

# About us

## Introducing The Swedish Union of Tenants

ENGLISH



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### About us

You can read all about us, the Swedish Union of Tenants, in this folder: who we are, what we do and what we stand for. If you would like to know more about us, please feel free to call us on 0771-443 443 or visit us online at [hyresgastforeningen.se](http://hyresgastforeningen.se).

### The Union of Tenants: Our fundamental principles

Our work is devoted to making sure everyone has the right to good housing at affordable cost. We promote better housing for the tenants of today and tomorrow. Our work benefits our members in many ways. We identify and promote involvement.

- We are a membership organisation
- We have no party political affiliations
- We negotiate with landlords concerning rents and terms and conditions of housing
- We answer questions from members and provide support in dealings with landlords
- We work with opinion-shaping and lobby policymakers to improve conditions for tenants
- We help members to personally make a difference in their housing





## Our vision

**Our vision is secure housing that promotes human and social development.**

Housing is a one of the most important aspects of people's everyday lives. The issue of housing affects us all, no matter where and how we live. Access to housing, tenant influence, reasonable rents, a sense of neighbourhood and well-managed housing environments are all important aspects of good, secure housing.

Creating good conditions for tenants is good for society.

When housing works, life works.

## Our objectives

**The Union of Tenants has two overall objectives for all our activities: better housing for tenants and increased member benefit.**

### **Better housing for tenants**

- Equitable economic conditions among different forms of housing
- Rents should not exceed 25% of disposable income and increase no faster than the general price trend
- Greater tenant influence over their own housing
- Greater tenant influence over the shared housing environment
- 15,000 new rental units per year in the years to come

### **Increased member benefit**

- Benefit corresponds to members' expectations
- Our service meets members' expectations

**You can read more about our objectives online at [hyresgastforeningen.se](http://hyresgastforeningen.se).**

## Organisation

**Decisions are made democratically at the Union of Tenants, and the people who are affected by our decisions are given a say.**

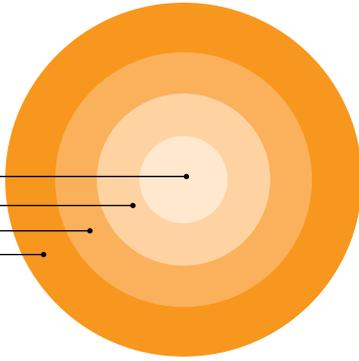
### **An organisation on four levels**

The Union of Tenants is organised on four levels: residential area, district, regional and national. On all levels, general decisions about how the organisation is run are made by representatives elected by the membership.

### **In the residential area**

There are house representatives or local groups of the Union of Tenants in many areas. In other areas, there may be working groups involved with temporary or single issues. The shared concerns of tenants are taken up with the landlord or property manager – which may involve anything from engaging in dialogue about the neighbourhood to having direct influence on rents or upkeep of the area.

People who want to get involved on a somewhat smaller scale can form a working group focusing on a single issue. The Union of Tenants will provide support in various forms, including training, contacts and methodological support for change processes.



**RESIDENTIAL AREA**

**Local Union** – activities in a block or residential area  
**Annual Meeting** – the supreme governing assembly for the local groups of the Union of Tenants  
**Local Boards** – ensure Annual Meeting resolutions are implemented

**DISTRICT**

**District Union** – activities at the district level  
**Annual Meeting** – The District Union's supreme governing assembly  
**District Board** – ensures Annual Meeting resolutions are implemented

**REGIONAL**

**Region** – activities at the regional level  
**Regional Delegates Meeting** – the region's supreme governing assembly  
**Regional Board** – ensures Regional Delegates Meeting resolutions are implemented

**NATIONWIDE**

**National Union** – activities at the national level  
**Annual National Union Meeting** – the national union's supreme governing assembly  
**National Union Board** – ensures Annual National Union Meeting resolutions are implemented

**In the district**

At the district level, the Union of Tenants negotiates rents with local housing companies. The Union also conducts advocacy work at this level on issues related to housing.

**In the region**

At the regional level, the Union of Tenants coordinates the action required in the region. Expertise in various housing issues is gathered here.

**Nationwide**

At the national level, the Union of Tenants conducts advocacy work in relation to housing policy. Our efforts with policy issues related to rents and negotiations are also concentrated here. Experts at the Union of Tenants are often consulted when the Riksdag (Swedish Parliament) is preparing to enact new laws in the area of housing.



**Negotiations**

**The Union of Tenants negotiates rents for most tenants in Sweden. Both employees and active members participate in the negotiating process.**

**The right rent**

Rent is supposed to correspond to the quality, standard and service of the apartment. Quite simply, you should pay the right rent for your apartment. It is equally important that rents do not increase suddenly and dramatically. One of our objectives is that rent should not exceed 25% of average after-tax income in Sweden. And rents should not rise faster than other prices.

**Comparable rent for a comparable apartment**

When we negotiate rents, we make sure your rent does not exceed the rent for comparable apartments. Service and maintenance are key components that are always factored into negotiations.



## Utility value

Your rent is basically determined by the ‘utility value’ of your apartment. Utility value means that the rent should be proportionate to the quality and standard of the apartment. We think this is reasonable because it results in fair rents for everyone. The rent should reflect the general value that tenants assign to various characteristics of their housing. This includes things like the size of the apartment, number of rooms, floor plan, standard, condition, the housing environment, the location of the building, local services and the attractiveness of the area.

## Legal service

**The Union of Tenants provides help, service and support to thousands of members every year. Problems range from minor issues like a dripping tap or a draught to serious matters, such as termination of a lease.**

The Union of Tenants’ lawyers represent members in legal forums such as rent tribunals, district courts and courts of appeal. Some cases are also taken to the Supreme Court, although that is unusual.

- Members get answers to 40,000 questions every year from the Union of Tenants advisory service

- Every year, there are more than 17,000 individual cases in progress for members who need more advanced support
- On more than 1,000 occasions, members receive legal support from us in various legal forums

Legal service from the Union of Tenants is covered by membership charges.

## Shaping opinion

**Rental property is a good form of housing. Thousands of dedicated people in the Union of Tenants are working hard to improve housing for the tenants of today and tomorrow.**

There are housing shortages in many areas in Sweden. We want to see 15,000 new rental units per year built over the years to come – with affordable rents.

There is an urgent need for refurbishment in many neighbourhoods. We want the residential areas to be fixed up and for tenants to be involved in the decisions made.

We send postcards to politicians, distribute flyers, demonstrate online and a great deal more. And we get results.



## International work

**The Union of Tenants has acted as the head of the International Union of Tenants – IUT – since 1983. The IUT is an international popular movement that links 60 tenants’ organisations in 45 countries.**

IUT disseminates experience gathered and promotes best practices. IUT is also involved in shaping housing policy by demonstrating the benefit of having a large stock of good, decent rental housing at reasonable rents.

In 2008, IUT opened a local office in Brussels in order to engage in dialogue and lobby Members of the European Parliament and officials with the European Commission. For more information, visit the IUT online at [www.iut.nu](http://www.iut.nu).

## The housing environment

**All tenants should have the right to live in a good housing environment. This includes standards for the building itself as well as the surrounding area outdoors.**

The design and placement of the building, site conditions and vegetation all have a great impact on the indoor and outdoor environment.

Building materials and building techniques determine how well the building functions. Good heating, ventilation and maintenance are also necessary. The design of the apartments, the size and layout of the rooms, and light and sound conditions affect how well the housing meets tenants’ needs.

Having a personal say is also important. All tenants should, if they want, be given the opportunity to influence their shared housing environment.

## Safety

**Safety is a social issue – it has to do with feeling a sense of community with your neighbours and involvement in events where you live.**

The physical environment also plays a key role in this context. Benches near entrances and carefully planned playgrounds can become natural meeting places for residents.

Tenants say that feeling safe in their homes and communities is their highest priority. The Union of Tenants spreads knowledge about shortcomings and problems that make people feel less safe and secure in their homes.

The Union of Tenants cooperates with landlords and other organisations in the neighbourhood to stimulate local initiatives and involvement in various activities and programmes.



## Benefits of membership in The Union of Tenants

- We negotiate rents for most tenants in Sweden. But our members have access to more information and support in negotiations.
- Our lawyers and administrative officers know tenancy law inside out. If you are a member, you can get advice over the phone or book a personal meeting.
- You have access to our services through the Union of Tenants website, *hyresgastforeningen.se*.
- If you want to work to improve the area where you live, we have the resources to support you.
- You will have really good members-only benefits to choose among – like our tailor-made contents insurance, *Hyresgästförsäkringen*, which offers excellent value.
- You will receive our member magazine *Hem & Hyra* eight times a year. Each issue contains features ranging from investigative reports and local news to tests of household products and decorating hints. *Hem & Hyra* has its own website, *hemhyra.se*.

## For more information

To learn more about us and rental housing, please visit us online at [hyresgastforeningen.se](http://hyresgastforeningen.se). You are also welcome to contact the Union of Tenants by phone on 0771-443 443.

### Fast facts

Membership: 528,000 households  
Members holding elected positions: 12,600  
Employees: 740  
Local chapters: 1,438  
Unions: 152  
Regions: 9

#### Membership: age and distribution:

0–25: 12%  
26–35: 18%  
36–45: 17%  
46–55: 17%  
56–65: 15%  
66–75: 11%  
75+: 10%

#### Membership by gender:

Women: 55%  
Men: 45%

## Our history

**When the first Union of Tenants was formed in the 1910s, tenants were at the mercy of landlords. We played a major role in changing that.**

### Looking back

The first tenants' union that still exists was formed in Nynäshamn on 30 December 1915. Discontented tenants living in housing provided by the Swedish Telegraph Service had gathered for a meeting. The apartments were dreadful, with neither electricity nor running water. They were overrun with rats and vermin. When the landlord refused to do anything about the miserable conditions, the tenants decided to band together in a tenants' union.

Tenants' unions were started in similar ways all over Sweden. Eight tenants' unions joined together in 1923 to form the National Union of Tenants. By 1925, it had become a nationwide organisation.

The unions that were part of the National Union of Tenants in 1923 had a total of about 8,000 members. The organisation has grown steadily ever since, and the Union of Tenants now has more than half a million members.

## Swedish Union of Tenants' Regions

