

If Children Can Be Homeless, We Do Not Have a Society

A source-backed Hedegreen Research analysis of child homelessness, Brussels, European housing obligations, and the gap between recognition and implementation.

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Brussels did not give me an argument.

It gave me a threshold.

It is one thing to talk abstractly about poverty, housing pressure and exclusion. It is another to walk through the capital of Europe and feel how little those words protect anyone when the failure is visible in public. One scene is not a city, and I do not want to pretend otherwise. But some scenes are strong enough to force a harder question: what are we allowed to call a society if children can still fall through the housing floor at all?

That is the right place to start because it moves the article away from mood and into structure. The issue is not that Brussels felt harsh to me for an evening. The issue is that child homelessness is already named inside Europe's own policy language. If children are still inside the homelessness system anyway, then the problem is no longer lack of vocabulary. It is the gap between recognition and implementation.

The European Child Guarantee makes that explicit. It lists homeless children and children experiencing severe housing deprivation among the priority groups Member States must pay particular attention to. In the housing section, it recommends that homeless children and their families receive adequate accommodation, prompt transfer from temporary accommodation to permanent housing, and relevant support services. That matters because the framework is already specific. It does not speak as if this were too vague to govern.

The older rights language points in the same direction. Article 27 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that every child has the right to a standard of living adequate for development, and that states should provide support programmes where needed, particularly regarding nutrition, clothing and housing. So the sentence already exists. Housing is not decorative in that framework. It belongs to the minimum conditions under which a child is supposed to develop at all.

The broader EU social language points the same way. In the Commission text launching consultation on a European Pillar of Social Rights, the housing section states that lack of adequate housing and housing insecurity remain a large concern across the EU. It also states that shelter should be provided to those who are homeless and linked to other social services. That matters because it removes another escape route. Brussels is not useful here as an isolated embarrassment. It is useful because it makes a wider European contradiction visible.

Brussels also has its own institutional count. Bruss'Help's 2024 report tracks homelessness and housing exclusion through ETHOS Light categories rather than reducing the subject to rough sleeping alone. At comparable methodology, the Brussels count rose from 6,465 people in 2022 to 8,050 in 2024. Inside that wider system, the report also records children and minors across several unstable housing categories, including emergency accommodation, transit housing, non-conventional housing and eviction-threat situations.

Those numbers should be handled carefully. They are not one clean total for homeless children in Brussels, and pretending otherwise would flatten the method. But that caution does not weaken the article. It strengthens it. The point is not that every child in those categories is living the same reality. The point is that children are still inside the homelessness and housing-exclusion system at all.

That is where the contradiction becomes harder to avoid. A system can already have the right rights language, the right recommendations, the right policy principles and the right administrative categories, and still fail the most basic verification test. If the capital of Europe can visibly contain this contradiction, and if its own institutional count still records children inside the wider housing-failure map, then recognition has not yet become a reliable social floor.

This is why I do not think the subject should be pushed back into charity language. Once children are involved, homelessness stops being only a welfare topic. It becomes a question about what a political order is for. A functioning society is not just a market plus emergency response. It is a system that sets a floor below which childhood is not supposed to collapse.

So the claim is narrower than ordinary outrage, but harder to escape. I am not saying every urban contradiction means we have no society. I am saying there are threshold failures severe enough to disqualify the story a system tells about itself. Child homelessness is one of them. If children can be homeless, we do not have a society in the serious sense. We have policy language, visible wealth, administrative procedure and public explanation. But the floor is still broken.

That is the part Brussels made harder to ignore. Europe has already written the standard down. The scandal is that children are still waiting for it to become real.

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