

IUT Statement
European Housing Ministers meeting in Prague 2005
Tenants and High Rise residential housing

It is estimated that about 40 million people in the 25 European Union countries live in large housing estates, most often in high rise residential buildings.

Up to 50 % of the residential flats in some countries are in pre-fabricated high rise buildings. When these houses were built, mostly in the 1960's and early 70's, high rise was considered very modern and attractive and people were happy to move from damp, dark, and over crowded tenement blocks from pre war and the after war period.

This was the case in all European countries.

But, without jobs nearby, lack of maintenance and without sufficient public transportation and other infrastructure necessities, the attraction died out in the 80's and 90's. Those natives who could moved out and immigrants moved in, creating segregated districts with low income residents, and we are all aware of the resulting situation and consequences.

The majority of the tenants living in high rise residential buildings often rent from the council, or from social or municipal landlords. Or – in eastern Europe, after privatisation – many tenants have become owners in newly established co-operatives.

Tenants or owners, living in large housing estates from the 60' or 70's, all share the problems that originate from low quality material and insufficient maintenance.

My home is my castle, as the British say. This expresses the feeling among tenants and owners alike. But there is a fundamental difference. Owners often have a national legislation that covers their interests, as well as regulates their rights.

For tenants, this is not the case in many countries, particularly in states which have strived to privatise its housing stock in a very short period of time.

Housing legislation in central and western Europe took 50-100 years to formulate and introduce, then collected in a Housing Acts.

In east Europe this process took maybe 10 years.

Housing Acts should guarantee and give the tenant a fundamental protection against the landlord. At the same time as the ownership is protected and guaranteed. A sustainable Housing Act should formulate the dividing line between ownership and the individual tenants' interest.

A sustainable legislation should be legislation with a social responsibility.

A housing legislation that protects both owners and tenants is also one of the fundamental pillars in a politically stable society.

Tenants also have rights; to live comfortably and feel safe from being evicted, from sudden rent increases, from leaking gas pipes and from roofs or from balconies on the brink of falling down. Unfortunately, this is often not the case.

Most of the Housing legislation which was composed during the 1990's in CEE countries did not enough, in our view, protect the tenants, nor new owners – whose problems often resemble those of the tenants.

Tenant's main problems are insecure tenure, invisible (or hard to meet with) landlords, bad management and rapidly increasing rents – at the same time as increasing unemployment and steady low pensions for the elderly.

And no address - no job!

In order to create socially and politically stable societies and reverse the increasing segregation and to promote social cohesion:

The IUT urges all EU members to

- regularly up-date its Housing policy and legislation for the purpose of improving the possibilities for tenants to be treated with fairness,
- establish mechanisms that assure the right of tenant participation, particularly in matters such as management and refurbishment of the building,
- formulate legislation that regulates the housing management of poor owners and that protects the tenants from unjust rent increases, evictions and neglected maintenance,
- avoid continuous privatisation of municipal or state owned housing, with special consideration to low quality housing and housing in great need for repair which would become economically impossible for the new owners to maintain and refurbish.
- re-establish a rental housing stock, with affordable rents.

Thank you.