

Youth Partnership

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EU-CoE youth partnership policy sheet

Housing and Residential Autonomy

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Executive Summary: Leaving home is an important transition for young people and a significant demographic phenomenon with generational and mobility consequences. This transition is profoundly interrelated with trajectories in the labour market, educational careers and paths towards the formation of family, but housing policies should not be completely dependent on the policies in these areas. The heterogeneity of the housing situations and possibilities across Europe is high, which constitutes a big challenge for the design, recommendation and applicability of European youth policy.

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1. Definition and state of affairs

Housing is one of the “forgotten” issues of social stratification and inequalities studies and leaving home is frequently the “neglected” subject in the transitions to adulthood studies tradition (when compared to school-to-work transitions or family formation processes, both occupying a great deal of researchers’ and policy makers’ concerns).

Strategies to promote residential autonomy and mobility of young people, particularly given their increased mobility on the national and EU level are scarce but pressing. However, they would contribute to the right to (access) a home *despite of* the social (or national) belonging of European young people.

Leaving home or entering the housing market is a transition with *extreme concrete and symbolic, subjective and objective importance* to young people. Leaving home late, never or returning to it frequently or more than in the past should not automatically be considered an indicator of a voluntary postponement of adulthood but rather as an indicator for a deterioration of the economic and housing conditions necessary to leave home. Evidence shows that young people experience nowadays a whole new set of economic and housing constraints to leave home sooner, in some countries further accentuated by the recent economic crisis.

Residential autonomy is important in many ways: it coincides with adult roles such as managing a house, with the autonomy to make own financial and consumption decisions without parental control or help; it is usually a pre-condition for entering a partnership or starting a family; it marks the entry in the housing market and it is a symbolic event of change in the relation between parents and child and it promotes trajectories of ascendant social mobility. Subsequently, not being able to leave home may prevent young people from:

- Getting jobs elsewhere, be more mobile, and combat unemployment
- Continuing their studies in an university and getting better life opportunities in the future
- Starting a consensual union or partnership and being able to start a family
- Conciliating all the above and others spheres of life, that is, having a better quality of life

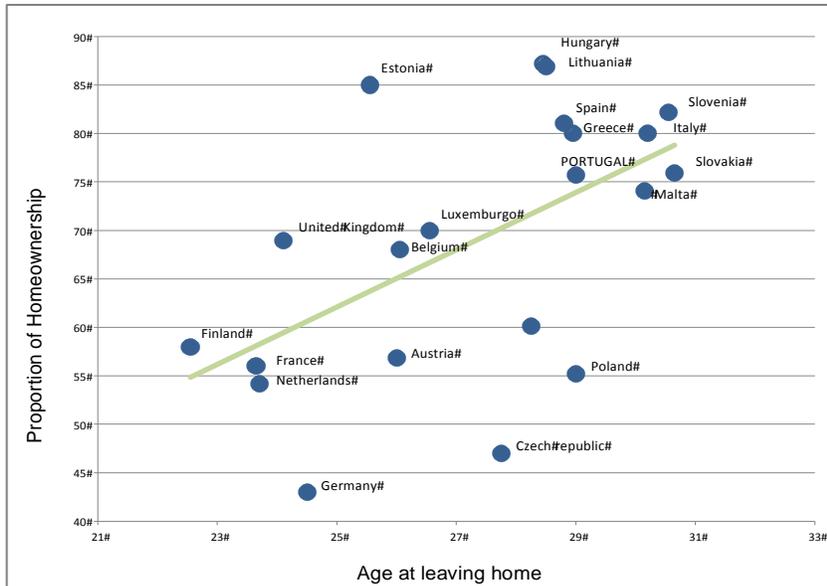
The transition to residential autonomy is also profoundly *intertwined with the timing, conditions and constraints of other “spheres of transition”*.

Employment and unemployment issues are in the core of all transitions to adulthood. But not all actions, programs and policies aiming to facilitate each and every transition to adulthood have to be directed to this area. National experiences - and the European heterogeneity concerning the timing of leaving home itself - have shown the success of specific programs and policies directed at youth and housing, which help to combat social inequalities’ reproduction and intergenerational transmission of poverty among young people. Many national experiences show that acting directly on

the sector is the best way to deal with (part of) the problem.¹ Youth policy designs for supporting residential autonomy may take into account the following aspects:

- Types of relations maintained with the labor market
- Quantity and quality of social and state support
- Accessibility and affordability of housing
- Existing policies and programs for youth housing.

2. Background information



An early exit from the parental household may be supported by cultural values, but also by a favourable labour and housing market, as well as by welfare state provisions.

(2005) First European Quality of life Survey:
Families, work and social networks, European Foundation for the improvement of Living and Working Conditions.

The European heterogeneity concerning the timing and conditions of leaving home reflects, more than cultural or

individual orientations or preferences, the orientation towards rental or homeownership housing systems in each country (see figure 2). The less rent-oriented the housing system, the more difficult it is for young people to leave home, because in order to do so, they would have to enter the housing market by becoming a homeowner (which is not at all in line with what is desired and possible).

Figure 1 | Relation between the proportion of homeownership and the age of leaving home, per country

SSources:

Eurostat Press Release (2009) for the mean age of leaving home and Norris e Shiels (2007: 68) for proportion of homeownership.

¹ See, for example the *renda basica de emancipacion* in Spain, the *Incentivo ao Arrendamento Jovem* in Portugal or the *Housing for Help* in Germany.

It also reflects the existence and direction of youth housing policies (towards specific young population or not). The lack of housing policies, together with some specific characteristics of the housing market results in the impossibility for young people to leave home to study and makes it difficult for young people to leave home before entering the labour market - as is the case in Southern European countries. It also results in the discouragement to leave home without a “partner” given such *risky* life decision. Evidence shows that the tendency to wait for conjugality to be able to leave home is very frequent in countries where the state support to leave home while studying or to rent a dwelling is scarce.

Therefore, policies for the support of young people’s residential autonomy **can make a difference**. more precisely: the establishment of agreements and protocols with bank entities to facilitate (fair) access to credit and especially initiatives, programs and policies to promote and facilitate access of young people to rented dwellings; and the definition and activation of social housing for young people targeting different profiles and by this differentiation getting the funding from different sources (such as student housing, young families housing, vulnerable population - including homeless).

3. Policies on European level

Housing policies on European level are situated between intentions and concretization.

On one hand, the need to develop mechanisms that **help young people to accomplish their residential and other mobility aspirations** is acknowledged. Official documents and reports on youth and/or housing have been highlighting the “social dimensions of housing” ([Eurofound, 2006](#)), housing rights of young people and living conditions as a dimension of social inclusion ([Eurofound, 2010](#)). These documents acknowledge “Housing has a crucial significance for young people” ([2012 Joint Report](#) and that Housing is a “tool to become more autonomous” (Policy Paper on Youth Autonomy, 2004). This has been so since the 90s decade:

“Leaving Home at an age that is in accord with modern life styles and aspirations about mobility, independence, and personal development, under conditions that offer access to adequate accommodation, is a natural process of growing up and should be recognized as an important social right... [and] housing policy should be revised towards an increase of opportunities and freedom of choice.

(in White, 1994: 86)

In 2006, a “dynamic housing policy as an element of European social Cohesion” has been the target of a [Council of Europe Resolution \(1486\)](#). Although it is not directly aimed at young people, its conclusions and recommendations would much benefit

young people. The “lengthening of young people’s period of cohabitation with their parents” are given has one of the causes for the need for such dynamic housing policy. In this resolution the right to housing as a fundamental social right that contributes to social integration and cohesion is acknowledged, and the need to improve the knowledge and data on housing conditions is defended, as is the promotion of dissemination of good practices in this area.

On the other hand, housing policies are usually **outside the European scope** and youth housing policies follow that same path. There is some hesitation on how to formulate the programs and access of housing to young people. It can be seen as prevention of poverty and/or homelessness, visible in statements such as “the risk of becoming poor is closely linked to the timing of departure from the parental home. In fact, some studies have found that moving out of the parental household is the ‘strongest predictor behind youth poverty’ ([2012 Joint Report: 1](#)). It can also, or alternatively, be seen in a life course and housing ladder approach. This would mean young people would constitute one of the particular groups of people for which there are “positive measures” in certain moments of their lives (as stated, for example, in the [CommDH\(2009\)5](#)). Housing policies can also be seen as part of a larger strategy to target and help more vulnerable or disadvantaged population. This is visible, for example, in the statement “one way to overcome the housing problems of young people is to offer social housing to those with low incomes”(2012 Joint Report, or in reports such as the one concerning Social Housing for Roma).

Either way, defining the criteria is necessary to set the discussion on its right tone, and to be understood and embraced by the Members States in equivalent but flexible ways. It is also necessary to take into account that housing is a social and universal right, as was established in the European Social Charter (ETS No. 163) of the Council of Europe (Article 31) and that

“As such, its effective realisation cannot be left to the sole discretion of market forces. This right to housing can only be universal and may not be vitiated by any exclusion in its application.”

(Council of Europe Resolution 1486)

4. Related key documents

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Documents

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[Dashboard of EU Youth Indicators, Eurostat](#)

[Declaration on the Future of the Council of Europe Youth Policy - Agenda 2020](#)

[EU Youth Report, Results of the first cycle of the Open Method of Coordination in the youth field \(2010-2012\), 2012](#)

[European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2005](#)

[European Youth pact](#)

[Living Conditions , social exclusions and mental well-being, 2010](#)

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