

Press release – MEPs: Juan Guaidó is the legitimate interim President of Venezuela



In a resolution adopted on Thursday by 391 votes for, 114 against and 177 abstentions, MEPs state that they do not recognise the legitimacy or legality of the “fraudulent National Assembly established on 5th January, 2021 on the basis of (...) non-democratic elections”. MEPs call on the Council and EU member states to unequivocally recognise the constitutional continuation of the 2015 legitimate National Assembly of Venezuela and the legitimate interim President of Venezuela, Juan Guaidó.

Free and fair elections are the only way forward

The only solution to the multidimensional Venezuelan crisis, which has an impact on the whole region, is a political, peaceful and democratic way forward, by way of credible, inclusive, free, fair and transparent presidential, parliamentary, regional and local elections, stress MEPs. They request the unconditional and immediate release of more than 350 political prisoners and reiterate that the respect and protection of human rights in Venezuela must be fully guaranteed.

Condemning the most recent crackdown on freedom of expression and the closure of newspapers and media outlets that are not politically aligned with the Maduro regime, Parliament welcomes the recent extension of the targeted EU sanctions against 11 individuals, which do not harm the Venezuelan population.

MEPs call on the international community to disburse the amounts committed to relieve the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela, as agreed by the Donors Conference.

Press release – ‘Right to disconnect’ should be an EU-wide fundamental right, MEPs say



In their legislative initiative that passed with 472 votes in favour, 126 against and 83 abstentions, MEPs call on the Commission to propose a law that enables those who work digitally to disconnect outside their working hours. It should also establish minimum requirements for remote working and clarify working conditions, hours and rest periods.

The increase in digital resources being used for work purposes has resulted in an ‘always on’ culture, which has a negative impact on the work-life balance of employees, MEPs say. Although working from home has been instrumental in helping safeguard employment and business during the COVID-19 crisis, the combination of long working hours and higher demands also leads to more cases of anxiety, depression, burnout and other mental and physical health issues.

MEPs consider [the right to disconnect](#) a fundamental right that allows workers to refrain from engaging in work-related tasks – such as phone calls, emails and other digital communication – outside working hours. This includes holidays and other forms of leave. Member states are encouraged to take all

necessary measures to allow workers to exercise this right, including via collective agreements between social partners. They should ensure that workers will not be subjected to discrimination, criticism, dismissal, or other adverse actions by employers.

“We cannot abandon millions of European workers who are exhausted by the pressure to be always ‘on’ and overly long working hours. Now is the moment to stand by their side and give them what they deserve: the right to disconnect. This is vital for our mental and physical health. It is time to update worker’s rights so that they correspond to the new realities of the digital age”, rapporteur [Alex Agius Saliba](#) (S&D, MT) said after the vote.

Background

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, working from home has increased by almost 30%. This figure is expected to remain high or even increase. Research by [Eurofound](#) shows that people who work regularly from home are more than twice as likely to surpass the maximum of 48 working hours per week, compared to those working on their employer’s premises. Almost 30% of those working from home report working in their free time every day or several times a week, compared to less than 5% of office workers.

[Press release – EU help for Croatia after devastating earthquakes](#)



The European Commission, together with other European and Croatian institutions, should minimise the administrative requirements to access help and support for people on the ground, MEPs say in the resolution on mitigating the consequences of the earthquakes in Croatia. They warn that

Croatian authorities are under considerable financial pressure and that the extremely serious situation in affected areas may lead to an irreversible decline in population with devastating social and economic consequences.

Start reconstruction as soon as possible

MEPs welcome the solidarity shown by member states, EU institutions and the international community through mutual assistance in emergency situations. They stress the importance of the [European Union Civil Protection Mechanism](#) in fostering cooperation among national civil protection authorities across Europe.

They state that together with Commission experts, Croatian authorities should now swiftly assess the overall damage in Sisak-Moslavina County and begin reconstruction as soon as conditions allow. MEPs encourage authorities to ensure the works comply with requirements for earthquake-resistant buildings and infrastructure, and to employ best professional practices and expertise from other member states

Finally, MEPs emphasise that recovery from severe earthquakes – such as those in Croatia –takes considerable time. This should be taken into account when revising the [European Solidarity Fund](#) (EUSF) to ensure that there is sufficient time for funds to be absorbed beyond the current application deadlines.

The resolution was adopted on Thursday, by 677 vote for, five against, and one abstention.

Background

On 29 December 2020, a 6.4-magnitude earthquake struck central Croatia, killing several people and causing extensive damage to numerous homes and infrastructure around the town of Petrinja. Through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, 15 countries sent immediate assistance, including housing containers, winter tents, sleeping bags, beds, and electric heaters. Croatia had already been hit by a strong earthquake in the Zagreb area in March 2020 that caused over 11.5 billion EUR of damage. One person died and at least 27 others were injured. To help the country deal with the devastating effects of that earthquake, Parliament made 683.7 million EUR available from the European Union Solidarity Fund (EUSF).

[Article – Parliament calls for action to solve housing crisis](#)



Lack of affordable housing is increasingly becoming a problem in the EU, with housing prices and rents steadily growing relative to incomes over the years.

On 21 January, Parliament adopted a resolution calling on EU countries to recognise adequate housing as a fundamental human right that is enforceable through legislation. Everyone should get equal access to decent, “healthy” housing, with connection to [high-quality drinking water](#), adequate sanitation, sewage and reliable energy, MEPs said.

Housing crisis: a problem for everyone

The situation has especially got worse for low-income owners and private renters, but also for people with an average income are burdened by housing and maintenance costs. Especially single parents, large families and young people on their first jobs have an income that is too low to afford market rents, while too high to make them eligible for social housing.

The [coronavirus outbreak](#) has also exacerbated the housing problem, as many people need to spend the lockdown in poor standard homes. In the medium-term, the crisis is expected to further increase homelessness rates.

Press release – MEPs: Access to adequate housing should be a fundamental European right



The resolution – adopted by 352 votes in favour, 179 against and 152 abstentions on Thursday – states that decent housing includes access to clean and high-quality drinking water, adequate sanitation and hygiene facilities, as well as connection to sewage and water networks. The right to adequate housing is a fundamental human right that should be enshrined in national and European law, say MEPs.

Minimum mandatory requirements for habitable homes should be introduced at EU level that include healthy indoor air quality and are aligned with WHO guidelines, MEPs urge. They also call on the Commission and member states to prioritise the reduction of emissions and to boost energy efficiency through housing renovation.

Eradicating homelessness by 2030

In many EU countries, rates of homelessness have increased over the last decade due to rising housing costs and social programmes and benefits being cut and suspended. The resolution reiterates [Parliament's earlier call for an EU-wide goal to end homelessness by 2030](#). In addition, exceptional measures to prevent homelessness and protect homeless people in the COVID-19 crisis should be maintained – particularly moratoria on evictions and on disconnection from energy supplies as well as the provision of temporary housing.

Keeping housing affordable

MEPs also call on member states and regional and local authorities to put in place legal provisions to protect the rights of tenants and owner-occupiers.

Housing is considered affordable if the occupant's remaining budget is at least sufficient to cover other essential expenditure. While this threshold is currently set at 40%, more than a quarter of European tenants in commercial housing spend a higher percentage of their income on rent, with average rents constantly increasing.

Finally, MEPs point out that the expansive growth of short-term holiday rental is removing housing from the market and driving prices up, which can make living in urban and tourist centres significantly more difficult.

Quote

Rapporteur [Kim VAN SPARRENTAK](#) said: "European rules are often better at protecting profit generated by the housing market than protecting people who need a roof over their heads. We need the EU to step up its game and use all the tools available to do its part, together with the member states. The report offers concrete solutions for all levels to take action. We can solve the housing crisis if we want to, and we can end homelessness by 2030."

Background

According to [research by Eurofound](#), inadequate housing costs EU economies 195 billion EUR every year. A growing number of people living in the EU find housing difficult to afford and spend a disproportionate amount on housing. In particular, single parents, large families and young people entering the labour market find that their income is insufficient to afford market rents but too high for them to be eligible for social housing.