

6th Housing Partnership Meeting on 22-23 March in Brussels

Important deliveries on better legislation and better knowledge

Vienna House in Brussels hosted the 6th meeting of the Housing Partnership on 22-23 March, where important progress on the better regulation and the better knowledge strands was achieved. Questions on the regulatory framework for public support for affordable housing and a policy toolkit for affordable housing were at the centre of intense discussions.

Concrete proposal for better guidance on EU regulations on housing

One important delivery of the meeting was the conclusion of the “Guidance Paper on EU Regulation and Public Support for Housing”. It unifies the essential results of a long time debate on that topic and is based on scientific findings of widespread case studies of the situation in many cities throughout Europe. Sebastian Garnier from AEDDES and expert on regulation and public support said: “Housing is a basic human right and plays a key role in many of today's societal challenges in urban areas. Housing has a huge impact on people's lives, especially vulnerable people, and remains a source of inequality and instability for national and local economies. Due to this set of socio-economic factors many European cities face increasing difficulties to guarantee adequate and affordable housing to their citizens. The Guidance Paper will help authorities and other actors to better understand how public support for housing investments can be compatible with the current EU state aid rules. The Guidance Paper also includes suggestions to improve EU regulation to enhance the provision of affordable housing and social cohesion in urban areas.”

According to the Pact of Amsterdam the Guidance Paper will be submitted, as part of the Partnership's action plan, for consideration, after informal guidance by the DG Meeting on Urban Matters, to the European Commission. Furthermore, it will be brought to the attention of incoming EU Presidencies in view of their possible inclusion in their working programme

New policy toolkit for affordable housing under progress

Sorcha Edwards and Alice Pittini from Housing Europe, lead partner of the subgroup on finance and funding, presented a proposal for a new policy toolkit for affordable housing. “Despite the odds, affordable housing delivery, even in our cities, is possible. This toolkit will

highlight where and how it is working. Speculation and commodification are driving up the price of homes. Incomes are not keeping the pace. Urbanisation, which is set to reach 80% in Europe by 2020, is raising housing demand in some cities, leaving behind the weakest in shrinking and rural communities. High construction and land prices are another deterrent to those who are tasked with delivering the affordable homes needed to keep our societies functioning, however, where there is a (political) will, there is a way. There are successful policies and schemes, some led by cities and non-commodified housing providers and who are working against the odds to ensure the supply of affordable housing for all. The partnership is working to bring together those inspiring examples to enable others to follow suit. This fits in the better knowledge strand of the partnership's work, however we will also investigate the role of better regulation and finance at European level in encouraging more replication of the examples featured.”

Discussion about the definition “affordable housing”

Dr. Orna Rosenfeld, scientist at Science Po and housing expert serving the Directorate- , presented the results of a new research looking at the ways the members of the Housing Partnership define the term ‘affordable housing’. Her findings suggest that there is a rich variety of interpretations and approaches to delivering affordable housing among the members. This gives the Partnership an opportunity to take its own position on the issue of definition of affordable housing, and to decide the way it is used in its work. After a short discussion the Housing Partnership concluded that there should not be any uniform definition of the term ‘affordable housing’ since the scope of using the term can vary from one Member State to another, from one city to another. In conclusion Dr. Rosenfeld highlighted: “The partnership has decided for ‘

. This is a challenging approach to implement. However, this Partnership decision is a vital step in ensuring design and delivery of rich variety of affordable housing options that are critically needed in cities across Europe”. The scope of the Housing Partnership is on municipal, social, cooperative housing, affordable rental housing and affordable home ownership.

Study visit on social and municipal housing through the “Marolles” – a low-income district in Brussels

On the second day in the afternoon the participants were invited to attend a tour to the “Marolles”, a marginalized urban district in Brussels. Leo Terhalle (City-guide) showed some characteristic social housing blocks and told some exciting stories about workers` life and the history of the Marolles.