

Concept Note

Liberal Solutions to the Housing Crisis in Europe

1. Introduction

Housing is not only a basic need but also a cornerstone of personal freedom, economic opportunity, and social mobility. Yet across Europe, escalating housing costs, supply shortages, and regulatory bottlenecks are threatening access to decent homes — especially for young people and vulnerable groups.

The European Commission's forthcoming initiatives on housing, combined with a growing political momentum, offer a crucial opportunity to advance liberal solutions to these challenges. Liberal principles — individual freedom, open markets, innovation, subsidiarity, and social inclusion — must be at the heart of this debate.

The European Liberal Forum (ELF), together with its partners, proposes a collective volume that brings forward a liberal policy agenda for addressing Europe's housing crisis. This project aims not just to explore the dimensions of the problem, but to generate innovative liberal solutions that can inspire EU and national policymakers.

2. Objectives

- Articulate liberal principles for housing policy and embed them throughout the study
- Analyze the current housing crisis, considering both affordability and supply shortages
- Identify unnecessary restrictions, regulations, and procedural barriers to housing development
- Explore innovative, market-driven, and socially inclusive solutions for housing affordability and accessibility
- Present case studies of successful liberal housing practices from across Europe
- Contribute to the wider EU discussion on housing policy ahead of legislative proposals

3. Methodology

The study will combine analytical chapters and comparative case studies, authored by a diverse group of researchers, policy practitioners, and urban experts. Each chapter will be aligned with liberal values, even where contributors bring independent or expert viewpoints.

The lead editor will coordinate contributions, ensuring consistency in tone and liberal spirit across the volume. Contributions will be selected through an open call for papers and targeted outreach to selected experts. MEP Brigitte van den Berg (Renew Europe Group) will be involved politically and will be invited to write the foreword.

4. Indicative Chapters

The structure of the collective volume may include (but is not limited to):

1. **Housing and Freedom: A Liberal Framework for Policy Action**
 - Setting the philosophical and political foundation for liberal housing solutions
2. **Diagnosing the Crisis: Affordability, Supply Shortages, and Inequality**
 - Overview of the housing market challenges across Member States
3. **Unblocking Supply: Removing Regulatory Barriers and Red Tape**
 - Analysis of rules, permits, zoning restrictions, and procedures that constrain new development
4. **Financing Housing: Market-Based Innovations and Investment Models**
 - Exploring liberal financial instruments, with contributions from experts like Piet Eichholtz (suggested)
5. **Building for the Future: Sustainability Without Sacrificing Affordability**
 - Liberal approaches to green housing and energy efficiency
6. **Empowering Local Solutions: Subsidiarity and Municipal Innovation**
 - The role of cities, communities, and local public-private initiatives
7. **Case Studies: Best Practices Across Europe**
 - Real-world examples of successful liberal housing initiatives and reforms
8. **Policy Recommendations: A Liberal Roadmap for Europe's Housing Future**
 - Concrete proposals based on freedom, innovation, competition, and social inclusion

5. Timeline

- **May 2025** – Launch of internal call for papers and targeted outreach
- **June 2025** – Selection of contributors and kick-off meeting
- **June–July 2025** – Chapter drafting and internal peer review
- **September 2025** – Final editing and layout
- **October 2025** – Publication and launch event in Brussels

6. Expected Outcomes

- A published collective volume, advancing a liberal policy agenda on housing
- Strong visibility for liberal solutions ahead of the EU's housing initiatives
- Deeper engagement with policymakers, stakeholders, and Member Organisations
- Event launch featuring MEP Brigitte van den Berg and contributing authors

7. Contributors

The volume will bring together a diverse group of contributors from across Europe, representing both expertise and lived experience. The goal is to combine academic rigor, policy relevance, and regional diversity to offer a genuinely multidimensional perspective on affordable housing. Contributors will be drawn from:

ELF Member Organisations: Several ELF partners have direct interest and expertise in urban development, social policy, and sustainability. Potential contributors may include:

Universities and Research Institutes: Leading academic centres and housing research networks in Europe, with expertise in urban studies, social geography, and EU public policy, such as:

Urban Innovation and Policy Labs: Organisations working on applied urban policy, social innovation, and public-private partnerships, including:

- URBACT (EU urban policy exchange network)
- Housing Europe (the European Federation of Public, Cooperative and Social Housing)
- European Urban Initiative (EUI)
- Eurocities network – social inclusion and housing working groups
- NGOs working on housing access and homelessness (e.g. FEANTSA)
- Youth organisations with a housing priority (e.g. European Youth Forum)

Policy Practitioners and Stakeholders: Involving current or former policymakers from local governments, EU institutions, or civil society organisations:

- Representatives from municipalities leading housing innovation (e.g. Vienna, Barcelona, Helsinki)
- Committee of the Regions
- Policy officers or advisors from DG REGIO, DG EMPL or DG ENER

Young and Emerging Voices: Early-career researchers, urbanists, or activists offering new thinking on housing equity, digital construction, or climate-resilient urbanism—especially from underrepresented regions in Central and Eastern Europe or the Western Balkans.

The volume will be edited by Dr Antonios Nestoras, Founder and Director of the European Policy Innovation Council (EPIC), and ELF Senior Fellow. The editorial process will ensure consistency in quality, tone, and relevance across chapters.