



Tenants' Milestones for the new European Parliament 2014-2019

The Social Dimension of the European Urban Policy - Tenants make cities!

1) Everybody should have the right to affordable and decent housing- the right to housing is a fundamental right

The constitution of Europe, the Lisbon treaty, has to guarantee social rights on key territories. Part of the Lisbon Treaty is the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, where the right to housing assistance is enshrined in article 34. This right has to be legally enforced at Member States level.

Member states should adopt policies to prevent unfair evictions as well as laws guaranteeing the security of tenure and affordable rents. Evictions represent an increasing trend in Europe: we urge the European Union to promote prevention policies for fighting housing exclusion, e.g. alert and support mechanisms for people endangered by evictions, balanced solutions for the sitting tenants in restituted flats in Central and Eastern Europe and rules that prevent foreclosures.

Tenancy law is existentially affecting the daily lives of European citizens, as about one third of them depend on rental housing. The implementation of a social rent law, especially in the member states in the EU periphery where the housing conditions are worst, would be the basis for a responsible housing policy and a level playing field between landlords and tenants.

2) EU state aid rules must favour investment in affordable rental housing - the allocation of social and affordable rental housing has to be decided at Member States' level

EU state aid rules that force member States to limit the access to social housing to socially disadvantaged groups and to exclude others groups in need are denying the fact that the private housing is not accessible and affordable to low and middle income groups because of market failures.

The EU competition policy has weak democratic basis- we need more influence and control of the EU parliament to guarantee universal access to good public services like social and affordable housing.

The definition of the mission and the role of social housing must remain under the exclusive competence of the member States, including the setting of criteria for allocation of social housing to people in need.

The fight against territorial segregation, ghettoization and the promotion of social cohesion and urban mix should be a priority of Member States by having a wide diversity of types of social housing, according to the local and regional needs.

Social and affordable housing should be accessible to large parts of the population, not only to a limited target group.

3) Fight energy poverty: ensure that enough EU-public funding is committed to make energy-efficient housing affordable for low and middle-income groups

16% of the European population, 78 million people are at risk of poverty. The costs for housing, heating and electricity have been increasing rapidly. Key workers have massive problems in finding affordable rental housing in the urban areas; especially poor households living in run down apartments are endangered by energy poverty.

Energy-efficient housing should not be a privilege of the rich- the big challenge will be to create equal access to low and medium income households. Promoting energy-efficiency by producing welfare losses for the inhabitants is not socially sustainable. For those countries where energy refurbishment costs may be passed on to tenants, the Dutch “covenant on energy savings” provides a best practice in the field. It ensures a balanced and democratic approach through the housing cost guarantee, by which overall housing costs for the tenants are lower after energy renovation works.

Knowing the energy performance of your building is the first step to save energy, Member States must ensure that the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) is handed over to current and prospective tenants; also, the indicator of the EPC shall be stated in real estate advertisements in commercial media (Article 12 Energy Performance Buildings Directive).

The EU 20-20-20 climate commitment (20% less greenhouse gas emissions, 20% more energy efficiency and 20% share of renewable energies until the year 2020) will not be reached without focusing on the existing housing stock responsible for 40% of Europe’s greenhouse gas emissions. EU regional and cohesion funds should speed up the process of energy-efficient refurbishment of the social and affordable housing stock. The 20% earmarking for low carbon economy should be channelled to the energy efficient refurbishment of the housing stock, especially social rental housing.

The European Investment Bank (EIB) shall provide new financing instruments and funds for energy efficiency improvements in private and public social housing.

4) Tenure neutral policies – redirect funding towards affordable rental housing

The worst form of social exclusion is homelessness. In the last twenty years the investment in social and affordable rental housing has steeply decreased in all EU Member States. The current austerity measures are exacerbating housing exclusion and homelessness. This trend is in contradiction with “Europe 2020” social objectives, notably the commitment to bring at least 20 million people out of poverty and social exclusion by 2020. We need a new Marshall plan for affordable housing, strengthening the investment in the not-for-profit housing sector.

Member States are withdrawing their support to social and affordable rental housing, through ultra-liberal policies that target only the most in need. Large sectors of society are therefore neglected, including the working class. We are witnessing policies that promote homeownership at all means. However, not everybody can afford to become a home owner. The goal of housing policies should not be homeownership for all, but housing for all. This objective is achievable if public policies promote all forms of housing tenure. The European Investment Bank (EIB) therefore should contribute to this goal by creating a fund dedicated to the investment in affordable rental housing.

