

Lack of data on housing and disability

Policy Briefing

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Objective of the paper

The human right to adequate housing is more than just four walls and a roof. It is the right of every woman, man, youth and child to gain and sustain a safe and secure home and community in which to live in peace and dignity.¹

People with intellectual disabilities face difficulties to access adequate housing, which is highly intertwined with their higher exposure to poverty, homelessness, and institutionalisation. While adequate housing was already essential to achieve good standards of living before, as people are asked to stay at home in times of lockdown, the importance of adequate housing became more visible. People with intellectual disabilities are now isolated, and this affects their wellbeing. This increases the need to get a full picture of their housing situation².

Europe is undergoing a general housing crisis. As there is no reliable data on the subject collected at the European level, showing the situation of people with and without disabilities, policies cannot appropriately target the obstacles people with intellectual disabilities face to access housing.

Housing is the starting point to achieve an adequate standard of living and to fulfil many other rights. Accurate knowledge of the situation, particularly on the accessibility of housing for people with intellectual disabilities is needed to finally transition to independent living.

This briefing aims to raise awareness on the lack of data regarding adequate housing for people with intellectual disabilities in Europe. It will first define the right to housing in international and European law, and the obligation to collect data on disability. It will then present the main issues with good practices and recommendations to collect accurate data on housing and people with intellectual disabilities.

¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/housing/toolkit/pages/righttoadequatehousingtoolkit.aspx>

² Report of the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context, Balakrishnan Rajagopal- COVID-19 and the right to adequate housing: impacts and the way forward, <https://undocs.org/A/75/148>

Definitions

The right to housing

United Nations

The **United Nations' (UN) Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** understands the right to housing as "the right to live somewhere in security, peace and dignity"³. The right to adequate housing is not only the right to a roof and four walls, but it also includes several other aspects:

- Freedom from arbitrary interference and the right to choose one's residence;
- Non-discriminatory access and participation in housing decision-making;
- Security in the community, appropriate infrastructure, habitability (including energy and heating), affordability, appropriate location (close to basic services and free from pollution), and cultural adequacy;
- Accessibility, taking into account the specific characteristics of disadvantaged groups;
- Protection against forced evictions and arbitrary destruction of the home.⁴

For people with disabilities, accessibility is a key element of housing. But as disability is complex and diverse, this may translate very differently according to the needs of the person. When housing is designed accessibly, the specific necessities of people with disabilities are taken into account; when housing is conceptualised according to the principles of universal design, it aims to reach all people.⁵

The **UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** has addressed the issue of housing in its General Comment N°2, reminding that "social housing programmes should offer housing that is, inter alia, accessible for persons with disabilities and the

³ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment n° 4: The right to adequate housing (art. 11 (1) of the Covenant), 1991,

https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CESCR/Shared%20Documents/1_Global/INT_CESCR_GEC_4759_E.doc

⁴ The right to adequate housing, Fact sheet n° 21, UN Habitat,

https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKewi9JeRnpvuAhW0mFwKHfUUCaAQFjAJegQIARAC&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ohchr.org%2Fdocuments%2Fpublications%2Ffs21_rev_1_housing_en.pdf&usq=AOvVaw18fzt3seDrBxqhDEHBsg28

⁵ What is the difference between accessible, usable, and universal design?, 4 March 2019,

<https://www.washington.edu/doit/what-difference-between-accessible-usable-and-universal-design>

elderly”.⁶ In the General Comment N°5, the Committee recognised barriers to access housing as one of the difficulties to transition to independent living, as a lack of choices regarding adequate housing will push people with disabilities into institutions.⁷ The Committee considers that adequate housing is also part of article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD), as “access to housing means having the option to live in the community on an equal basis with others”.⁸ However, the Committee has consistently noted persistent issues in regard to the right to adequate housing, particularly regarding data collection⁹.

Council of Europe

Article 16 of the [European Social Charter of 1961](#) envisions social housing as one of the means to ensure “*the necessary conditions for the full development of the family*”, while its [revised version](#) enshrines in its article 31 the right to housing, for which States Parties should take measures designed:

1. *“to promote access to housing of an adequate standard;*
2. *to prevent and reduce homelessness with a view to its gradual elimination;*
3. *to make the price of housing accessible to those without adequate resources”.*

The **European Committee of Social Rights of the Council of Europe** affirmed that States must allow vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities, to access housing.¹⁰

European Union

The [Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union](#) brings up the right to social housing and housing assistance “*in order to combat social exclusion and poverty (...) so as to ensure a decent existence for all those who lack sufficient resources*”.

⁶ Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, General comment No. 2 (2014) - Article 9: Accessibility, 22 May 2014.

⁷ Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, General comment No. 5 (2017) on living independently and being included in the community, 27 October 2017.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Concluding observations on the initial report of Kuwait, 18 October 2019.

¹⁰ European Committee of Social Rights, Conclusions on Italy, 2003, https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwj4hMrGv8PsAhXRC-wKHYWUD5EQFjAAegQIBBAC&url=https%3A%2F%2Frm.coe.int%2F168070cacc&usg=AOvVaw0RRmFwul_Qq7sLHQY08V5g

The European Pillar of Social Rights takes a step further and recognises that:

- a. *“Access to social housing or housing assistance of good quality shall be provided for those in need.*
- b. *Vulnerable people have the right to appropriate assistance and protection against forced eviction.*
- c. *Adequate shelter and services shall be provided to the homeless in order to promote their social inclusion.”*

In addition, the **European Parliament** adopted a resolution in favour of coordination on social housing at the European Union level, recognising that people with disabilities are more prone to homelessness and lack of adapted housing, and called for more accurate and disaggregated data to analyse the social impact of housing on people with disabilities.¹¹ The European Parliament has also adopted a report on the access to decent and affordable housing, recognising the obstacles for people with disabilities to access housing and calling for deinstitutionalisation and improvement of the accessibility of housing.¹²

National level

There are divergences in the constitutional recognition of housing as a fundamental right:

- In France, the right to housing is a fundamental right recognised by the Constitution. It is an “opposable” right, which means that you may require the authorities to fulfil your right to housing if, for example, a carer of a person with disabilities lives in inadequate housing.¹³
- In Spain, the right to housing is recognised as a principle of economic and social policies, and two autonomous communities consider it a fundamental right.

¹¹ European Parliament resolution of 11 June 2013 on social housing in the European Union (2012/2293(INI)), [EUR-Lex - 52013IP0246 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/lex/52013IP0246-EN/20130611-01-0001-1)

¹² European Parliament resolution of 21 January 2021 on access to decent and affordable housing for all (2019/2187(INI)), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0020_EN.html

¹³ Jurifiable, Tout sur le droit au logement, <https://www.jurifiable.com/conseil-juridique/droit-immobilier/droit-au-logement-0>

- It is also recognised as a constitutional right in Belgium – where they even mention the notion of “decency”¹⁴ –, in Portugal and in the Netherlands.¹⁵

The right to adequate housing is linked to the right to privacy and family life, an adequate standard of living, healthcare, independent living, human dignity, and non-discrimination, and it has been recognised as a human right by many international and European instruments (see table below).

International framework overview¹⁶	
Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948	Article 25 recognises the right to an adequate standard of living, including housing.
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1966.	Article 11 establishes the right to an adequate standard of living , which includes the right to housing.
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966	Article 17 recognises the prohibition of arbitrary unlawful interference with the privacy of the home.
Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989	Article 27 recognises the right to housing.
United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of 2006	The Convention recognises the right to an adequate standard of living , with an explicit mention of the right to housing in article 28, and the right to live in the community in article 19.

¹⁴ Human Settlement Country Profile – Belgium, https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKewjip5zA_Z3uAhWPFMAKHZtIB40QFjANegQIGhAC&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.un.org%2Fesa%2Fagenda21%2Fnatinfo%2Fcountr%2Fbelgium%2Fhsettlembelgium04f.pdf&usq=AOvVaw2fcOnV3P9HPa_cS35tg38z

¹⁵ Michael Kolocek, The Human Right to Housing in the 27 Member States of the European Union, 2013, https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKewijsMOuoTs_AhUO1BoKHfGjAG0QFjAAegQIAhAC&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.feantsa.org%2Fdownload%2Fmk_paper712726667342_8107546.pdf&usq=AOvVaw2ml61s0C8hMXuHcRv5RpEI

¹⁶ This list is not exhaustive; other instruments recognising the right to housing include the International Labour Organization’s 1962 Convention No. 117 concerning Basic Aims and Standards of Social Policy (article 5 (2)); the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951 (article 21); the 1965 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (article 5 (e)(iii)); the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (articles 14 (2) and 15 (2)); the International Labour Organization’s 1989 Convention No. 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries (articles 14, 16 and 17); and the 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (article 43 (1)(d)).

Council of Europe	
European Social Charter of the Council of Europe of 1961 , and revised version of 1996.	The Charter understands the provision of housing as a measure to fulfil the right of the family to social, legal and economic protection , and the right to housing has been recognised in its revised version .
European Union	
Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union of 2000	Article 34 recognises the right to “ social housing and assistance ”.
of 2017	Principle 19 encompasses the right to housing and assistance for the homeless, calling for assistance regarding housing and protection against forced evictions for vulnerable groups .

Data collection and disability

While there is a general lack of data on disability, having accurate and disaggregated data is crucial to build well-informed policies and to monitor progress of existing ones. Furthermore, data can contribute to create awareness on pressing issues.

- **Accurate** and reliable data refers to the quality of the data, whether the values the data contains are correct or correspond to reality. Data accuracy has two elements: correct values and consistent presentation.¹⁷ Often, when discussing issues that affect a very large population, a sample will be used to present the data. Samples can be representative, random or systematic. Choosing a representative sample can be interesting for research, but when conducting large studies, the samples tend to be random. To make it as accurate as possible, the sample should be large, and try to include diverse population groups.
- To gain as much knowledge as possible from data collection, data should be **disaggregated**. Disaggregating data means breaking it down into multiple

¹⁷ What is data accuracy, <https://www.erp-information.com/data-accuracy.html>

categories or variables. For example, when conducting a study on housing, respondents should be divided according to whether they have a disability and by type of disability. This would improve the study because it would inform data collectors on the differences between population groups.

- Another way to make data more accurate is by **mixing objective and subjective elements**, particularly when analysing certain aspects of housing. On the one hand, objective data refers to physical elements that can be observed with our senses – for instance, the number of bedrooms in a house. On the other hand, subjective data refers to the views of the respondents on a particular topic – such as personal satisfaction regarding your home.

Collecting accurate data is not only a recommendation, but an international obligation under Article 31 of the UN CRPD: “*appropriate information, including statistical and research data, to enable [the State Parties] to formulate and implement policies to give effect to the present Convention.*” According to the Convention, this information “*shall be disaggregated*”. However, these obligations are often not respected, as many countries lack reliable data on disability.¹⁸

The situation on data collection in Europe

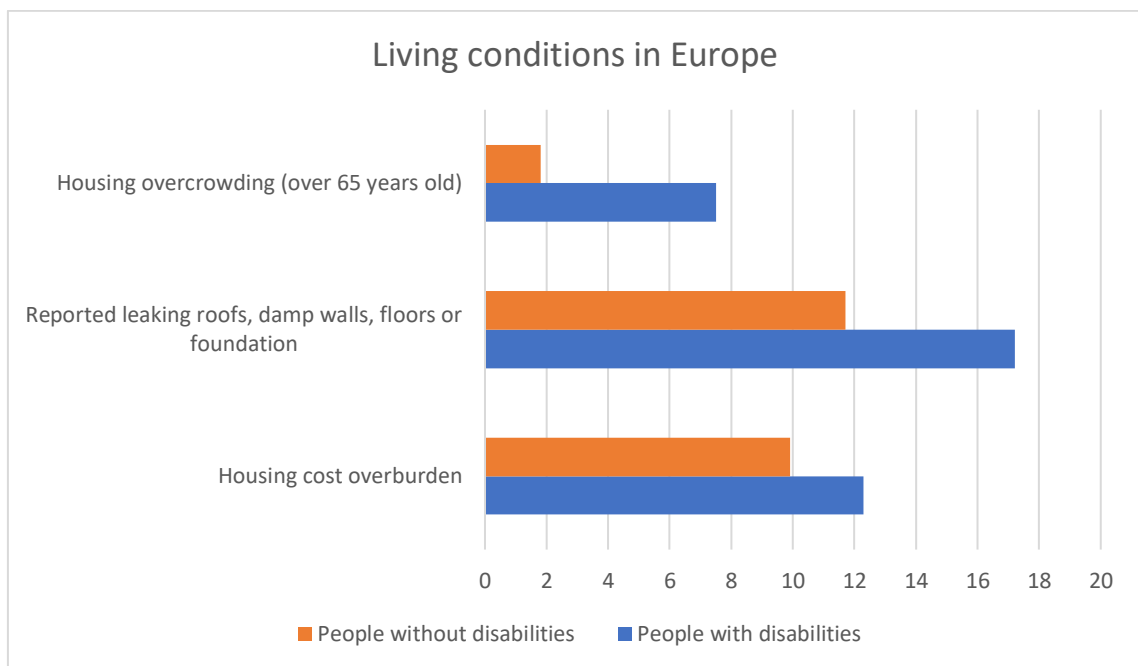
Data at the European Union level

As the European Union has certain competences on housing, particularly regarding energy policies and the housing market, collecting data on housing at the European level would be an asset to compare between countries and to inform policies, particularly regarding people with disabilities. This data could also help compare the situation among countries, which would start a conversation on comparative policies. However, data on housing at the European Union level presents certain issues, and comparing data among countries can be challenging.

¹⁸ Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Improvement of disability data and statistics: objectives and challenges, 2015, https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwj7y6Xgn-bsAhVHzhoKHTweDw4QFjABegQIBBAC&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.un.org%2Fdisabilities%2Fdocuments%2FCOP%2FCrpd_csp_2015_3.doc&usg=AOvVaw0SikCF057wfeXKzTM6Wv k

Eurostat, the European Union statistics agency, collects data on housing conditions and disability in the European Union. Their statistics show that people with disabilities have higher housing costs, that their housing conditions are worse and when over 65, they face higher housing overcrowding:

- People with disabilities face a higher cost overburden than those without disabilities; 12.3% in comparison to 9.9%;
- More people with disabilities are affected by pollution, insecurity or damaged housing; for instance, 17.2% of people with disabilities reported leaking roofs, damp walls, floors or foundation, or rot in window frames and floors, while only 11.7% of those without disabilities reported these issues;
- Housing overcrowding of people with disabilities over 65 years old was of 7.5% in 2017, while the average for those without disabilities was of 4.6%.¹⁹



However, the methodology in the collection of the data raises some questions. On the one hand, the definition of disability used by Eurostat is a “global activity limitation”. This definition does not reflect the social model of disability of the UN CRPD, which the European Union ratified. A definition that reflects the social and environmental barriers people with disabilities find in their everyday lives would be more appropriate.

¹⁹ EUROSTAT, Disability statistics – housing conditions, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Disability_statistics_housing_conditions#People_over_65_with_activity_limitation_more_likely_to_face_overcrowding

- The definition of disability should be **harmonised** at the European level, and be in line with the social model of disability of the UN CRPD.

On the other hand, the data is not disaggregated per type of disability, which may hinder the accuracy of some information showed in the study. As a result, the situation of people with intellectual disabilities is unknown. For instance, the study shows that young people with disabilities are less likely to live in overcrowded spaces. Knowing that many people with intellectual disabilities are institutionalised from a young age, this may not be their case.

When looking at the possibility of comparing data produced individually by countries, the diversity in data collection methods and definitions can hinder data comparison. Countries have different definitions of disability, sometimes outdated and focused on limitations.²⁰ This is also a main obstacle when looking at data on homelessness, often collected by civil society organisations, as national agencies do not know how to reach homeless people, with varying definitions of homelessness – for example, some may take into account informal housing while others do not.²¹

Including people with disabilities in data

There are certain issues when observing data on housing and disability that are in fact common to all data collection on disability. The main obstacle being insufficient data, there are still many other issues to overcome even when there is some data.

As mentioned, an extremely concerning problem is the **lack of disaggregated data** by type of disability. When data is not broken down between people with disabilities and without, but also among types of disabilities, we do not get a full picture of the situation. Data on housing disaggregated by type of disability is particularly rare.

²⁰ Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Improvement of disability data and statistics: objectives and challenges, 2015, https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKewj7y6Xgn-bsAhVHzhoKHTweDw4QFjABegQIBBAC&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.un.org%2Fdisabilities%2Fdocuments%2FCOP%2Fcrpd_csp_2015_3.doc&usq=AOvVaw0SikCF057wfeXKzTM6Wv_k

²¹ Housing Europe and FEANTSA, The European Pillar of Social Rights Social housing and the fight against homelessness: discussion on the future EU action plan, 10 December 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kOYAhs-CN8>

→ Data must be **disaggregated by type of disability** (i.e. visual impairment, physical or intellectual disability), and between institutions and individual households.

People with intellectual disabilities must be included in data. To achieve this, surveys should aim to reach out to them, including people living in institutions, in informal housing or in homelessness.

Moreover, relying on **self-identification** of persons with disabilities can hinder data accuracy. Due to prejudices, lack of diagnosis or of knowledge on disability, many perceive their situation as not severe enough to count as a disability. This means data would be incomplete, because it might only reflect the situation of those with complex support needs, and would not provide an accurate picture of people with disabilities.²²

There is also a tendency to have large number of **non-respondents** when surveys on disability are conducted. This might be because the questions are not accessible, or because they do not think answering is useful. It should also be noted that even in surveys regarding disability, people with intellectual disabilities and people with complex support needs may be excluded. When conducting surveys, people with intellectual disabilities might not get asked to respond because they are **not considered able** to answer or they are perceived as **too complicated to reach out to**. This judgment on capacity will make the results of the survey not representative of people with intellectual disabilities and complex support needs.

People with intellectual disabilities are also excluded from surveys when these contain complex questions, can only be answered online, or are **inaccessible** (not in easy-to-read format, nor accessible for people with hearing and visual impairments). For instance, in **Slovenia**, in the course of a study conducted on accessibility of the built environment, researchers contacted people with disabilities individually and representative organisations. They noted that the level of response among representative organisations

²² Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Improvement of disability data and statistics: objectives and challenges, 2015, https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwj7y6Xgn-bsAhVHzhoKHTweDw4QFjABegQIBBAC&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.un.org%2Fdisabilities%2Fdocuments%2FCOP%2Fcrpd_csp_2015_3.doc&usg=AOvVaw0SikCF057wfeXKzTM6Wv k

was higher, admitting that some people with disabilities were not able to answer to the questionnaire individually.²³

- ➔ Surveys must be **made accessible** and make sure to include all people with disabilities. Allowing respondents to answer by proxy, to choose their preferred platform (phone, online...), and providing them accessible information, also in easy-to-read, could help enlarge the sample and accurately represent all people with disabilities.
- ➔ An appropriate way to ensure reaching out to people with intellectual disabilities is by contacting their representative organisations, that can act as a bridge between data collectors and the respondents.²⁴ Organisations of people with intellectual disabilities should also be consulted regarding the accessibility of surveys.

France

For a recent medical paper, the survey was diffused directly through organisations of people with disabilities so they could get in touch with their members and groups of people with disabilities and chronic diseases on social networks.²⁵

Data on people living in institutions

Often people living in institutions are excluded from data on housing because care homes are not considered private homes. In some instances, statistics on institutions combine data on people institutionalised due to old age and due to disability, not allowing to know the percentage of people with disabilities living in institutions, as in the case of data collected in **Ukraine**²⁶ and in **Belarus**.²⁷

²³ Disabled people and accessibility: How successful is Slovenia in the elimination and prevention of built-environment and communication barriers?, 2009,

https://www.jstor.org/stable/24920466?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents

²⁴ European Disability Forum and Innovation to Inclusion (i2i), Inclusion counts: Data driven advocacy for implementation of the CRPD, 4 December 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qaQdnaUOqic> (1:05:17-1:11:00)

²⁵ Détresse psychologique pendant le premier confinement lié à la Covid-19 : des facteurs de vulnérabilité spécifiques aux personnes vivant avec une maladie chronique ou un handicap, February 2021, <https://www.irdes.fr/recherche/questions-d-economie-de-la-sante/255-detresse-psychologique-pendant-le-premier-confinement-lie-a-la-covid-19.pdf>

²⁶ State Statistics Services of Ukraine, Statistical Yearbook of Ukraine for 2018, 2019.

²⁷ National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus, Nursing homes for the elderly and disabled adults and children, <https://www.belstat.gov.by/en/ofitsialnaya-statistika/Demographic-and-social-statistics/social-protection/annual-data-6/nursing-homes-for-the-elderly-and-disabled-adults-and-children/>

It is important to note that many institutions would not qualify as “adequate housing”, as they do not provide privacy for the residents and do not allow them to live an independent life.

However, many people with intellectual disabilities live in institutions. So, if data collectors do not include residential institutions in their surveys, people with intellectual disabilities will automatically be underrepresented in the data collected.

- ➔ Data on housing must also look at residential institutions, the number of people living there, of which age (particularly, if children with disabilities live in institutions), and in what conditions.

Croatia

To conduct the deinstitutionalisation plan in Croatia, the Center of Rehabilitation in Zagreb identifies the number of residential institutions and their users in Croatia, disaggregating them by type of disability.²⁸

Hungary

Official statistics show the number of care homes for persons with disabilities, beds, residents and occupancy rate, displaying the evolution by year.²⁹ The number of residents in supported housing, disaggregated by disability, psychiatric patients, and addicts, is also available.³⁰

Denmark

In Denmark, statistics show the number of people receiving disability services, disaggregated between men and women and showing the numbers of people living in supported housing.³¹

²⁸ Operativni plan deinstitutionalizacije i transformacije domova socijalne skrbi i drugih pravnih osoba koje obavljaju djelatnost socijalne skrbi u republici hrvatskoj 2014. – 2016, www.europski-fondovi.eu/sites/default/files/dokumenti/Operativni_plan_deinstitutionalizacije_i_transformacije_domova_socijalne_skrbi_i_drugih_pravnih_osoba_2014-2016.pdf (europski-fondovi.eu)

²⁹ Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, Magyar Statisztikai Évkönyv, 2011, http://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xftp/idoszaki/evkonyv/evkonyv_2011.pdf

³⁰ Residents in supported housing (2014-), http://www.ksh.hu/docs/eng/xstadat/xstadat_annual/i_fsi003.html

³¹ Statistics Denmark, Disability Care, 2019, <https://www.dst.dk/en/Statistik/emner/levevilkkaar/sociale-forhold/handicap>

To assess the situation of institutions and transition to independent living, many different elements need to be factored in when producing data – i.e. the reasons of institutionalisation, the barriers to inclusion, child poverty, age structure of the population, and rates of psychosocial disability.

Accessibility and reasonable accommodations

Accessibility and reasonable accommodations are necessary for people with intellectual disabilities to get adequate housing, live autonomously and be included in the community. Nevertheless, analysing these concepts through data can be challenging.

Accessibility

Accessibility is not a uniform concept. As disability is diverse, accessibility may mean many different things depending on the needs of the person. For people with mobility limitations, accessibility may mean a ramp or an elevator. For people with a visual impairment, it may be signs in braille. And for people with intellectual disabilities, accessibility varies from one person to another: for some it means support for daily tasks, for others, reminders to pay rent, access to social housing, or permission to have a support animal in the house.³²

Therefore, measuring accessibility in a manner that covers this diversity of needs is difficult.

- ➔ To know more about the accessibility of housing, studies should identify where accessibility issues arise, as to inform policies and incentives to adapt housing for people with disabilities.

France

Recent surveys asked respondents to identify which parts of the house they had trouble accessing, breaking down the data by age. They identified amongst others accessibility issues with stairs, elevators, or the entry of the house.³³

³² How Fair Housing Helps People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Live Independently, 2020, <https://equalrightscenter.org/housing-intellectual-developmental-disabilities/>

³³ Handicap et logement, 2007, <https://www.inegalites.fr/Handicap-et-logement>

- Collecting data on housing accessibility should also aim to produce statistics on the number of accessible houses in the market, to know how many houses are effectively available for people with disabilities.

Germany

Data shows that only 2% of houses are barrier-free. Statistics also show that newer houses are more likely to be accessible, while the number of accessible houses is still low.³⁴

A study in Berlin showed that only 1.5% of households live in homes accessible for wheelchair users.³⁵

- Therefore, data collectors must establish indicators on the accessibility of housing for people with disabilities, with a comprehensive definition of accessibility that includes people with intellectual disabilities.

Reasonable accommodation

Reasonable accommodations are adjustments that can be made to ensure that people with disabilities can enjoy their rights on an equal foot with others.

Currently, there is a lack of indicators on the provision of reasonable accommodations, on whether there are done not.

- Data collection should aim to observe if tenants with disabilities ask for reasonable accommodations in housing – particularly in social housing –, and whether these accommodations are made or not.

Homelessness

There is a lack of data from national governments on homelessness. Statistics on homelessness are rare, and generally conducted at a local or national level by civil society organisations, as statistic agencies do not know how to contact them. Very few countries

³⁴ Barrierefreier Wohnraum: Ausnahme statt Regel | Ergebnisse Mikrozensus, 2020, <https://www.bfb-barrierefrei-bauen.de/mikrozensus-2018-zusatzprogramm-wohnen/>

³⁵ Bis 2035 fehlen zwei Millionen altersgerechte Wohnungen, 17 November 2020, [Bis 2035 fehlen zwei Millionen altersgerechte Wohnungen | kobinet-nachrichten \(kobinet-nachrichten.org\)](https://www.kobinet-nachrichten.org/)

collect this data, and even fewer disaggregate it. For instance, it has been noted by the European organisation FEANTSA that **Romania** does not collect data on homelessness at the national level.³⁶

A lack of a systematic approach can also be detrimental to the collection of statistics on homelessness. In **Belarus**, the national census revealed 587 homeless people in the whole country, while the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection noted 4,000 homeless people registered, and the city of Minsk registered 823 homeless people receiving assistance.³⁷

It is even more complicated to know how many people with disabilities are in homelessness, as they lack access to healthcare and may therefore be underdiagnosed.

While it is likely that people with intellectual disabilities are more prone to homelessness, due to higher exposure to poverty, lack of access to healthcare, insecurity regarding tenure due to deprivation of their legal capacity,³⁸ and deinstitutionalisation without feasible alternatives provided, there is very little data to confirm this claim.³⁹ However, existing data points in that direction:

- According to UNICEF, 30% of young homeless people have a disability.⁴⁰
- It is estimated that in the United States 30-40% of homeless people have intellectual disabilities.⁴¹
- A study conducted in the Netherlands on homelessness showed that approximately 30% of respondents were people with intellectual disabilities.⁴²
- In Ireland, a recent census showed that 27.1% of homeless people have a disability.⁴³

³⁶ FEANTSA, Homelessness in Romania: Key Statistics, 2017.

³⁷ Belarusian Helsinki Committee, Human Constanta, and Libereco, Homeless People and the Right to Housing in Belarus.

³⁸ United Nations, Disability and Development Report: Realizing the Sustainable Development Goals by, for and with persons with disabilities, 2018.

³⁹ European Disability Forum and FEANTSA joint reply to the UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing; Oakes and Davies, Intellectual Disability in Homeless Adults : A Prevalence Study, Journal of Intellectual Disabilities, 2008; Housing Rights Watch, Homelessness and disabilities: the impact of recent Human Rights developments in Policy and Practice, <https://www.housingrightswatch.org/content/homelessness-and-disabilities-impact-recent-human-rights-developments-policy-and-practice%E2%80%8B>

⁴⁰ United Nations, Factsheet on Persons with Disabilities.

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/resources/factsheet-on-persons-with-disabilities.html>

⁴¹ What We Know About Homelessness and Disability, 2020 <https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/evidence-based-living/202009/what-we-know-about-homelessness-and-intellectual-disability>

⁴² Intellectual disability among Dutch homeless people: prevalence and related psychosocial problems, Plos One, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24465905/>

⁴³ NDA Factsheet 5: Where do Persons with Disabilities Live?, December 2020, <http://nda.ie/resources/factsheets/nda-factsheet-5-housing/nda-factsheet-5-housing-briefing-information.pdf>

- Research shows that at least 30% of homeless people have a severe mental illness.⁴⁴ This can be both a cause and a consequence of homelessness.⁴⁵
- In a study conducted in Japan, while a majority of respondents identified unemployment as the cause of homelessness, a significant percentage of respondents with intellectual disabilities identified lack of support from friends and family as the cause leading to homelessness.⁴⁶

Scotland

In a national study on homelessness, 51% of respondents reported to have one or more support needs. A majority of these support needs came from mental health reasons and from basic housing management or independent living skills difficulties, while 19.2% had a medical condition, 11.4% a physical disability, and 5.8% had a learning disability.

Some of the reasons provided for difficulties to maintain accommodation are mental health issues, physical health reasons, and difficulty managing on own.

To gather this information, assessments for housing support needs done by local authorities are consulted.⁴⁷

- ➔ Including informal or fragile living situations in data collection on housing and disability is extremely relevant. For instance, homeless people may not be contacted for the survey, so there is no way of knowing how many people with intellectual disabilities are in fragile living situations.
- ➔ To contact people with disabilities in homelessness and in fragile living situations, governments should increase their efforts to identify people with disabilities and to provide them with essential services. Statistics agencies should contact respondents through associations or civil society organisations, instead of conducting surveys through the Internet or landlines.

⁴⁴ Mental Health Europe, Access to services by people with severe Mental Health Problems Who are homeless , <https://www.mhe-sme.org/access-to-services-by-people-with-severe-mental-health-problems-who-are-homeless/>

⁴⁵ A. Nishio et al., Causes of homelessness prevalence: Relationship between homelessness and disability, *Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences* 2017; 71: 180–188

⁴⁶ A. Nishio et al., Causes of homelessness prevalence: Relationship between homelessness and disability, *Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences* 2017; 71: 180–188

⁴⁷ Scottish government, Homelessness in Scotland: 2019 to 2020, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/homelessness-scotland-2019-2020/>

Ireland

In a study conducted in Dublin, qualitative data was given by Family Service Users and Individual Services Users, conducting interviews through the phone. Quantitative data was provided by records of a disability organisation in Ireland, Daughters of Charity Disability Support Services. Staff members provided additional statistics in this regard.

Respondents to the survey cited demands of caring (20.2%) and their house not being adapted for disability (12.3%) as some of the leading causes of homelessness. Most of the respondents providing qualitative data cited socioeconomic factors as causes of homelessness, particularly over-reliance on social welfare and on the private rental market for accommodation.⁴⁸

Living conditions

“Housing is the front line in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. (...) In the context of COVID-19, having no home, lacking space for physical distancing in overcrowded living areas or having inadequate access to water and sanitation has become a “death sentence”, handed out predominantly against poor and marginalized communities. (...) The full, cumulative impact on the rights of (...) persons with disabilities is not yet known but is likely to be severe.”

Balakrishnan Rajagopal, UN Special rapporteur on adequate housing.⁴⁹

Living conditions are an essential element of adequate housing, and cover several aspects, including, but not limited, to energy, number of bedrooms, noise, pollution,

⁴⁸ Trinity College Dublin and National Disability Authority, The experience and risk of homelessness for people with intellectual disabilities and/or autism and their families in Dublin. A mixed methods study, November 2020.

⁴⁹ Report of the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context, Balakrishnan Rajagopal- COVID-19 and the right to adequate housing: impacts and the way forward, <https://undocs.org/A/75/148>

safety, and infrastructure. Knowledge on these elements provides a fuller picture of the housing situation.

- All surveys on housing should include a variety of indicators. Being able to put different elements in contrast allows to understand what areas public policies should target to increase access to adequate housing.

Spain

In 2012, a study was conducted on disability and housing by the National Statistics Institute. A large sample (24,000 households) was included in the survey, and the definition of disability was in accordance with the social model.

This study included informal and fragile housing in their survey, such as slums and mobile homes. This also helps to know the fragility of the living situation of people with disabilities.

Interesting elements were contrasted with the data on housing, such as employment, civil state, level of education, income, or health. To analyse whether housing was accessible or not, respondents were asked to specify if they encountered any accessibility issues in their homes.⁵⁰

Many statistics look solely at subjective data, meaning that respondents are asked to express their own perception of their situation.

- While knowing whether people with disabilities are satisfied or not with their housing is important, this data must be complemented with objective information on the characteristics of the housing. Having only objective or subjective data does not draw a complete picture: it is crucial to collect both types of data, as to know if housing is physically satisfactory and accessible, and to allow people with disabilities to express their views on their housing.

⁵⁰ INE, Encuesta de integración social y salud EISS-2012,2013, https://www.ine.es/dyngs/INEbase/es/operacion.htm?c=Estadistica_C&cid=1254736176987&menu=resultados&idp=1254735573175#!tabs-1254736195303

Belgium

In the French-speaking region, many objective elements of the housing are analysed, such as the facades of the house, the number of apartments in the building, exposure to noise, environmental problems, luminosity and violence.⁵¹

Living conditions are also related to house overcrowding and who you live with. This is particularly important for people with intellectual disabilities and independent living, to know if they live autonomously and have privacy.

United Kingdom

Statistics observe if people with disabilities are more likely to live with their parents than people without disabilities. This is an interesting aspect to look at, to know whether people with disabilities have the opportunity to live autonomously or not.

This study showed that people with disabilities under 25 years old are less likely to live with their parents than people without disabilities, and this tendency reverses after they become 25 years old. This would be an interesting result to be analysed and contrasted with institutionalisation rates, as this may indicate that people with disabilities live in institutions from a young age.⁵²

- It is crucial to create comprehensive surveys that look at the diversity of aspects of living conditions and include informal housing and homelessness in their scope.

Housing market

The housing market is subject to **fluctuation and speculation**. Prices can increase or decrease in a question of months. Europe is experiencing rapid rent increases in large cities. These changes in the housing market impact the access to adequate housing by the population, and particularly those in more fragile living situations or in poverty. While

⁵¹ Chiffres-clés du logement en Wallonie, 2018, <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwiAiuCJ5ebsAhVEzhoKHUU1BBYQFjACegQIAxAC&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.swl.be%2Findex.php%2Factualites-2%2F1063-les-chiffres-des-du-logement-public-wallon-2018&usg=AOvVaw0dyZurPQ9-PwxM3Y4FYyPp>

⁵² Disability and housing, UK: 2019, Housing outcomes for disabled adults, with analysis by age, sex, impairment type and country using Annual Population Survey (APS) data, December 2019, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/disability/bulletins/disabilityandhousinguk/2019>

it is likely that people with intellectual disabilities are more impacted by housing market changes, there is currently no data to support this claim.

- As housing is a sector highly affected by market fluctuations, data becomes quickly outdated. **Data should be updated** as regularly as possible, particularly regarding issues strongly related to the housing market.

In the past few years, housing became more and more treated as a commodity, a mean to invest and accumulate weight.⁵³ As more and more capital is invested on housing, it disconnects it from its social function, forgetting the impact this has on the wellbeing of communities.⁵⁴ This structural change in housing and investment is called **financialisation of housing**. It happened as vulture funds and other financing entities took over the housing market, operating from tax havens and aiming to maximise their profits.⁵⁵ This is often detrimental to those renting these houses, who saw their rent increase faster than their incomes. The financialisation of housing is likely to have disproportionately impacted people with intellectual disabilities, pushing them into institutions, but also affecting their quality of life in care homes, as many care homes were bought by financing entities.

The phenomenon of **gentrification**, meaning that a low-income area is changed and sees prices rising by wealthier people moving in, is strongly related to market changes, and it also affects people with disabilities. It can impact their lives, as moving further away from their families, friends and job due to rising prices can reduce their mobility. But currently, the effects on gentrification on mobility have not been analysed.

Changes in the housing market and rent increases both impact accessibility of housing and living conditions. For instance, more people will live in overcrowded houses to split the costs. Eurostat provides data on overcrowded houses in relation to poverty status all around the European Union.⁵⁶ However, once again this data is not disaggregated by

⁵³ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, Financialization of housing, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Housing/Pages/FinancializationHousing.aspx>

⁵⁴ Plan International, Financialization of housing and the right to adequate housing, 2017, <https://www.girlsrightsplatform.org/fr/node/1110>

⁵⁵ Housing Financialization: trends, actors and processes, 15 December 2018, <https://housingnotprofit.org/housing-financialization-trends-actors-and-processes/#1>

⁵⁶ Eurostat, Overcrowding rate by age, sex and poverty status - total population - EU-SILC survey, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ILC_LVHO05A/default/table?lang=en

type of disability and does not include people living in institutions nor who are living with their parents.

Changes in the **energy market** can also impact the access to the right to housing, as energy is a key element of adequate housing. After years of liberalisation of the energy market in Europe, energy prices are still rising. While 7% of households in the European Union are unable to pay their utility bills,⁵⁷ people with disabilities face higher costs because some might use assistive devices that consume energy or a tendency to spend more time at home. For instance, in the slum city of La Cañada Real in Spain, the population has been living without electricity for months, so those with breathing devices are risking their lives.⁵⁸

- ➔ It is necessary to contrast the increase of energy prices, liberalisation policies, and the cost of energy for people with disabilities, to decide if energy policies should be modified.

As **rental prices rise**, households spend a larger percentage of their income in housing. Eurostat measures housing cost overburden by considering that housing is affordable when households spend less than 40% of their disposable income in housing.⁵⁹ This does not correspond to today's reality, as housing has increased enormously and salaries have not; housing overburden should be measured at 25%.⁶⁰ Disaggregated data by type of disability in this regard is crucial, as people with disabilities have higher housing costs and lower incomes than the general population.

Belgium

Housing overburden is measured by contrasting housing costs to average earnings, getting a clear picture of the percentage of income housing represents.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Eurostat, Arrears on utility bills, 2020, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/DDN-20200120-1>

⁵⁸ La Cañada Real sigue sin ver la luz al final del túnel: "Hay vecinos que viven con un respirador y no pueden conectarlo", 12 December 2020, https://www.infolibre.es/noticias/politica/2020/12/12/la_canada_real_sigue_sin_ver_luz_final_del_tunel_hay_vecinos_que_viven_con_respirador_no_pueden_conectarlo_114367_1012.html

⁵⁹ Eurostat, Is housing affordable? 2019, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/digpub/housing/bloc-2b.html?lang=en>

⁶⁰ European Housing Policy Conference, 6 November 2020.

⁶¹ Chiffres-clés du logement en Wallonie, 2018, <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwiAiuCJ5ebsAhVEzhoKHUU1BBYQFjACegQIAxAC&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.swl.be%2Findex.php%2Factualites-2%2F1063-les-chiffres-clés-du-logement-public-wallon-2018&usq=AOvVaw0dyZurPQ9-PwxM3Y4FYyPp>

A direct consequence of the increase in rent is **the rise of evictions**, as tenants are unable to face their payments – or homeowners cannot pay their mortgages when they suffer a loss of income. The European Pillar of Social Rights determines the protection of vulnerable groups from evictions, but there is a lack of data regarding evictions of people with disabilities, while there is proof that it does happen.⁶²

- ➔ Knowing if evictions of people with disabilities happen more often than in other groups could create better policies, that provide *moratoria*, subsidises or social housing to people with disabilities so they do not lose their homes.

Another aspect that derives from the housing market and from economic policies is the **prevalence of home ownership**, as opposed to renting. High rates of homeownership can lead to financial stability⁶³, but this is influenced by stimulus policies for individuals to buy homes and by mortgage interest rates.

- ➔ Knowing if people with disabilities are able to own homes gives insight into their level of autonomy and independence and their quality of life; therefore, the situation regarding independent living.

There is a lack of data on the **availability and accessibility of such housing**, preventing from establishing a clear picture of whether people with disabilities are prioritised to access social housing and if it is accessible and adequate. While some countries and associations prioritise people with disabilities in access to social housing.⁶⁴

- ➔ Access to social housing can be an effective way to provide stable housing to those at risk of poverty or in homelessness. The situation must be monitored.

⁶² Case of an eviction of a family with a child with disabilities in Spain, 2019, <https://www.cuartopoder.es/sociedad/2019/07/03/desahucio-de-una-familia-con-un-nino-con-discapacidad-no-sabemos-que-vamos-a-hacer/>

⁶³ Benefits of Homeownership and Stable Housing, 2012, https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKewimiezR7Z3uAhWMSsAKHfoeDwIQFJAJegQIARAC&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.nar.realtor%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2Fmigration_files%2Fsocial-benefits-of-stable-housing-2012-04.pdf&usq=AOvVaw30TIW3lcFgaeSdt88lZs3u

⁶⁴ For instance, in the United Kingdom (https://england.shelter.org.uk/housing_advice/council_housing_association/who_gets_priority_for_council_housing) and in Spain (<https://www.defendoabogados.es/requisitos-alquiler-social/>)

Conclusions

Housing is a human right, and it must be treated as such.

People with intellectual disabilities are more exposed to poverty, which may trigger institutionalisation. But there is no clear picture of their housing situation in Europe, because of the lack of reliable data. There is a great variety of studies being conducted in Europe regarding housing and disability, but the lack of harmonisation in data collection and definitions prevents from comparing the existing data. This is an obstacle to know what the housing situation is for people with disabilities at the European level at the moment.

The housing crisis currently taking place in Europe is highly related to the housing market fluctuations, but also to liberalisation and privatisation policies. To effectively monitor the effects of such policies on the quality of life of people with disabilities, data must be contrasted and disaggregated by disability.

Improving housing statistics involves making surveys accessible, disaggregating data per type of disability, and other changes in the way data is collected and presented. Reliable statistics on housing for people with intellectual disabilities are crucial to appropriately target these issues in European and national policies. This would help to efficiently address poverty, accessibility, housing inadequacy, and the transition to independent living and community-based care.

Ambitious goals must be set for people with intellectual disabilities to have adequate housing. But this starts with drawing a clear picture of the situation, with accurate, reliable data that supports these demands.