

HUMAN RIGHTS TALK

Ending child homelessness in Europe: policy and legal pathways

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Key messages

With the participation of



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These are the key outcomes of the Human Rights Talk on Ending child homelessness in Europe: policy and legal pathways, held on 22 September 2026 to reflect on how EU social policy instruments can be used to address the issue, and to inform discussions around the Council recommendation on fighting housing exclusion and homelessness.

Homelessness is a matter of human rights

Child homelessness is one of the most serious forms of poverty and social exclusion. It permanently undermines the effective exercise of the full range of human rights, including the child's best interests as well as the rights to adequate housing, education, health and social protection. It also has lasting consequences for children's friendships, development and ability to simply be children. Ending child homelessness is both a moral duty and a legal obligation under international and European human rights law, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the European Social Charter and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

A growing crisis in Europe

Nearly one in four children is at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the European Union, and an estimated 400,000 children experience homelessness. If children living in shelters or temporary accommodation were also included, the numbers would be considerably higher. Despite increasing political attention and investment, child homelessness continues to rise in many countries. To be able to ascertain the extent of the issue, States should agree on a universal definition of homelessness, such as the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS), and collect quality disaggregated data that captures the situation of children and families.

Housing is a right, not a privilege

Homelessness is, at least in part, the result of financialization of housing, which prioritizes investment returns over people's housing needs. States should regulate housing matters in line with the social function of property to ensure that it is treated as a public good and a human right.

Homelessness is about housing, but not only

It is a multidimensional phenomenon that is often the result of several interacting circumstances, such as unaffordable housing, inadequate income support, low labour market attachment, family breakdown, domestic violence, discrimination, migration status, disability, and health problems. Roma and migrant children, children with disabilities and children leaving alternative care are disproportionately affected by homelessness. Increasing the housing supply is only one aspect of tackling child homelessness. Addressing it requires both structural policies to strengthen social inclusion and access to services, and targeted interventions for children and families at risk. It also requires a whole-of-government approach that involves all relevant services and levels of governance, and makes strategic use of EU instruments to leverage action.

Move from emergency - to human rights-based response

Too often Governments focus on emergency responses rather than preventing homelessness. A human rights-based approach requires addressing root causes through early intervention, eviction prevention, family support, adequate social protection and community-based services. Policies should be guided by children's rights, informed by Child Rights Impact Assessments and dedicated budgeting, and developed in consultation with children, families, people with lived experience and CSOs. Responses must avoid criminalisation and reject discriminatory or identity-based housing solutions.

EU leadership role

The EU has a crucial role to play in setting ambitious standards, as its policies influence housing and homelessness responses globally. In addition to EU funds, initiatives such as the Anti-Poverty Strategy, the Affordable Housing Plan, the strengthened European Child Guarantee, and the Council Recommendation on Fighting Housing Exclusion and Homelessness, create an important opportunity for progress. Those instruments should be leveraged and their implementation assessed against Member States' obligations under international human rights law. Human rights mechanisms of the United Nations and the Council of Europe can help provide valuable guidance and support in this process.