

Rethinking affordable and adequate housing

With Article 25 of its 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations proclaims the “Right to an adequate standard of living” as basis for health and well-being. The Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe (2009: 3) specified the right to housing as a cluster of rights that allow for living “somewhere in security, peace and dignity”. In the revised 1996 European Social Charter of the Council of Europe, article 31 includes in the right to housing to have access to affordable housing with an adequate quality and to prevent homelessness. The EU-Charter of Fundamental Rights, which is binding for the EU-countries, includes the right to housing in article 34 on social security and social assistance: “In order to combat social exclusion and poverty, the Union recognizes and respects the right to social and housing assistance so as to ensure a decent existence for all those who lack sufficient resources, in accordance with the rules laid down by Community law and national laws and practices.”

Housing is therefore at the core of a good and dignified life - a person's well-being. Housing, as an affordable, decent and secure roof above one's head, has been ascribed many positive social effects. It allows for a socially included and healthy life coupled with labour market participation for this and the next generation. Making housing affordable and maintaining it will favour human capital development, inclusive, sustainable, competitive cities and regions.

However, the right to housing is not legally enforceable in most countries, while land scarcity drives up house prices and rents, specifically in growing cities. Unaffordable housing gives rise to phenomena like income poverty, housing poverty, energy poverty, water poverty, and commuting poverty. How do these types of poverty arise and relate? Which definitions of affordability are useful in determining a relationship between housing costs and income and housing quality in the widest sense (technical, legally and comfort-wise)? When, under what market conditions, with which government measures for whom is housing affordable and is affordability sustainable? How does (un)affordability impact on equity and efficiency concerns?

PhD proposals are welcome from a variety of disciplines (economic, geographic, policy and poverty studies). Please contact dr. Marietta Haffner (m.e.a.haffner@tudelft.nl) for more information.