

The housing crisis in Europe: the long absence of planning

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Abstract According to the most recent report by the EU's Joint Research Centre, "House prices have surged by more than 50% since 2015, and rents have risen by more than 13% across the EU": a dramatic increase triggered by economic factors which, the study claims, include increasing land prices and speculative pricing in high-demand areas (Ozdemir & Koukoulakis 2025).

Some of these economic factors may indeed seem out of the control of urban authorities – the increasing pressure of urbanization, demographic transitions and the growing demand for short-term rentals have presented cities with grand and sometimes unprecedented challenges (Egidi et al. 2021). These challenges, in turn, have resulted in a growing share of the European population living in a condition of housing vulnerability, with housing cost-to-income ratios continuing to grow.

Housing vulnerability, however, is not simply the result of uncontrollable market forces, but also of the shrinking role of public authorities at different levels (European, National and local) and of their planning efforts in explicitly addressing the housing crisis (Freemark & Steil 2022): a contraction in social housing sector, an unregulated market for short-term rentals and the lack of balanced agreements with private estate developers are matched with poor planning choices at the local level in most EU contexts (Lee et al. 2022). This planning deficiency is disproportionately perceived by vulnerable populations: though part of the policy discourse around housing, in most EU countries they face stigmatization and socio-spatial barriers to access to housing (Ozdemir & Koukoulakis 2025).

Yet, this scenario is slowly changing, with 2024 bringing about a wave of change in the European Commission's planning approach to housing: a European Energy and Housing Commissioner was appointed, a dedicated Task Force will attempt to bring coherence in the fragmented scenario of EU housing policies and (Housing Europe 2024) and a Committee was formed in December 2024 to focus solely on Housing. How this will translate into national and local policies is, however, still hard to determine.

The research will thus present the preliminary results of a research effort conducted within the framework of the HouseInc European projects, focusing on the drivers of housing vulnerabilities of different marginalized groups in Czech Republic, Germany, Italy and Romania. It will specifically present an overview of housing policies at the National level, followed by a description of the planning (or lack thereof) of housing strategies in four respective countries. After an analytical comparison, conclusions will be drawn on the need to coordinate the different governance and planning levels, bearing in mind the changing EU policy framework on housing.