

# Black market' Swedish flat leases sold openly on the internet

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**Stockholm** has long had a problem with housing shortages, and as a result, a black market in rental contracts. But now the illegal market has gone mainstream and leases are sold being openly on the internet.

Finding an apartment in Stockholm is a jungle for the newcomer. The city's lampposts are littered with adverts for apartments to exchange, apartments wanted or apartments to let.

Many of the adverts, which in recent years have largely moved to the internet, included demands for a "reward" or "premium" and six figure sums regularly change hands in return for a contract giving the right to reside in one of the capital's elusive "first-hand" rental apartments.

But in recent years the cryptic language has disappeared and leases are being advertised, bought and sold, like any other product or service, openly over the internet, Sveriges Radio reports.

The practice of selling a rental contract is however illegal and carries a maximum penalty of six months imprisonment.

Barbro Engman at the Swedish Union of Tenants (Hyresgästföreningen) explained to The Local why people are prepared to take the risk.

"They do not understand that it is illegal. Society does not bat an eyelid, nobody cares," she said.

"It is up to the police and politicians to act. No other form of criminal activity occurs so openly, so I don't understand the police when they say they can't do anything about it."

Engman explained that the shortage of apartments in Stockholm makes newcomers desperate and ruled out that the relatively low, regulated rents are to blame.

"No one knows how much the rents would have to rise in say, Gamla Stan, before you begin to erode this criminal activity and the will to pay."

"The rich always prosper, but there are a lot of pensioners living in central Stockholm that would have to move," Engman told The Local.

In recent years the problem has spread to other Swedish cities despite greater supply and rents lying closer to what the equivalent tenant-owner apartment (bostadsrätt) would cost.

"You will always find people prepared to pay that little bit extra for living just where they want," Engman observed.

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