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► Notes to the editors

[The European Public Health Alliance \(EPHA\)](#) is a change agent - a dynamic member-led organisation made up of public health NGOs, patient groups, health professionals, and disease groups working together to improve health and strengthen the voice of public health in Europe. EPHA is a member of, among others, the Social Platform, the European Public Health and Agriculture Consortium (EPHAC), the Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL), and the EU Civil Society Contact Group.

[CECODHAS Housing Europe](#) is a network of national and regional housing federations of housing organisations. Together the 43 members in 18 European members States manage 25 million dwellings which represent 12% of the total housing stock.

Its members work together for a Europe that provides access to decent and affordable housing for all in communities which are socially, economically and environmentally sustainable and where all are enabled to reach their full potential.

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