

Editorial

Editorial Board of *Revista de Treball Social* (RTS)

The proposed law on transitional and urgent measures to tackle and eradicate homelessness is currently undergoing parliamentary approval and stands as a pioneering initiative in Europe. This bill, initially introduced in the Catalan Parliament three years ago, was interrupted in 2023 due to the calling of a general election and the subsequent dissolution of Parliament. It is now once again progressing through the legislative process.

The five organisations driving this proposal—Arrels Fundació, Assís Centre d'Acollida, Càritas Catalunya, Comunitat de Sant Egidio Barcelona and Sant Joan de Déu Serveis Socials Barcelona—with the backing of seven professional associations, including the prominent support of the Official Association of Social Workers of Catalonia (TSCAT), describe it as a law upholding the rights of people experiencing homelessness.

According to professor Antoni Milian i Massana, director of the legislative initiative and full professor of Administrative Law at the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB), “The passing of this bill will represent a paradigm shift, because for the first time a piece of legislation will explicitly and decisively address the needs of the most severely excluded vulnerable individuals.”¹

Homelessness, however, not only affects those sleeping rough; it also impacts individuals who seek shelter in hostels, women's refuges and services for migrants, or those living in unsafe housing conditions. What all these situations share is the absence of secure, affordable and dignified housing. It is therefore necessary to address the lack of stability involved in street homelessness and the multiple vulnerabilities associated with this circumstance.

The increasing scale and severity of homelessness in recent years has prompted a response from European institutions, which have called for the abandonment of conventional models in favour of approaches that aim more specifically to eradicate homelessness altogether.

Indeed, in the 21st century it is utterly unacceptable that thousands of people across Europe—and, by extension, in Catalonia—continue to live on the streets, exposed to conditions that severely impact their physical and mental health, employment prospects, financial stability and social relationships. These realities push many into poverty, marginalisation and social and housing exclusion.

The Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia enshrines citizens' right to housing and defines the duty of the public administration to guarantee it, as set out in Article 26: “Those individuals who lack sufficient resources

1 Càritas Catalunya. (26 February 2025). *La llei per fer front el sensellarisme torna al Parlament de Catalunya*. Retrieved on 27 May 2025 from <https://www.caritascatalunya.cat/noticias/la-llei-per-fer-front-el-sensellarisme-torna-al-parlament-de-catalunya/>

have the right to a decent home, and public authorities shall, therefore, establish by law a system of measures to guarantee this right ...". Yet it is not enough to respond solely to emergencies, there must also be sustained investment in social housing and alternative accommodation options, particularly rental properties, to address the needs of the many families, older people and young adults seeking independence.

Where housing is a right, the public administration is responsible for ensuring its provision; yet current social housing policies remain insufficiently effective.

Judith Gifreu i Font, tenured lecturer of Administrative Law and director of the UAB Housing Chair, notes that in response to the 2007 housing crisis, public authorities implemented a host of emergency measures focused primarily on preventing eviction rather than ensuring access to housing. She also highlights various strategies employed, including bringing vacant homes back into use, agreements with large property owners and the use of pre-emption and repurchase rights.²

In a similar vein, Carme Trilla i Bellart³, President of Barcelona Metropolitan Housing Observatory and the Hàbitat3 Foundation, stated in an interview with the Pompeu Fabra University (UPF) Chair of Decent and Sustainable Housing that the housing situation in Spain is critical due to the economic barriers to accessing and maintaining housing. This is largely due to the disconnect between housing costs and household incomes: a gap between prices and wages.

Trilla also noted that the Catalan Government budgets are insufficient to maintain a stock of social housing that meets public demand, and increasing that stock is a slow and complex process.

Without adequate resources, it appears that responsibility is being shifted to social organisations and even to service users themselves. It is often social services that are called upon to respond and to support individuals through a disheartening and uncertain process.

The lack of access to housing is frequently a trigger for social exclusion and entrenched poverty. Although housing policy is not the exclusive sphere of social work, our profession is deeply involved in addressing the many social consequences of housing precarity, managing situations with profound impacts on the lives of the most vulnerable. However, we do not wish to limit our role to direct intervention; we also seek to be active participants in policy debates. Ultimately, we must analyse the role of social services and social workers from a social and interdisciplinary standpoint, and we need to assert our crucial role in both the design and implementation of truly effective and transformative housing policies and measures aimed at addressing residential exclusion and homelessness.

2 Gifreu i Font, Judith. (2023). Mecanismes de col·laboració públicoprivada per a la provisió i l'explotació econòmica d'habitatge assequible: un joc de suma positiva (CA-ES). *Revista Catalana de Dret Públic*, 66, 56-85. <https://doi.org/10.58992/rcdp.i66.2023.3998>

3 Trilla i Bellart, Carme. (13 March 2025). *Presente y futuro del acceso a la vivienda assequible en Cataluña y España* [Audio podcast]. Retrieved on 27 May 2025 from <https://open.spotify.com/episode/2dyKGBMnV2YkXMfKTOjDDE?si=1f226db63c654d32&nd=1&dlsi=355d24c5422a4650>