

Executive Summary of Activity during 2025/2026 for the Barcelona chapter of the Foundation Centesimus Annus pro Pontifice

THE RIGHT TO ADEQUATE HOUSING

The work of the Catalan Chapter consisted of a series of working meetings to hear the perspectives of experts, the preparation of summaries for each of their interventions, internal debate and discussion, and finally, the presentation of the executive summary or synthesis. This summary is based on the conclusions and further complemented by references to Catholic Social Teaching and proposed courses of action.

The participating experts were:

- **Carme Trilla:** An expert with a long career in the field of housing policy within the public sector (she was a driving force behind the pioneering and advanced 2007 Catalan Housing Law) and third-sector organizations (currently with Habitat 3).
- **Germà Bel:** Economist, Professor of Applied Economics at the University of Barcelona (UB), former Member of the Congress of Deputies and the Parliament of Catalonia, and a regular commentator in the media.
- **Eudald Vendrell:** Jurist and member of *Justícia i Pau* (Justice and Peace), as well as part of the working group within that organization which recently published an extensive study on the subject titled "*Pel dret garantit a l'habitatge*" (For a Guaranteed Right to Housing).
- **Martín Vidal Quadras, architect:** Real estate entrepreneur.
- **Carlos Cabrera:** Civil Engineer, President of the Ildefons Cerdà Institute, expert in urban planning, and member of the Ethics Committee of Càritas.

SYNTHESIS / CONCLUSIONS

1. The right to adequate housing is a human right. It indisputably belongs to the category of "social or collective rights" and enjoys the broadest international recognition through instruments such as:

- The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)
- The United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, 1966)
- The Council of Europe's European Convention on Human Rights (1950)
- The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2007)
- Numerous other texts, treaties, and conventions, as well as the domestic constitutions of the vast majority of states and nations.

It is also proclaimed at both state and regional levels within our context: Article 47 of the Spanish Constitution of 1978 and Article 26 of the 2006 Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia.

2. It is noted that the recognition of a right does not necessarily equate to its guarantee.

There is insufficient protection under Article 47 of the Spanish Constitution, as it does not place housing within the scope of "fundamental rights and freedoms." Instead, it is classified as one of the guiding principles of social and economic policy, which must be developed by legislators, governments, and other public authorities, meaning it lacks maximum judicial protection.

Furthermore, there is near-unanimous agreement on the lack of firm and sustained political will and action to make this right effective. This stands in contrast to other social or collective rights—such as the rights to health and to education—where political determination and economic resources have been deployed with reasonably satisfactory results. Practical difficulties also arise from the complex and contentious distribution of powers between state and regional authorities, which frequently results in the Constitutional Court overturning laws passed by the Parliament of Catalonia.

3. This lack of sustained political action, combined with the lingering effects of the 2007–2008 real estate crash, the pandemic, and the recent surge in migration over the last four years, has triggered a social crisis of immense proportions. Consequently, housing is now viewed by citizens as their primary concern and a major source of anxiety in our society.

4. In the face of this crisis, it is worth recalling that the promotion, defense, and guarantee of social rights are primarily the responsibility of states (or public authorities and administrations in the broader sense). This constitutes an inescapable part of their inherent obligation to promote the common good (good governance), without prejudice to the fact that they should endeavour to do so in cooperation and in concert with private enterprise and civil society organizations.

5. Consequently, within our territory, public administrations must be diligent in developing the principles established in the aforementioned constitutional rules. This should be achieved through legislation that focuses on the needs of the most disadvantaged social sectors (the vulnerable, the excluded, etc.), facilitating their access to adequate housing. Such measures must also effectively bring about the eradication of speculation in the real estate sector, which remains a regrettably neglected mandate of Article 47 itself.

6. Given the critical current situation, these policies must be sustained over time and require a broad political and social consensus—a true national pact among all political, social, and economic stakeholders involved.

- **The essential pillars must include** budgetary allocations—in other words, public investment in the sector that brings us closer to average EU levels, from which we are currently far removed.
- **Tax policies** that favor access to housing are required.
- **Coordination across all levels of administration** is vital to achieve agile, synchronized urban planning, ensuring the balanced acquisition of public land for housing across the entire territory. This land must be equipped with necessary social, healthcare, educational, and public transport services. A metropolitan vision is required, while concurrently addressing the specific needs of inland, abandoned or "empty" Catalonia.

7. In any event, the role of private enterprise within the real estate sector must be respected and stimulated (owners, builders/developers, credit institutions, cooperatives, etc.), provided that the limits of the social function of property are kept in mind. Simultaneously, a check must be placed on purely speculative practices, particularly by large funds or corporate landlords that treat housing as a mere commodity.

8. The expediency and potential criticisms of certain measures were debated, some of which are included as final proposals in this study:

- Rent price caps.
- Mandatory lease extensions and the suspension of evictions.
- Rights of first refusal and pre-emption (*tanteig i retracte*) by public administrations.
- The prohibition or eradication of tourist and short-term seasonal rentals.
- The mandatory allocation of a percentage (e.g., 30%) of new developments to social housing.
- The expropriation of vacant housing held by SAREB, vulture funds, or REITs (*SOCIMIs*), or the imposition of penalties, tax surcharges, etc.
- Eliminating the possibility for housing built under historical official protection frameworks (*venda de protecció oficial*), and acquired with significant tax subsidies, to subsequently enter the free market through resale.

Regarding these issues, reference was made to specific foreign examples of housing policy (Berlin, Vienna, the Netherlands, France, Italy, etc.) and their outcomes, which—while not always successful—are nevertheless worthy of consideration.

9. Some of the most undignified and extreme situations linked to the right to housing were also addressed, though time constraints prevented them from receiving the extensive coverage required. These include:

- The subletting of rooms.
- Squatting out of absolute necessity (distinguishing this from criminal or syndicate-driven activities).
- Substandard housing, homelessness, and evictions.
- Discrimination in accessing rental housing on the grounds of race or origin.

10. The need for the Church's message and witness regarding its own real estate patrimony was highlighted (dioceses, parishes, religious orders, convents, schools, care homes, etc.). Recent stances taken by the Tarraconense Episcopal Conference and the Union of Religious Orders of Catalonia with the purpose of collaborating with the Public Administrations in searching for solutions to the housing crisis were viewed positively. Union of Religious Orders of Catalonia with the purpose of collaborating with the Public Administrations"

PROPOSED COURSES OF ACTION

- Regulation of housing rental prices.
- Prohibition of tourist apartments, alongside the legal regulation and monitoring of seasonal rentals.

- Restrictions on the purchase of housing by non-EU nationals (investment funds or high-net-worth individuals who hold properties for very short stays), unless actual residency is verified.
- Limits on the number of residential properties an individual or entity can own within a high-demand, stressed housing market zone (*zona tensionada*).
- The revision and streamlining of urban planning regulations to generate housing, with a particular focus on rural areas.
- Public investment in housing of a minimum of 5% of the budget across all public administrations for a minimum period of 10 years.
- The integration of housing and transportation policies.
- Fostering legal stability by extending the mandatory minimum duration of lease agreements.