



International Union of Tenants: Preventing inadequate housing is a gain for society

March 15, 2016: On the occasion of the World Consumer Day, the International Union of Tenants (IUT) stresses the importance of providing people with adequate, healthy and affordable housing and increase the security of tenure. Housing is a consumer commodity that households spend the majority of the household income on.

Housing conditions and the urban environment have a direct effect on the physical and mental health of the population. Poor quality housing, related to insufficient insulation against cold/heat, damp and humidity, bad indoor air quality, noise and the lack of space accounts for more than 100.000 deaths per year within the European Region.¹ Poor and vulnerable populations face unhealthy and unsafe housing and physical barriers and related discrimination and exclusion. Those living in substandard and temporary and informal settlements often lack water, sanitation and other public services. 122 million Europeans citizens are at risk of poverty.² As housing costs are the major household spending, the provision of affordable, sustainable and healthy housing would be the key answer. The situation is exacerbated by 1.3 million refugees claiming asylum in Europe who lack the very basic housing provisions.

Although governments face these shocking facts, the right to housing is far from being recognized and implemented, not to mention the right to adequate housing. IUT claims that governments put this fundamental human right on the top of their agenda and not freedom of competition and private property coming first.

The private rental sector counts the highest proportion of poor quality, unhealthy housing. In the United Kingdom it is estimated that it would cost £17,6 billion to achieve 100% decency in the private rental sector.³

But this investment is a winning game. According to an upcoming EU publication, the entire society gains from investment in adequate and affordable housing as health, social security and energy costs significantly decrease, e.g.

Entire dwelling stock	Total cost of repair (€)	Annual savings to health service (€)	Annual savings to society (€)
Czech Republic	2,7 billion	87 million	1,4 billion
France	43 billion	956 million	16 billion
Germany	51 billion	904 million	16 billion
UK	37 billion	1,2 billion	19 billion

¹ <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/environment-and-health/Housing-and-health/data-and-statistics>

² <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/income-and-living-conditions/data/database>

³ Housing Learning and Improvement Network (2011): *Public health and housing: we can get it right.*

The estimated total cost of repair in EU 28 would be 353 billion euros; annual savings for health services would be 10 billion euros and annual savings to society 158 billion euros. Therefore, investment in affordable and healthy housing is a form of preventative expenditure, leading to residents improved well-being, better homes, neighbourhoods and to social and economic improvements.

Property entails obligations. Its use shall also entail the public good. The IUT claims that tenants need to be protected by national legal systems e.g. through “social” tenancy laws in which short term agreements are the exemption, tenants are protected against arbitrary notices and rents are stabilized legally to ensure affordability and accessibility to the market also for the less better off. As housing is not an economic but a social good, the security of tenure is a precondition for stabilizing people’s life and thus their well-being.

About IUT:

The International Union of Tenants (IUT) is a NGO that was founded in 1926 with the purposes of safeguarding tenant’s interest and promoting affordable and decent rental housing across the world. Today, IUT has got 61 member associations in 45 countries.

www.iut.nu