

CALL FOR PAPERS to Special Issue of Critical Housing Analysis

We invite contributions to the special issue of Critical Housing Analysis entitled

Understanding contemporary drivers of housing inequality under radical contextual diversity

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Across many countries, housing has arguably become a more salient engine of socio-economic and intergenerational inequality (Adkins et al. 2019; Dewilde & Waitkus 2024; Hochstenbach et al. 2025). Housing wealth has increasingly become the cornerstone of a new, more asset-based welfare state (Groves & Murie 2007; Malpass 2008; Dewilde & Ronald 2017). Rising housing prices over recent decades, unequal distributions of price gains, and multi-property ownership (Christophers 2021) have exacerbated wealth and welfare inequality. In many countries, more vulnerable groups are struggling to meet basic housing needs – whether quality, tenure security or affordability – and are facing more durable conditions of housing precarity (Gielens et. al 2025). To a scale unprecedented in the post-WWII context, housing inequality is structuring broader social, economic and wealth inequalities and is increasingly at the centre of national and European politics.

However, such dynamics are not the same across European countries. Although many countries experienced sharp recoveries in housing prices shortly after the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), in many others house prices only recently returned to pre-GFC levels. While some countries face worsening housing affordability, in others affordability has actually improved. For example, average housing costs-to-income ratios (according to EU-SILC data) and average housing price-to-income ratios (according to OECD data) improved between 2008 and 2023 in almost two-thirds of European countries (Lux et al. 2026). And while inequality in housing costs-to-income ratio worsened between 2008 and 2023 in three-quarters of European countries, inequality in access to homeownership worsened “only” in half of them and housing wealth inequality (measured in terms of the ratio between the 90th to 50th percentile of net residential wealth) worsened in less than half of the countries surveyed by the European Central Bank between 2011 and 2023 (ECB 2025). There are outliers, such as Austria, Germany, Sweden, the UK and the Netherlands, where housing affordability decreased and housing inequalities rose more strongly. Similarly, the years of the Covid-19 pandemic (due to sharp housing price growth) and period of great inflation (with rising interest rates and energy costs) represent outlier periods from the long-term trend. However, in view of such radical diversity across

countries and time periods, how can we understand the real drivers of changing housing inequality? And what dynamics are especially relevant to explain divergent trends?

Besides contextual diversity, recent literature reviews reveal a lack of a universally agreed definition of 'housing inequality' (Nasrabadi et al. 2024; James et al. 2024). Researchers use a broad set of perspectives and measures to examine it. This adds to a 'conceptual fog' around a complicated body of results that may not be fully consistent, even within one country. Specifically, there are: (1) different domains of housing where we can study inequality (such as, affordability, tenure, quality, precarity, wealth or locational characteristics); (2) different geographic levels where housing inequality can be surveyed, namely *micro*, *meso* and *macro* levels; and (3) different indicators and empirical strategies in measuring inequalities.

Taking housing wealth inequality as an example, it can variably be measured by examining wealth variance, comparing wealth between different household *wealth percentiles*, or comparing wealth across household *income quantiles*. We can compute inequality for total or equalised (per capita) wealth, and for gross or net wealth. Because housing wealth inequality is closely connected with tenure inequality, it can also be measured by the tenure income/wealth gap or the stratification of homeownership among different SES or income groups. Each indicator may produce different relative results and patterns in country comparisons. The selection of geographical coverage, focus, scope and measures hence all influence conclusions. This instability complicates interpretations and makes generalization difficult, particularly for policymakers. In other words, how can we understand housing as a driver of inequality without a clearer understanding of what housing inequality is and the limitations of different perspectives and indicators employed to measure it?

Additionally, the mechanisms driving the evolution of housing inequality are themselves complex. Housing inequality trends are influenced by various direct and indirect factors. More direct factors, such as *housing market* (e.g., price and affordability trends) or *housing regime characteristics* (e.g., tenure structures, supply, rental market regulations) may only mediate the impacts of relevant indirect factors (e.g., labour market, political interests, market failures or socio-demographic changes). The causal relationships between factors and consequences may also not be clear. Declining homeownership rates are interrelated, for example, with demographic changes such as lower fertility rates or higher shares of single-person households, however, cause and effect relations are often bidirectional.

With such a complex explanatory framework, contextual diversity, and diverse conceptualizations and operationalizations, how can we understand drivers behind housing inequality? What are the limits for generalisation of the results from inequality studies? What are the advantages and weaknesses of different approaches, measures and analytical concepts? And ultimately how can we clear the conceptual fog surrounding housing inequality research, e.g., by expanding the theory or classifying existing knowledge?

In this special issue, we welcome papers that deal with diverse aspects of housing inequality: papers that focus on the different domains of inequality and apply various methodological and analytical approaches (quantitative or qualitative). Papers may be

either comparative or relating to one country, neighbourhood or population group, but they should **have an ambition to contribute to the theoretical underpinning of housing inequality studies** – by, e.g., advocating strengths and weaknesses of particular approaches or indicators, delineating and classifying the limits for generalisability of findings, or contributing to new conceptual and theoretical framings of inequality research. We welcome theoretical papers, review papers, empirical data analyses of housing inequality/precarity, or qualitative case studies, but with the requirement that each of them **will, at least partially, help to define or refine the conceptual and theoretical basis for a more cohesive understanding of housing inequality.**

Contributions

More information on the publisher standards and previous articles published in Critical Housing Analysis are available at <https://www.housing-critical.com>

Potential contributors should submit an abstract to martin.lux@soc.cas.cz by **July 15, 2026**. The deadline for submission of full papers to the Special Issue is **November 30, 2026**. The issue is planned to be released as **No. 1/2027** in **May/June 2027**.

Full papers should be submitted through <https://www.housing-critical.com/submit-your-paper/> after registration of the corresponding author.

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