

Council and social housing in Poland

In Poland, the main burden of responsibility for meeting housing needs rests on the local authorities, the municipalities. The process of transferring this responsibility began in 1990 along with the transfer of state housing stock to the municipalities. The municipal housing stock now consist of two categories; council housing and social housing

In Poland we have a stock of council flats, from which a special category of social housing can be distinguished. This category is housing often of lower standard, designated for people who have been evicted or those who are unable to maintain a dwelling on their own. Social housing rents are lower than those of council flats and they cannot exceed half of the lowest rental rate applied in the council flats stock.

The need for housing with reduced rents in Poland is high but state support for this type of housing is negligible. There is no ministry dealing specifically with housing. Since 1989 Polish governments have followed the Spanish path, trying to bring about a situation in which housing will be only a domain of the market, where the state does not intervene.

Regarding council and social housing in Poland we note today that there is no clearly defined government policy supporting the development of housing, including council and social housing. There is no housing development strategy. Instead, this issue is included the Human Capital Development Strategy. As a result, municipalities push housing issues into the ranks of inconvenient and less important tasks.

There is also a lack of adequate financial support from the state for local authorities to implement housing policies. Furthermore, expenditures on housing in the national budget are decreasing. Social housing and various programs for sheltered and emergency housing for the homeless receive some, but too little attention. Reasons for



Plac Centralny in Nowa Huta, Krakow, which once was home to a giant statue of Lenin, was in 2004 renamed Ronald Reagan Central Square.

this lack of attention include overly complicated procedures or the need for too much self-funding.

The shortage of council and social housing results, inter alia, from hasty and ill-considered housing privatization in the past – often with large discounts, demolition of buildings, and exclusion of premises from use because of their bad technical condition.

Also, there is an attitude, and belief among tenants, that there are no sanctions if you do not pay your rent, so the volume of rent arrears is increasing. At the end of 2011 the proportion of homes in council and social housing in which tenants were in arrears in payments was as high as 41 percent.

This shortage of council and social housing has another negative effect on municipal budgets. Since 2007 municipalities have been obliged to pay full compensation to owners, often housing associations, due to their inability to provide social housing for people who have been evicted.

Also, the allocation of council housing does not take into account possible improvements in the financial situation of the tenant. In Poland council flats are provided without any time limits.

Receipts from rents are low, rarely reaching the statutory level of 3 percent of the premise's reinstatement value per year. Rents can fulfil their role when this level is 4–7 percent of the reinstatement cost.

Ways forward in Poland could be to study how public-private partnerships are conducted in Western Europe, e.g. in obtaining land for construction or provision of credit guarantees.

Another recommendation would be to implement mechanisms that allow municipalities to control whether a council flat is occupied by a person who really needs such assistance. Also, Polish municipalities could build council flats, and obtain social dwellings by renovating run down council flats.

Council housing construction in Poland is facing many challenges. It is important to seek effective solutions, to share experiences and to learn from best European practice.

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