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## **REPORT**

on housing and regional policy  
(2006/2108(INI))

Committee on Regional Development

Rapporteur: Alfonso Andria

## CONTENTS

	<b>Pages</b>
MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION.....	3
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT.....	10
PROCEDURE.....	14

## MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

### on housing and regional policy (2006/2108(INI))

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to the rules governing the Structural Funds for the period 2007-2013,
- having regard to its resolution of 26 September 2006 on a thematic strategy for the urban environment<sup>1</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 13 October 2005 on the urban dimension in the context of enlargement<sup>2</sup>,
- having regard to the Council's resolution of 12 February 2001 on architectural quality in urban and rural environments<sup>3</sup>,
- having regard to the Commission Communication: Cohesion Policy and cities: the urban contribution to growth and jobs in the regions (COM(2006)0385),
- having regard to the Commission Communication: the Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment (COM(2005)0718),
- having regard to the Commission Green Paper of 22 June 2005: Energy Efficiency – or Doing More With Less (COM(2005)0265),
- having regard to the Bristol Accord of 7 December 2005, which mentions, among the eight characteristics of a sustainable city, a well-designed and well-built high-quality urban environment,
- having regard to the Social Charter of the Council of Europe – revised version (ETS 163), signed in Strasbourg on 3 May 1996,
- having regard to the European Charter on Housing adopted by its Urban Housing Intergroup on 26 April 2006,
- having regard to the Vancouver Declaration On Human Settlements proclaimed at the UN Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat I) held between 31 May and 11 June 1976 in Vancouver,
- having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions (345/2006), and that of the European Economic and Social Committee (407/2007), in application of Rule 117 and 118 of its Rules of Procedure,
- having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,

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<sup>1</sup> *Texts Adopted*, P6\_TA(2006)0367.

<sup>2</sup> OJ C 233 E, 28.9.2006, p. 127.

<sup>3</sup> OJ C 73, 6.3.2001, p. 6.

- having regard to the report of the Committee on Regional Development (A6-0090/2007),
- A. whereas the lack of decent housing at affordable prices directly affects the lives of citizens, restricting their options for social integration and mobility in both urban and rural areas,
- B. whereas many European Union cities are experiencing great problems with housing, such as abundant or insufficient supply, depending on the region or country, homelessness, soaring costs of purchase and maintenance and buildings in a bad state of repair; whereas poor maintenance often leads to the demolition of existing housing patrimony, which can give rise to new inequalities in terms of urban planning in the absence of an integrated development strategy;
- C. whereas the issue of urban housing should be seen against the wider background of town planning and thus as being related to problems such as the impoverishment of certain areas, environmental degradation (air and water pollution, noise, waste, congestion and so on), operational problems in relation to public services, accessibility, security and so on,
- D. whereas difficulties in gaining access to housing are a cause of social segregation and ghettoisation,
- E. whereas demographic change and depopulation in some regions may lead to a declining demand for housing, empty properties and the downgrading of cultural infrastructure in particular, with the result that quality of life is diminished in the areas concerned, which will be inhabited predominantly by disadvantaged sections of the population,
- F. whereas the combination of low incomes, high energy prices and inadequate heating and insulation systems results in energy poverty and energy exclusion,
- G. whereas the housing issue is not simply an issue of construction but also encompasses social infrastructure (cultural centres, libraries, stadia, meeting places and so on), which is an important element in social inclusion and in tackling the feeling of alienation that is particularly widespread in large urban areas,
- H. whereas social exclusion runs counter to the European social model,
- I. whereas the vitality of town centres and district centres and of the fabric of listed buildings must be preserved,
- J. whereas urban sprawl is causing numerous social and economic problems affecting transport (congestion in public transport, dependence on private cars), environmental protection (increased energy consumption, pollution) and the accessibility of services,
- K. having regard to the importance of the regeneration and reutilisation of brownfield sites and the protection of greenfield sites,
- L. whereas the financial instruments supporting cohesion policy help to revive urban areas by encouraging the redevelopment of public spaces, the implementation of measures to improve safety and prevent delinquency and the development of measures to encourage the efficient use of water and energy, support for social integration and so on,

- M. having regard to the specific problems relating to large prefabricated buildings, in terms of both the quality of habitat and the difficulties stemming from the redevelopment of infrastructure (funding of maintenance and renovation work and research on appropriate techniques and technologies),
- N. whereas the new regulation on the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) has made housing eligible for funding in the new Member States in a number of specific cases<sup>1</sup>,
- O. having regard to the problems relating to property ownership, especially those caused by the inappropriate regulation in some Member States of both rent and the transfer of ownership ,
- P. having regard to the Seventh Framework Programme for Research<sup>2</sup>,
- Q. having regard to the Jeremie<sup>3</sup> and Jessica<sup>4</sup> financial initiatives established in cooperation with the European Investment Fund (EIF) and the European Investment Bank (EIB) respectively,
- R. whereas the housing sector is an important source of employment in the field of construction, but also in the fields of renovation, conversion and local and financial services,
- S. whereas the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council has raised the issue of the homeless and of housing-related exclusion to the level of a priority in the EU strategy for social inclusion and social protection,
- T. Whereas investment in social housing plays, and will continue to play, an essential role in providing housing for many people for whom the housing market is not otherwise accessible,
1. Considers that the right to adequate housing at reasonable prices is an important fundamental right that is recognised in a number of international charters and constitutions of the Member States;
  2. Considers that the renovation of housing for social and energy efficiency purposes is not merely an urban issue and that the large-scale, housing-related challenges that rural areas currently face, especially in the new cohesion countries, must be appropriately addressed;
  3. Calls for the identification, at European level, of a series of quality indicators defining the concept of ‘adequate housing’;
  4. Stresses the importance for the EU of adopting a European housing charter based on the work of Parliament's Urban Housing Intergroup and on the charter approved by the political groups represented;

<sup>1</sup> Regulation (EC) No 1080/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the European Regional Development Fund: Article 7(2) and Recitals 5 and 6.

<sup>2</sup> Seventh Framework Programme of the European Community for Research, Technological Development and Demonstration Activities (2007-2013).

<sup>3</sup> Joint European Resources for Micro to Medium Enterprises.

<sup>4</sup> Joint European Support for Sustainable Investment in City Areas.

5. Insists on the need – in the context of the Lisbon Strategy – to strengthen the right to housing benefits and to other social rights, so that worker mobility can become a reality;
6. Hopes that national and local decision-makers will adopt measures to help young people get their first home;
7. Calls on the Commission to include housing in the debate on cities and the sustainable development of the regions, and in the work programme of the inter-services task force set up to coordinate policies affecting the urban dimension;
8. Stresses the importance of safety issues
  - relating to crime, especially in underprivileged areas
  - relating to buildings (construction and operating standards)
  - relating to electricity and gas infrastructure, water, sewerage and heating (the safety of existing systems and of upgrading technologies and the replacement of outdated pipes);
9. Believes also in the importance of a consistent approach in tackling the different dimensions of sustainable development (solidarity, environment and energy), accessibility, health, security and quality of use and of ensuring that the burden of housing improvements matches the resources of households;
10. Stresses the importance of cultural centres, intercultural dialogue and joint projects involving several areas in promoting the integration of the various communities living in cities, suburbs and nearby rural areas;
11. Stresses the need to take into account the specific housing problems of rural environments in order to favour a balanced policy on spatial planning that counters segregation and the depopulation of rural areas, especially considering the many handicaps in such areas, such as low levels of earnings, scattered and dilapidated housing and a lack of rental, social or other accommodation;
12. Points also to the specificity of housing issues within small towns; considers that the latter attract the rural population not only because of the jobs they offer but also because they offer the opportunity to acquire a higher level of education and qualifications and because they meet needs relating to health and culture; stresses the need to support the development of this role of small towns because it is closely connected to the restructuring of rural areas, in particular with regard to healthcare services, secondary education, the development of SMEs, tourism, health resorts and so on;
13. Believes that, in the rural environment, it is essential to propose incentives for the acquisition, rehabilitation and renovation of old buildings, to support public and private bodies providing advice and personalised guidance to private individuals and business people wanting to settle and to improve the supply of public and private, new and renovated social housing;
14. Encourages the Commission to undertake a study into, and the Member States to improve data gathering in respect of the cost of and the demand for housing and the property market in general, taking into account the heterogeneity of housing occupation, the changes in traditional family structures and the specific circumstances of young people and the ageing and declining population; furthermore, calls upon the Member

- States to take into account access to and the rate of utilisation of technical, social, cultural and transport infrastructure when planning and restructuring housing projects and gathering data;
15. Emphasises that, with regard to the principle of subsidiarity, housing-related problems, as a national issue, should be dealt with predominantly at local level and from this perspective municipalities should be supported;
  16. Takes the view that, given the complexity of the issues affecting housing, an integrated approach, rooted in the principles of subsidiarity and proximity, should be adopted, so as to ensure the simultaneous introduction of various factors which would promote access to housing, improve building quality, improve quality of life for all generations and promote the attractiveness of both urban and rural environments;
  17. Draws attention to the fact that most public housing is not located in healthy environments, nor does the quality of the housing ensure healthy living conditions, for which reasons development measures financed by the European Regional Development Fund should be used not only to promote housing but also to improve the environmental and health situation of public housing tenants, thus helping to improve their quality of life;
  18. Considers, furthermore, that taking an integrated approach will have a greater chance of success if it is taken by the local and regional authorities, which can provide an overall view, optimal coordination of the policies and measures implemented in the urban area and a long-term vision of the development of the urban area in question; accordingly, encourages the Member States, in accordance with Article 11 of Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 of 11 July 2006 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund, to involve cities in the programming and management of structural funding designed to co-finance urban actions that are eligible under the operational programmes, and to delegate implementation to them;
  19. Calls on the Member States and/or their local authorities, on the basis of the Finnish Presidency's proposal on 'Health in All Policies', to ensure that, when they draft housing programmes to be carried out with the aid of Community funding, local authorities conduct health impact assessments in order to provide the socially excluded with a living environment that is suitable from the environmental and health points of view;
  20. Stresses the need for dialogue and consultation between the various tiers of local, regional and government authorities, in order to ensure that public action is consistent and socially responsible and relies upon coordination that is horizontal (addressing all Community housing policies), vertical (among those dealing with housing at the various levels, European, national, regional and local) and mixed (among public authorities, social and economic interest groups and civil society); calls, moreover, for strong participation by residents and their organisations with the aim of reaching joint decisions on the revitalisation, redevelopment, management and preservation of the urban environment;
  21. Encourages greater coordination of financial flows and policies affecting housing, in particular ensuring that the actions supported by the ERDF, the JESSICA and JEREMIE financial instruments, the Seventh Framework Programme for Research and the other

Community, national, regional and local measures concerning housing and urban redevelopment are complementary, and specifically ensuring that residential buildings in historic city districts are modernised and renovated;

22. Hopes that, in the context of the revision of the regulations governing cohesion policy planned for 2009, the debate will be reopened on extending access to Community funds for the renovation of social housing to all Member States in order to save energy and protect environment, which is currently provided for only for certain countries, given that housing needs are critical throughout Europe; asks the Commission and the EIB to implement the Jessica initiative under the same conditions in all countries, including housing within an integrated development approach;
23. Encourages the Member States concerned to make full use of the funds made available for housing from the ERDF;
24. Calls on the Commission to ensure, when monitoring intervention by the Structural Funds, that recital 6 of Regulation (EC) No 1080/2006 is implemented in full for the funding of housing using European structural funds and that appropriate accommodation is being provided for disadvantaged sections of the population by such subsidised housing through social rents and rent control that match the public subsidy;
25. Confirms its support for the strengthening of the partnership between the public authorities, social and economic interest groups and civil society and stresses the potential importance of public-private partnerships, especially in the modernisation of prefabricated buildings and the regeneration of brownfield sites;
26. Supports the Commission's campaign for sustainable energy, which is aimed at making European citizens aware of the need to reduce domestic consumption; also encourages the Commission to promote a wide-ranging information campaign, as part of its energy efficiency action plan;
27. Calls on the Commission to facilitate the widespread use in the housing sector of new technologies and more efficient building products that enable less energy to be consumed;
28. Calls on the Commission to take practical follow-up action to its pilot project in the social housing sector under the SAVE programme<sup>1</sup>, in order to promote and disseminate the exemplary energy efficiency projects selected;
29. Stresses the importance of exchanging best practices in housing policy and encourages the Commission to develop thematic networks for housing along the lines of those established under the URBACT programme; welcomes with interest, therefore, the Commission's initiative 'Regions for economic change' (COM(2006)0675) and awaits the submission of the implementing arrangements for this initiative;
30. Encourages the Commission to set up a website in all official languages of the Union to serve as a forum for cooperation and the exchange of information and best practices similar to the European Urban Knowledge Network (EUKN);
31. Calls on the Commission to prepare a study showing how powers and responsibilities are

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<sup>1</sup> SAVE - multiannual programme seeking to promote energy efficiency



divided among national, regional and local levels and setting out the legal framework for housing in all the Member States; believes that such a study would allow considered decisions to be made and possible areas of EU action with regard to housing to be identified, so that Community measures provide real added value compared to national, regional and local measures;

32. Strongly supports the idea of simplifying bureaucracy at all levels in order to make spatial planning and management more effective;
33. Stresses the importance of the training of operators at grass-roots level, including specific training in urban planning, construction, redevelopment, management and the preservation of existing buildings, and welcomes the funding of training courses under the European Social Fund (ESF);
34. Stresses how important it is for spatial management authorities to take into account the accessibility of housing, public services and urban transport for disabled people and to plan exercise and recreation areas for children and young people when framing spatial planning policies, planning what action to take and implementing that action;
35. Encourages the EIB Group and the Commission, under Jeremie and in synergy with the Jessica initiative, to establish a strategy for boosting the building sector, chiefly in the new Member States, which would constitute structural aid for developing housing and involve the mobilisation of local and regional resources geared to urban projects;
36. Encourages national, regional and local authorities to identify the different circumstances of the cities and territories in the Member States and to draw up and review their housing policies in accordance with the principle of sustainability;
37. Calls upon national, regional and local authorities to urgently address one of the priorities of housing policy, namely that of eliminating homelessness;
38. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and Commission, and to the governments of the Member States, the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee.

## EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Although the Treaty does not vest the European Union with any specific powers with regard to housing, a large number of Community policies (in particular those concerning the environment, energy, transport, social affairs and measures to benefit the common market) have a direct or indirect impact on housing conditions in the various EU Member States.

Nevertheless, the ERDF regulation for the period 2007-2013 has made housing eligible for funding in the new Member States in a number of cases set out in Article 7(2) and Recitals 5 and 6, thereby de facto giving some of the responsibility to the EU.

Housing should also be seen from the wider perspective of the attractiveness of cities in terms of strengthening their growth and job creation potential, which thus also helps to implement the Lisbon Agenda. The contribution of cities to growth and employment has also been highlighted in the Community Strategic Guidelines on cohesion.

The European Parliament has expressed its views on this matter in a number of resolutions<sup>1</sup>, advocating practical measures to boost the development of the urban environment and a greater sense of responsibility on the part of the local decision-makers responsible for drawing up management and urban transport plans to improve quality of life in their cities.

Furthermore, the European Housing Charter, adopted by the 'URBAN-Housing' Intergroup of the European Parliament on 26 April 2006, defines housing as a staple part of life, a fundamental social right underpinning the European social model and a source of human dignity.

We must therefore identify those factors which have an impact on housing, in order to implement a 'socially responsible' policy and make housing accessible to all. We have to find a solution to the problems of spatial segregation and 'ghettoisation' and meet the social and economic challenges relating to the ageing population, whilst placing housing in the broader context of the sustainable development of towns and cities.

This report seeks to focus the housing debate on three key issues:

1. the social dimension
2. the environmental and energy dimension
3. the coordination dimension.

### **1. Social dimension**

The lack of decent housing at affordable prices, when housing is considered to be a fundamental right by the European Housing Charter, directly affects the lives of citizens, restricting their options for social integration and their choices in education, training and professional development.

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<sup>1</sup> European Parliament resolution on the thematic strategy on the urban environment (2006/2061(INI)) and European Parliament resolution on the urban dimension in the context of enlargement (2004/2258(INI)).

This, in turn, has an impact on competitiveness, employment and economic development in general. Over the past ten years, housing prices have constantly increased in nearly all EU countries. This rise has led to a reduction in families' capacity to consume other goods, which, in the long term, curbs sustainable growth.

In particular, problems relating to housing accessibility and quality cause problems of social segregation – the most underprivileged continue flocking to problematic areas, while the better-off move to other areas. They are also a contributory factor to homelessness and problems relating to the social integration of migrants from both other regions of the EU and non-member states, not to mention the problem of the suburbs, which manifests itself in repeated violent upsurges in the cities of several Member States.

In this context, culture can be a precious tool for encouraging the integration of the various communities which make up the cities and their suburbs. The establishment of cultural centres or the implementation of cooperation projects between districts can thus foster intercultural dialogue, especially in the cities and suburbs with a high concentration of immigrants and in areas where integration problems are more marked. It is therefore important to include cultural activities in an integrated approach to planning and urban regeneration.

Social exclusion runs counter to the European social model, which is supposed to offer all citizens future prospects. We therefore need to ensure greater social cohesion and encourage, in particular, the integration of the young and the elderly. A key aspect of this is also to improve the relationship between historic centres and suburbs, between wealthy and underprivileged areas, between urban territory and the hinterland.

Moreover, the housing sector in itself is an importance source of employment in the field of construction, but also of renovation, conversion and local and financial services.

## **2. Environmental and energy dimension**

The development strategy for urban housing should be seen against the wider background of a general urban development strategy. Housing problems are not restricted to issues concerning construction and spatial planning as such, but are also greatly influenced by bad town planning. Hence certain areas, affected by environmental degradation (air and water pollution, noise, waste, congestion, etc.) and operational problems in public services, accessibility, security, etc. become increasingly less attractive and ultimately impoverished.

This impoverishment is often exacerbated by energy problems. Although growing energy prices may result in a rationalisation of use (the establishment of measures and technologies to help save energy and the introduction of sustainable energy, development of new energy sources, etc.), the combination of low income, high energy prices and inadequate heating and insulation systems result in 'fuel poverty'<sup>1</sup> and energy exclusion. It is important to consider that the greatest potential for energy savings can be found in the housing sector, where this potential is estimated at 27% of energy used, as pointed out by the Commission in its energy action plan.

We should also consider the impact of the urban sprawl on the condition of cities. The abandonment of city centres and peri-urbanisation are causing numerous organisational

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<sup>1</sup> 'Fuel poverty' is when more than 10% of income is devoted to paying energy bills.

problems which affect, amongst others, transport (congestion of public transport, dependence on private cars), environmental protection (increased energy consumption, pollution caused by individual cars) and accessibility of services; all this has an impact on the social and economic situation of the city and its inhabitants.

To make housing attractive, it is first necessary to have efficient, cheap and functional means of transport linking homes to workplaces. We therefore need to offer the entire population means of transport which replace private cars.

Moreover, it is essential for housing to have easy access to services (especially with regard to health and social affairs, training, shops and public authorities). Special attention should therefore be paid to underprivileged areas which often have few local services and are badly linked to more distant services.

Urban security also plays an important role in city attractiveness, which is why it is important to frame policies to combat crime, in particular in underprivileged areas. The renovation of public areas can, for example, prevent delinquency and provide greater security. In order to implement such policies, we need to have quality information and statistics so that the relevant policies can be better targeted.

The importance of the safety of the electricity and gas distribution infrastructure and the water and sewerage systems should also be stressed, with regard to both access, the safety of existing systems and the upgrading technologies used. This is particularly important in the new Member States of Central and Eastern Europe, where in most cases housing needs to be brought up to existing safety standards.

### **3. Coordination dimension**

Given that the various problems are intertwined and pervasive, we therefore need to take an integrated approach, albeit one that is deeply rooted in the principles of subsidiarity and proximity, to ensure that different key factors are introduced simultaneously in order to provide quality of life in urban environments and make them more attractive; this should be done by using a common participative methodology in accordance with the Lisbon/Göteborg agenda.

Such an approach can be better adopted by the local authorities, which can provide an overall view, optimal coordination of the policies and measures implemented in the urban area and a long-term vision of development in the town/city.

In order to support this approach, the following types of coordination need to be implemented: horizontal (between all housing-related Community policies), vertical (between those dealing with housing at various levels – European, national and local) and mixed (between the public authorities, social and economic interest groups and civil society).

In addition, the cities, regions and Member States should have a mechanism whereby they can exchange experiences and best practices with regard to housing policy, based on the lessons learned from the URBACT programme, which now includes 17 thematic networks and several working groups.

In particular, we should promote and disseminate the best practices implemented by the

national, regional and local authorities in order put the above-mentioned strategy into practice, whilst taking into account the different reference backgrounds. This mechanism will help to establish a cycle of lifelong learning and is an essential way in which Europe can provide added value.

However, given the complexity of the subject and the need to plan and to take an integrated approach at the local level, the added value and contribution the EU could provide in comparison with the national, regional and local authorities would not be to take legislative action, which might not meet the different needs of the cities, but rather to establish a support system for the exchange and transfer of best practices between the Member States.

## PROCEDURE

<b>Title</b>	Housing and regional policy
<b>Procedure number</b>	2006/2108(INI)
<b>Committee responsible</b> Date authorisation announced in plenary	REGI 18.5.2006
<b>Committee(s) asked for opinion(s)</b> Date announced in plenary	EMPL 16.11.2006
<b>Not delivering opinion(s)</b> Date of decision	EMPL 23.1.2007
<b>Enhanced cooperation</b> Date announced in plenary	
<b>Rapporteur(s)</b> Date appointed	Alfonso Andria 2.5.2006
<b>Previous rapporteur(s)</b>	
<b>Discussed in committee</b>	22.11.2006      22.1.2007
<b>Date adopted</b>	20.3.2007
<b>Result of final vote</b>	+: 45 -: 3 0: 1
<b>Members present for the final vote</b>	Alfonso Andria, Stavros Arnautakis, Elspeth Attwooll, Tiberiu Bărbulețiu, Jean Marie Beaupuy, Rolf Berend, Jana Bobošíková, Antonio De Blasio, Vasile Dîncu, Gerardo Galeote, Iratxe García Pérez, Eugenijus Gentvilas, Pedro Guerreiro, Gábor Harangozó, Marian Harkin, Alain Hutchinson, Mieczysław Edmund Janowski, Gisela Kallenbach, Tunne Kelam, Evgeni Kirilov, Sérgio Marques, Miguel Angel Martínez Martínez, Yiannakis Matsis, Miroslav Mikolášik, Jan Olbrycht, Maria Petre, Markus Pieper, Wojciech Roszkowski, Elisabeth Schroedter, Stefan Sofianski, Grażyna Staniszewska, Catherine Stihler, Kyriacos Triantaphyllides, Oldřich Vlasák, Vladimír Železný
<b>Substitute(s) present for the final vote</b>	Alfredo Antoniozzi, Jan Březina, Brigitte Douay, Den Dover, Emanuel Jardim Fernandes, Ljudmila Novak, Miroslaw Mariusz Piotrowski, Zita Pleštinská, Christa Prets, Toomas Savi, László Surján, Károly Ferenc Szabó, Nikolaos Vakalis
<b>Substitute(s) under Rule 178(2) present for the final vote</b>	Věra Flasarová
<b>Date tabled</b>	28.3.2007
<b>Comments</b> (available in one language only)	

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, Committee on Regional Development



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