**FEANTSA’S CONTRIBUTION**

# Impact of climate change on the right to adequate housing

FEANTSA is the European Federation of National Organizations Working Together to end Homelessness. FEANTSA has over 120 member organisations from 24 European countries. FEANTSA’s work on climate change and the right to housing concentrates on the risks and opportunities of the energy transition for the most vulnerable people and households.

FEANTSA has been following the main policy developments at EU level related to climate and housing such as the [Fit for 55 package.](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/delivering-european-green-deal_en)

[FEANTSA's Position on the Social Climate Fund](https://www.feantsa.org/public/user/Resources/Position_papers/2022/FEANTSA_Social_Climate_fund_2.pdf) and [Finding alternative ways to finance the Social Climate Fund](https://www.feantsa.org/en/report/2022/07/27/finding-alternative-ways-to-finance-the-social-climate-fund?bcParent=27).

Under the umbrella of the European Housing Forum issued a joint statement: [Decarbonisation of the EU Housing Stock Through Contextualised EU Climate Policies: A Housing Sector Perspective](https://www.feantsa.org/public/user/Resources/Position_papers/Decarbonisation_of_the_EU_housing_stock_through_contextualised_EU_climate_policies_-_A_housing_sector_perspective_-_Oct_2021.pdf).

FEANTSA is also a member of [the Right to Energy Coalition](https://righttoenergy.org/)

In this submission we will give an overview of the European perspective of the impact of climate change on the right to adequate housing, focusing specifically on the most vulnerable people and households with illustrating examples from all over Europe.

*In real life*

## Main effects of the climate crisis on the enjoyment of the right to adequate housing

There are two sides to this challenge. First, housing is a key determinant of general health and climate change resilience. Once lost, problems in all areas compound. Therefore, the climate crisis has a disproportionate impact on lowest income groups living in inadequate housing because 1) they are more exposed to extreme temperature, 2) they are already limiting their energy consumption and are therefore less demand elastic, less able to adapt to climate impact (extreme temperature) and climate change mitigation policies (e.g. buying an electrical car to adapt to new fuel emission rules).

Indeed, second, while FEANTSA recognizes the need for ambitious measures to tackle the climate crisis, there is also evidence that climate driven policies, if not carefully crafted and accompanied by ambitious social policies, can negatively and disproportionally impact poor and vulnerable households. Please find below some examples of the main effects of climate crisis either direct impact, or collateral impact through green transition policies.

### 1.Direct Impact

See the work of Dr Shakoor Hajat (Centre on Climate Change and Planetary Health London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine) on climate change, homelessness and health that shows:

* Globally, climate change is contributing to the prevalence of homelessness through housing loss, migration, poverty, and other intersecting stressors (e.g. conflict)
* Homeless/vulnerably-housed populations are disproportionately exposed to climatic events, but currently lack of empirical evidence of climate impacts on such groups
* <https://www.lshtm.ac.uk/aboutus/people/hajat.shakoor>

### 2.Collateral Impact

See the work of Prof. Katrin Grossman (“Energy efficiency for whom?”) that shows how energy retrofitting is commonly seen as a measure to both decrease energy use for heating and to alleviate energy poverty. However, little attention is paid to the repercussions of retrofitting in urban space and segregation dynamics. Her work identifies concerns regarding the social impacts of retrofitting measures for households, neighbourhoods, and on a city-wide level.

Please see FEANTSA’s report: [“Renovation: Staying on Top of the Wave, avoiding social risks and ensuring the benefits”](https://www.feantsa.org/public/user/Resources/reports/Renovation_Wave_final_report.pdf%29)

For more information on this topic, please also see:

[The effects of home energy efficiency upgrades on social housing tenants: evidence from Ireland](https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12053-018-9688-7)

[New homes in UK’s struggling neighbourhoods disproportionately affected by increase in flood risk from climate change](https://www.lse.ac.uk/granthaminstitute/news/new-homes-in-uks-struggling-neighbourhoods-disproportionately-affected-by-increase-in-flood-risk-from-climate-change/)

## Differences on how the climate crisis affects the right to adequate housing in urban and rural areas.

[How will climate change, over the coming decades, impact the urban and rural areas of Scotland differently?](https://fraserofallander.org/how-will-climate-change-impact-urban-and-rural-areas-of-scotland-differently/)

## Groups distinctly affected in the enjoyment of their right to adequate housing as a result of the climate crisis

As mentioned above, people experiencing homelessness are disproportionately affected by the climate crisis first because they are overexposed to extreme temperatures.[[1]](#footnote-1) [[2]](#footnote-2) Second, the overall impact of climate change will be likely to lead to population displacement (migration crisis) with implications for host countries in their capacity to provide adequate housing for all. (For more information, see the work of [the Global Climate-Homelessness Network](https://www.homelesshub.ca/climate-homelessness))

## Key rulings of national courts and tribunals protecting tenants and homeowners from the impact of the climate crisis or on their right to adequate housing

Even though there is no explicit right in the the European Convention of Human Rights to a clean environment, Article 8 has traditionally been the environmental route into the case law of the European Court.[[3]](#footnote-3) Environmental case-law has to a large extent developed on the basis of the findings in the case of Lόpez Ostra v. Spain, 1994, that severe environmental pollution may affect individuals’ wellbeing and prevent them from enjoying their homes in such a way as to affect their private and family life adversely. For more information on the case law of the Court check their guide about Environmental case-law. [[4]](#footnote-4)

With the urgency of climate change, a distinct right to a healthy environment is also taking shape within the Council of Europe system. A proposal of a draft of an additional protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights would make such the right enforceable in law in all countries which ratified it.

In the landmark Carbon Majors inquiry carried out by the Philippines Human Rights Commission, civil society organizations lamented human rights violations associated with the impacts of climate change, and the responsibility of the so-called Carbon Majors for causing these. The applicants alleged breaches of a series of human rights recognized both in national and international law, most saliently the rights to life, to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, to food, to water, to sanitation, to adequate housing and to self-determination.

*In measures*

## Energy efficiency, green urban planning, climate mitigation and adaptation policies and programmes and the right to adequate housing

At FEANTSA we report that the link is not adequately established between energy efficiency, green urban planning and the right to adequate housing. On the contrary, the risk of unintended negative consequences of energy efficiency and green urban planning policies has been raised by some early experiences of renovation programmes, such as increased overall housing costs, renovictions and “green gentrification”. For more information on the social impact of energy efficiency programs, particularly in the context of the right to adequate housing, please see FEANTSA’s report: “[Targeting energy efficiency renovation to improve housing conditions of the most vulnerable](https://www.feantsa.org/en/report/2021/03/19/targeting-energy-efficiency-renovation-to-improve-housing-conditions-of-the-most-vulnerable?bcParent=27)”

*Towards* *a just transition*

## Specific legislation, policies, or programmes adopted to put in place and finance a just transition to a rights-compliant, climate-resilient and carbon-neutral housing for all

As the world debates actions to combat climate change, the success of reducing greenhouse gas emissions relies largely on the transition to a low carbon and energy-efficient built environment. Increasing population and economic growth also reveals a greater need for buildings. The challenge is how we boost access to affordable housing for everybody while at the same time reducing emissions. Affordability is especially relevant for vulnerable and low-income households, whose residents often live in social housing. It is essential that people are put in the driver's seat of the energy transition to make energy-performing and sustainable buildings widely available, in particular for lower-income households confronted with high energy bills and energy inefficient homes. Renovation has to be used as a lever to address energy poverty and access to healthy housing for all households, especially the most vulnerable. Policymakers have the responsibility to shape more resilient housing systems and ensure that decent homes and neighbourhoods are affordable, safe and accessible.

Some best practices:

[**Slovenia**’s long-term climate strategy until 2050](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/LTS1_SLOVENIA_EN.pdf)

“Slovenia will implement the measures for mitigation and reduction of energy poverty within social and housing policies and the targeted measures of EEU and RES. Measures to adapt to climate change will be designed within the framework of the housing policy and will be amended, if necessary, with targeted measures for the most vulnerable groups upon the reform of the national housing programme and when reviewing the NECP.”

“A financing model of sustainable and broader renovation for multi-dwelling buildings in Slovenia, which are at highest seismic risk, will be established. Slovenia will thus define additional dedicated financial resources within the housing policy”

“The key measures defined in the NECP for promoting RES are financial supports: investment supports for households and district heating systems, and the support scheme promoting decentralised electricity generation from RES”

Several programmes have been successfully launched to provide financial support to low-income people to compensate for renovation and energy costs. The “Habiter Mieux” (Better Living) programme was created in France in 2010.

**Lithuania**: New financing for energy efficiency loans with Siauliu Bankas”, 3 January 2019. Available at <https://www.eib.org/en/press/all/2019-001-new-financing-for-energy-efficiency-loans-in-lithuania-with-siauliu-bankas> (accessed on 23 November 2020).

Another innovative scheme that was introduced in the **Netherlands**, is called Energisprong (Energy Leap), which focuses on social housing. It aims to fund investments in retrofitting through bill savings, ensuring no net additional cost to tenants. Instead of paying their energy bills, tenants pay a similar amount to the housing associations. Using this money, the corporations pay building companies to retrofit the houses, which have developed “industrialized” renovation procedures that are highly cost-effective.

Other initiatives can be found in this report: [Targeting energy efficiency renovation to improve housing conditions of the most vulnerable](https://www.feantsa.org/public/user/Resources/reports/Targeting_Energy_Efficiency_Renovation_Report.pdf)

One stop shops for renovation and energy efficiency: <https://opengela.eus/en>, (Basque Country, Spain) or <https://mehi.hu/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/mehi_renopont_rec_20220321.pdf> (Hungary)

ICCARus - Improving housing Conditions for CAptive Residents in Ghent: <https://uia-initiative.eu/en/uia-cities/ghent-call3>

“With this project, we renovate the houses of 100 households in Ghent. Candidates will be unburdened and supported technically, financially, administrative and socially. Due to the renovations, the general quality of living of the households and of the neighbourhoods in our city are improving. By using a recurring fund, the public finance is not only used for a limited group but can be used over and over again to fight this main urban challenge.”

## Measures to ensure that the costs of green transition in the housing sector are fairly shared

Not enough is done to ensure that the cost of the green transition in the housing sector will not be disproportionate for lowest-income groups.

Leaving no one behind requires explicitly recognising and addressing the social risks
constituted by climate measures in the context of housing. National authorities must set up a regulatory and financial framework to 1) improve lowest-income groups’ access to decent, affordable housing, including by directly addressing poor housing conditions 2) prevent the green transition policies from contributing to housing exclusion due to increased housing costs.

FEANTSA proposes that, to ensure a positive social impact, it is necessary to massively invest to target first and foremost inadequate housing, housing of lowest income groups who need it most, particularly in a context of increasing energy prices and inflation.

First, funding (local, national and European) shall ring-fence appropriate amounts for the renovation of buildings inhabited by vulnerable households and people living in social housing. This will mean lowest income groups on the private rental sector but also poor or vulnerable people in social housing and owner-occupied dwellings.

Secondly, public funding should be targeted towards the retrofitting of inadequate temporary accommodation (e.g., hostels, shelters, refuge accommodation, etc.) and transform them to improve both energy performance and social impact, in particular through investment in the “Housing First” model, which prioritize independent, adequate, and stable housing over collective emergency accommodation, bringing both an environmental and a social win.

The main barriers to achieving a just transition are inequalities and lack of political will.

**Adaptation strategies needed to ensure the continued habitability of housing in the face of the climate crisis**

As explained by Dr. Shakoor Hajat, housing is a key determinant of general health and climate change resilience. Once lost, problems in all areas compound. Costs and complexities of intervening increase rapidly the further systems engage along the time course. Prevention is far more efficient than crisis response. Concrete steps include the development of a national housing strategy, enabling and incentivizing cross-sectoral and jurisdictional collaborations. More immediate measures should include public access to clean drinking water.

## Role of international cooperation, technology transfer and development assistance of States and multilateral agencies to ensure a just transition

One of the essential roles of international cooperation is to place the social dimension at the heart of the green transition. Social ambition is a must for climate transition and is necessary to ensure the social acceptability (and therefore feasibility) of the green transition.

1. https://www.bigissue.com/news/housing/how-can-i-help-homeless-people-during-a-uk-heatwave/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://hogarsi.org/imaginate-que-vivir-los-365-dias-del-ano-fueran-tan-duros-como-sobrellevar-esta-ola-de-calor/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Guide on Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Updated on 31 August 2021 https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Guide\_Art\_8\_ENG.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Guide to the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights. Environment. Updated on 30 April 2022. https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Guide\_Environment\_ENG.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-4)