

**DRAFT: Informal conference of EU Ministers responsible for Housing
Declaration of the Ministers – Nice, March 8, 2022**

Common challenge: producing affordable, sustainable, decent and resilient housing which contributes to the quality of life

Preamble

1. The EU ministers responsible for housing, invited by the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union on March 8, 2022 in Nice, held an informal meeting on the theme of producing affordable, sustainable housing that ensures the quality of life.
2. This meeting took place in the context of a health-crisis as well as natural disasters related to climate change and rapid urbanisation processes. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a re-evaluation of our relationship to housing and our living environment, and has contributed to exacerbating already existing difficulties, in particular, the lack of affordable housing, energy poverty, more generally the issue of energy efficiency, the difficulties of implementing the circular economy. In addition, National housing policies need to be adapted to a new way of reflecting on living and working, while also better address housing exclusion of more vulnerable groups, in line with Principle 19 of the European Pillar of Social Rights, on housing and assistance to the homeless.
3. In terms of process, emphasis was placed on the importance of taking into account the work already carried out on sustainable and affordable housing issues, the great diversity of situations in the Member States, notably between urban and rural areas but also between areas with a growing or declining population, the need to integrate local authorities and regions in the work, more generally the need to strengthen collaboration between institutions, Member States and territorial authorities and, finally, the importance of setting up tools to better understand the issues.
4. **We, the EU Ministers responsible for Housing, acknowledge:**
 - The European Union's Cohesion Policy 2021-2027;
 - The final declaration of the 19th informal meeting of European Housing ministers of 10 December 2013;
 - The United Nations Geneva Charter on Sustainable Housing and its objective to "ensure access to adequate, affordable and healthy housing for all" endorsed by the *United Nations Economic Commission for Europe* on 16 April 2015;
 - The 2030 Agenda adopted by the UN in September 2015 with the Sustainable Development Goals;
 - The New Urban Agenda adopted at the UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development in Quito in October 2016;
 - The Pact of Amsterdam, adopted at the Informal Meeting of Ministers responsible for Urban matters on 30 November 2016 in Amsterdam, establishing the Urban Agenda for the EU;
 - The opinion of the European Committee of the Regions "Towards a European Agenda for Housing" of 1st December 2017;

- The Urban Agenda for the EU and especially Housing Partnership's Action Plan adopted in 2018;
- The Davos Declaration - Towards a high-quality Baukultur for Europe! approved by European Ministers of Culture, 20-22 January 2018;
- The Urban Maestro project launched on 14 February 2019;
- The European Citizens' Initiative "Housing for all" registered on 18 March 2019;
- The Council Conclusions on Circular Economy in the Construction sector, 8 November 2019;
- The European Green Deal, presented by the European Commission on 11 December 2019;
- The study "Housing policies in the European Union" by the Institute for Housing and Environment Darmstadt, Institute of Political Science, Technical University, study on behalf of the German Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community, presented during the German EU Council Presidency in 2020;
- The New European Bauhaus initiative, 2020;
- The Circular Economy Action Plan, presented by the European Commission in March 2020;
- The Action Plan "Critical Raw Materials Resilience: Charting a Path towards greater Security and Sustainability", 3rd September 2020;
- The European Commission's "Renovation wave" strategy, published on 14 October 2020 and the Affordable Housing initiative as announced in the Commission's strategy;
- The New Leipzig Charter, adopted on 30 November 2020 at the Informal Meeting of Ministers responsible for Urban Matters;
- The Territorial Agenda 2030 – A future for all places, adopted on 1st December 2020 at the Informal Meeting of Ministers responsible for Territorial Cohesion;
- The study "Housing 2030 - Effective policies for affordable housing in the UNECE region" by the UN Economic Commission for Europe, UN-Habitat and Housing Europe in 2021.
- The European Parliament's resolution of 21 January 2021 on the access to decent and affordable housing for all;
- The Recovery and Resilience Facility, 18 February 2021;
- The Lisbon Declaration on the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness, 21 June 2021;
- Horizon Europe's mission for "100 climate neutral and smart cities" by 2030, launched on 28 September 2021;
- The report of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) group of Member States' experts focusing on high-quality architecture and built environment for everyone, October 2021;

- “Place and Life in the ECE – A Regional Action Plan 2030”, October 2021;
- Level(s), A common language for building assessment, European Commission DG Environment, October 2021;
- The Council Conclusions on culture, high-quality architecture and built environment as key elements of the New European Bauhaus initiative, 30 November 2021;
- The Ljubljana Agreement and the Multiannual Working Programme adopted on 26 November 2021 at the Informal Meeting of the Ministers responsible for Urban Matters for the EU;
- The Union for the Mediterranean Strategic Action Plan for Sustainable Urban Development towards 2040, adopted end of 2021, along with a dedicated plan on the housing dimension containing specific actions;
- The Council Conclusions on the Renovation Wave that repairs the economy now, and creates green buildings for the future, 11 June 2021;

(Findings)

We observe that:

5. Rising housing rents and real estate prices as well as the lack of affordable housing notably in urban areas are common trends in the European Union. In fact, an increasing number of low and middle-income households living in the EU are experiencing challenges to access affordable housing.
- 6.
7. 70% of the EU population lives in urban areas and more than 82 million households face difficulties in financing their rent¹. 17.1% of the EU population lives in overcrowded accommodation and 10.3% of the population spends more than 40% of its income on rent².
8. Homelessness rates are rising and energy poverty is a persistent scourge in many Member States. There are significant inequalities as regards availability and access to adequate housing, particularly for young people, families with children, migrants and people with disabilities. This hampers economic growth by limiting professional mobility and the attractiveness of areas undergoing economic transformation. People with disabilities and elderly people face physical barriers in accessing housing, including social housing, which calls for a greater adaptation of housing. In addition, it poses risk for increasing social disparities in cities as certain neighbourhoods are being gentrified and deprived.
- 9.
10. EU’s building sector plays a significant role in achieving the climate targets and implementing the European Green Deal. Buildings are responsible for about 40% of total energy consumption and 36% of energy-related greenhouse gas emissions in the European Union. It is necessary to increase the energy efficiency of buildings, reuse abandoned and/or unused buildings and

¹ Policy guidelines for affordable housing in European cities, 2018, European Urban Agenda, Housing Partnership

² Report on access to decent and affordable housing for all, January 2021, European Parliament

extend the durability of existing buildings, implement measures to reduce construction waste and increase the presence of green infrastructure. In the effort of reducing the life-cycle emissions in the construction sector and attaining climate goals, incorporating principles of circular economy (such as durability, adaptability, designing for disassembly, etc.) in the renovation and construction of buildings can have a significant effect.

11. The construction sector faces an enormous challenge to achieve the various European targets, while at the same time providing a sufficient number of additional homes. It can also make a significant contribution to job creation and economic growth after the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, many countries are faced with shortage of skilled professionals and rising construction costs due to the lack and high prices of construction material, longer delivery periods and rising energy prices.
12. More than 220 million buildings in the European Union, or about 85% of the building stock, were built before 2001 are not designed to adapt to current and future challenges linked to the climate crisis nor are in line with the EU's ambitious medium and long-term climate goals. Their renovation represents a crucial potential for reducing energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions to reach the 2050 carbon neutrality goal. Apart from the climate neutrality perspective, the comprehensive renovation of the housing stock has a direct impact on the maintenance costs of housing. Nevertheless, the scale of this challenge calls for collective vigilance with regard to the ambitiousness of the objectives, the necessary resources to be allocated to it, the need to bear in mind the social dimension of renovations and the consideration of existing cultural values, while it is inclusive towards low-income households.
13. Climate change and the lack of mitigation can have far-reaching consequences, especially for households living in areas that are particularly vulnerable. Renovation of buildings could also contribute to the improvement of resilience to natural disasters, notably stability and safety of buildings (seismic resistance of buildings for instance).
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15. An increasing number of households in the EU are considered energy-poor, as they cannot afford keeping adequate levels of comfort in their home due to the high energy demand of their house and the increasing energy prices. The renovation of buildings should be designed as a tool to fight against energy poverty.
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17. The Renovation of buildings can also give a powerful contribution to the twin transitions, promoting the uptake of digital solutions. It is necessary to ensure that this digital transition is inclusive towards SMEs and does not exclude vulnerable citizens.
18. A consistent district approach should be implemented, as already outlined in the Renovation Wave strategy: urban planning must be reconsidered with a view to contributing to improving the energy efficiency of cities as a whole.
19. The COVID-19 crisis has reinforced inequalities in access to affordable and sustainable housing in some Member States, as well as pushing more people across the EU into housing cost overburden. The pandemic has also highlighted the need to rethink the spatial planning and

design of housing to integrate the new expectations of citizens in terms of uses and quality of life. It has furthermore evidenced the vulnerability of homeless persons to public health crisis.

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22. In order to prevent urban sprawl and aiming to rationalize the use of land especially in urban areas, state-owned and local authorities' owned land, or brownfields, can represent a highly valuable spatial resource for urban renewal including affordable and social housing. In addition, extensions to existing buildings can contribute to effectively reducing the renovation cost burden and increasing supply of homes.

(Statements and Action points)

We, EU Ministers responsible for Housing, declare:

23. The housing, and construction are key to deliver on the climate objectives set in the European Green Deal, the relevant strategies (Circular economy action plan, Renovation Wave, New European Bauhaus, etc.), the sustainable development goals and to consolidate the European Pillars of Social Rights.

24. These sectors are at the crossroads of EU policies such as energy, environment, climate, urban and territorial development, cohesion, social justice, industry, competition or the Single Market which affects housing policies at different levels of governance and depends on them. Therefore, better coordination of policies in this area is needed. These sectors also have an impact on and a role to play in preserving and developing aesthetical values, architecture, and cultural heritage in the built environment.

25. Housing and construction policy is an exclusive competence of the Member States and/or Regions and requires a place-based approach (in terms of social, cultural, historical, geographical aspects, i.a.) since most of the investments in housing, including sustainable construction and renovation projects take place at the local level, due to the key role played by regional authorities and cities across Europe in putting the Member States' housing policies into practice.

26. With this declaration, the Ministers commit themselves to **better promote Member States' policies related to affordability and access to housing, design and planning, renovation and sustainable, circular and resilient construction (and its products) carried out under fair competition with fair working conditions, in order to draw common lessons and share good practices among the Member States and the local and regional authorities.** In particular, the Ministers recommend the exchange of good practices related to the challenges and opportunities created by tourist accommodation platforms, ensuring that low and middle-income families are not priced out of the private housing and rental market in urban areas.

27. The Ministers underline the importance of providing homes of good quality that are well connected (including green infrastructures), situated in mix-used, compact and dense areas with a high-quality living environment and are close to working areas.

28. The ministers support the reuse of abandoned and unused buildings and their function-wise conversion, when and where possible, in order to reduce construction waste.

29. The Ministers commit themselves to **continue the work resulting from the ministerial conference on housing and construction of 8th March 2022** and invite the future presidencies of the Council of the European Union to continue this work.
30. In this perspective, the Ministers agree on **the organisation of regular meetings of ministers responsible for housing** and of annual meetings of the network of European focal points responsible for housing, which could be a basis for Ministerial meetings with the objective to strengthen affordable, sustainable and inclusive housing in Europe.
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32. The Ministers recommend defining, together with local and regional authorities, **housing strategies to increase the availability of affordable, decent, energy-efficient, decarbonised, sustainably designed accessible and resilient housing, socially mixed neighbourhoods**. These strategies could include the management of cultural heritage, promotion of high-quality architecture and public spaces design and planning.
33. The Ministers recommend pursuing the measures of the national **recovery and resilience plans** in favour of investment in affordable, decent, sustainable and resilient housing, to continue deploying the **Renovation wave and also start implementing the New European Bauhaus Initiative**, by prioritising the energy renovation of the least efficient accommodations and by ensuring the economic and social sustainability of the renovation rate.
34. The Ministers acknowledge that efficiency as well as volumes of new construction and renovation can be increased by industrialisation (factory-built buildings and renovation with factory-produced panels), digitalisation and automation.
35. The Ministers acknowledge that a circular building sector will guarantee economic growth, long-term employment (e.g. repair, recycling, remanufacturing) and will have a positive impact on the climate and environment notably in terms of emissions, materials and waste management.
36. Particular emphasis should be placed on the new projects deployed within the framework of the **New European Bauhaus initiative promoting sustainability, design, aesthetic innovation and inclusion** supported by the European Commission and all European Institutions. A participatory and inclusive approach should be promoted in order the civil society and all related organisations to be part of this initiative, with regard the use and well-being of their living places. The New European Bauhaus implementation must include all levels of governance, especially the local and regional level and a place-based perspective combining all layers on the ground.
37. The ministers recommend that additional housing supply takes into account criteria such as qualitative spatial efficiency, while actively reducing land take and containing urban sprawl, this should be based on an integrated urban development approach.
38. The Ministers recommend that increasing the affordability of housing is dependent on the supply of new or renovated quality housing. All efforts to improve permitting procedures as well as new housing development or renovation financing are encouraged.

39. In this perspective, the Ministers invite the European Commission to support their efforts to promote the development of participatory and inclusive housing solutions, based on sustainable strategies for the use of urban space. For instance, solidarity property companies can be useful tool for some Member States.
40. With regard to access to housing, the Member States will act, or continue to act, to combat existing **inequalities in access to adequate, safe, well-designed and affordable housing and homelessness solutions** as well as better protect the rights of tenants and owner-occupiers and improve the transparency of rental markets.
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42. European funding should complement national and regional support schemes in the housing and construction sector. Therefore, the Ministers ask the Commission to facilitate access to information on **European funding dedicated to the housing and construction sector**. The ministers ask the European Investment Bank Group, which is a major financier of social and affordable housing to continue and develop further its financing and advisory services for sustainable social and affordable housing.