

# GLOBAL TENANT



INTERNATIONAL UNION OF TENANTS' QUARTERLY MAGAZINE

November 2011



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here and there!'

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## Young adults matter, here and there

Some weeks ago I met with many of IUT's friends and relations in Brussels, for the Tenant's Day together with the UN Habitat Day, on October 3. Our theme 'young adults and access to affordable rental housing' manifested itself as a theme which many could relate to, and find an interest in. We noted with pleasure that several of IUT's members around the world also caught on to this topic.

Why is that young people always, and in all countries, seem to have great difficulties in finding affordable housing? Is it some kind of a law of nature? Yes, it is true that many young people, below perhaps 25, do not have the necessary incomes to buy or even to rent under present conditions. But really, for all those above 25, and even 30+, who can not afford housing – how can we allow this? Also, those 20+ need to come away from home, for studies or for work. This backlog of affordable housing merely seems to be a structural problem, and lack of political will. It is simply the obligation of every state or province to provide, or to facilitate, its citizens with housing that they can afford – full stop!

Just before Tenant's Day I had the privilege of visiting South Africa, first Cape Town and then Durban, where IUT's member, Organisation of Civic Rights, is very active. And if we have a problem with housing here in Europe, then how big isn't the problem in South Africa! But the aspirations are the same; to leave home, to study or to get a job and then raise a family. In Durban, as in elsewhere Africa, only alternative for many young families in the townships is to cram together with parents and often grandparents, in 2–3 small rooms.

It is sometimes necessary to put things into perspective.



**Magnus Hammar**  
Secretary General, IUT

## C A L E N D A R

### 2 0 1 1

**December 5–8:** 1st National Housing Convention in Calabar, Nigeria

**December 8–10:** APNHR 10th conference in Hong Kong

### 2 0 1 2

**February 8–10:** 6th Australasian Housing Researchers' conf. in Adelaide

**Febr. 27–March 1:** 2nd World Conference on Women's Shelters, Washington D.C.

**April 10–12:** Housing California Annual Conference, in Sacramento

**April 21–22:** Contemporary Housing Issues in a Changing Europe, Galway Ireland

**April 25–26:** Annual Swedish national housing meeting, in Gävle

**June 11–15:** 2012 World Indigenous Housing Conference, Vancouver Canada

**June 12–14:** CIH Annual Conference and Exhibition, Manchester England

**June 15–17:** National Conference of the Swedish Union of Tenants, in Stockholm

**June 24–27:** ENHR Conference 2012 in Lillehammer, Norway

**July 16–18:** TPAS England Annual Conference, Birmingham

**August 1–4:** Housing in Latin America, Buenos Aires Argentina

**September 1–7:** UN World Urban Forum in Naples, Italy

**September 16–19:** SAHF Conference in Cape Town, South Africa

**September 24–26:** 73rd UN ECE Session of the Com. on Housing and Land Management, Geneva

**October 1:** International Tenants Day

**Oct. 30–Nov. 2:** 7th National Australian Housing Conf. in Brisbane

For more information on conferences: [www.iut.nu/conferences.htm](http://www.iut.nu/conferences.htm)

# What future for social housing in the UK?

*From Lloyd George's promise of "homes fit for heroes" to Margaret Thatcher's dream of a property-owning democracy, housing has been at the centre of British politics for more than a century – but it has rarely mattered as much as it does now. Here is why.*

Labour voters lived in council houses. Tories owned their own homes. That's the way it had always been.

Yet for a young Labour MP, out canvassing in his constituency in the early 1980s, it still came as a shock to be told, by an old party stalwart, that there was no point knocking on doors on a private housing estate, as they all voted Tory. To Tony Blair, it was a sign of just how out of touch his party had become with ordinary working people.

Millions of people owned their own homes, or aspired to. Did Labour have nothing to say to them?

Blair's supporters in his North-East of England constituency, battling crippling levels of unemployment in a former mining area, needed the guarantee of a decent home for their families at a reasonable rent that council housing provided.

But, Blair reasoned in articles at the time, that Labour would never again be in a position to help them as a party of government unless it learned to connect with owner occupiers, particularly in the South of England. Blair's epiphany came at the height of Margaret Thatcher's "right-to-buy" revolution.

**Giving council tenants the opportunity** to buy the homes they were living in, at a generous discount, was one of the defining policies of the Thatcher era.

More than two million council tenants – many of them traditional Labour voters, took advantage of it.

At the time, it seemed like the fulfilment of a longstanding Conservative dream, first spoken about in the 1930s, of creating a "property-owning democracy".

Ordinary working families now had assets that they could pass on to their chil-



PHOTO: IUT/MAGNUS HAMMAR

Is this the the future for social housing in the UK ...



PHOTO: IUT/MAGNUS HAMMAR

... or is this the future? Regeneration offers mixed rental housing in Manchester.

dren, Tory MPs boasted, and the opportunity to escape the modest circumstances they were born into.

The policy had been pioneered by Lady Thatcher's predecessor as Tory leader, Ted Heath, in the early 1970s, although local councils have had the right to sell off their council housing stock, with ministerial approval, since 1936.

Local authorities had been required by law to provide council housing since 1919 and Lloyd George's "Homes fit for Heroes" campaign sparked by concerns over the poor physical condition of army recruits.

**It was not until after World War II** that the age of the council house truly arrived. Clement Attlee's post-war Labour government built more than a million homes, 80 per-

cent of which were council houses, largely to replace those destroyed by Hitler.

The house building boom continued when the Conservatives returned to power in 1951, but the emphasis shifted at the end of the decade towards slum clearance, as millions were uprooted from cramped, run-down inner-city terraces and re-housed in purpose-built new towns or high rise blocks.

A generation was introduced to the joys of indoor toilets, front and rear gardens, and landscaped housing estates where, as the town planners boasted, a tree could be seen from every window.

**By the early 1970's**, the concrete walkways and "streets in the sky" that had once seemed so

Continued on page 19 ➔



## Tenants' Day 2011:

# Little action in sight to solve young adults' housing situation

*The theme 'Affordable Rental Housing for the Young' showed to be a topic which caught the interest of many IUT members around the world. It is a theme which many can relate to, either directly as a young person in housing distress or as parents with children in their 30s who can not afford a home of their own. Or as a 50 + with memories of what life was like as a young person ready to leave home.*

The full day IUT conference in Brussels on the International Tenant's Day was organised against background figures from Eurostat showing that almost half, 46 percent, of all young adults between 18 and 34 in Europe still lived with their parents in 2008 – a figure most certainly higher today.

The Tenant's Day originally springs from the UN Habitat Day which is an officially declared Day by the UN. In 1986 this day, first Monday in October, was adopted by IUT as the Tenant's Day.

Over 25 speakers not only spoke out on the difficult housing situation for young people in Europe, but also on the way out from housing stress and on various solutions. The event was attended by some 130 delegates from 18 countries, including many from European research institutes and Brussels based institutions, including the EU Commission and the EU Parliament.

Even though the European Union combats social exclusion, through its many programs and funds, housing exclusion – which is perhaps the most evident and concrete form of social exclusion – is left on its own.

**Housing in the EU** is, according to the principle of subsidiarity, left to the national governments to take action on. But there is no or little action in sight! And if there is action, it is mainly construction of housing designated for those with good salaries.



Young people, young adults, most times have to rely on parents, relatives and the subletting market or on friends with whom they can cram together with. Worst case scenarios are of course shelters and hostels, or even homelessness.

In the US, Australia and in Canada the reality is similar. In the US, by the end of June, the US Census Bureau reported a net increase of 1.4 million households that moved into rental housing, a 4 percent rise since 2010 in the number of tenant households. Much of the rental demand is from household heads under 30 years old who have decided to postpone homeownership in favor of renting during uncertain economic times, according to the report.

**"These declarations are not just for show!"** said IUT President Sven Bergensträhle, with reference to several international agreements, treaties and conventions, which already states the right to housing. *'Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being for himself and his family, including food, clothing and housing...'* is direct wording from the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and from the UN Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural rights. Likewise, the rev. European Social Charter, article 31, covers access to housing and prevention from homelessness, and the necessity of affordable housing.

Mr. Bergensträhle stressed that: "These agreements have to be realised, and they apply to all, including of course young adults. There is something wrong when almost every second young adult still live with parents in the EU today".

The **'Global Housing Strategy** to the year 2025' was presented by Claudio Acioly, chief of housing policy section with UN HABITAT in Nairobi. UN-HABITAT addresses the global challenge to realise affordable housing for all and equitable access to affordable housing.



Sven Bergensträhle, IUT President, called for less subsidies to homeownership.



Karima Delli, MEP, blamed much of housing distress on youth unemployment.



Mariam Ahmed and Alan Tien from St Basils stressed that homelessness is best prevented by early measures.



Claudio Acioly presented the UN Habitat Global Housing Strategy to 2025.

**Over 25 speakers not only spoke out on the difficult housing situation for young people in Europe, but also on the way out from housing stress and on various solutions.**

“Rental housing is not just an issue in developed countries but maybe even more so in developing countries, where many – maybe the majority– rent their accommodations, but with few or no rights”, said Mr. Acioly. “In one of the largest slums in Africa, Kibera Nairobi, rented housing provides for nearly 95 percent of the stock.”

Furthermore, in the CEE region where rented occupation virtually disappeared after 1991, there is currently a housing crises produced partly by the lack of tenure choices, like the access to rental housing. In his concluding remarks Mr Acioly stated that: “Countries with higher ownership rates and limited tenure choice tend to have higher share of households facing affordability problems.”

**A level playing field** was asked for by several speakers; Mr. Bergensträhle said that: “Without exception, all EU countries subsidize homeownership, mainly through tax incentives. These subsidies contribute to an overall low production of rental housing.”

**Prof. Hugo Primus from Delft University** also stressed the necessity of a more level playing level field for tenants and owners, with more tenure neutral housing policies and income-related housing allowance as an entitlement. Prof. Primus commented on the present credit crunch and the Euro crises by saying: “The housing demand now shifts from expensive to cheap housing and from owner occupation to rental housing. But most governments react in precisely the opposite way by stimulating social housing providers to sell their housing stock and stimulate owner occupation. This is wrong and will only increase the financial crises and the problems on the housing markets. Instead, we need more investment in housing, particularly in rental housing”.

**“Why do young adults live with their parents”** asked Ylva Westander, IUT analyst and policy maker with the Swedish Union of Tenants. The Scandinavian countries are positioned at the lower end of the scale with only about 20 percent living with parents. The Mediterranean countries and many CEE countries place themselves at the other end of the scale with over 50 percent of all young aged 18–34 living with their parents in 2008.

The Eurobarometer Youth Survey from 2007 reveals that lack of financial resources as the primary explanation as to why 3 out of 4 of young adults aged 15 to 30, continue to live with their parents in the EU 27. 16 percent openly admitted that they preferred all the conveniences at ‘Hotel Mum’. It can be assumed that Scandinavian young adults move out despite a huge backlog of affordable housing, simply because of a strong need for emancipation.

**“I am an MEP but I am also an activist”**, was Karima Delli’s opening remark. She continued by giving a personal and engaging presentation of how she, before becoming an MEP in Brussels for the French Greens, was an active member of the *Jeudi Noir* (Black Thursday) collective and how they occupied empty houses in Paris. Thursday from the day of the week when young French people ➔



➔ search through the newspaper ads for flats to rent. Ms Delli argued that unemployment, particularly among the young, is one of the main causes of the present housing crises. France is one of the richest countries in the world, but still 3 million people are inadequately housed, or not housed at all. One remedy would be to increase minimum wages for the young!

**“Well paid employees** of EU institutions and other international organisation have pumped up the housing costs for the citizens of Brussels”, according to Alain Hutchinson. Mr. Hutchinson, MP of the Brussels Parliament and until 2009 MEP for Belgium, described how key workers and other low / medium paid employees in Brussels often have to seek housing in the social sector, or start commuting from far away neighbouring towns. Also, there is widespread speculation on land and property which have further worsened the housing situation.

*After the morning coffee break the floor was handed over to those who are directly affected by housing shortage and housing unaffordability, or those representing those who are in housing need.*

**Kathleen Kelly** from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation focused on what makes young people’s housing moves successful; facilitate information across the system and earlier and the need for fuller understanding of reality of choices and constraints in the housing system. Furthermore, we need to treat young people as individuals and with respect and with open minds, and not just having them to tick boxes. Another advice was that we can work with schools to help young people to prepare for independence, and carry out pre-tenancy vulnerability checks to avoid later housing difficulties.

**Homelessness makes young people** extremely vulnerable, and quickly undermines self-esteem and self-confidence. Mariam Ahmed and Alan Tien, from the UK, represented the National Youth Reference Group, and St. Basils which works directly with young people aged 16 – 25 in the area of Birmingham, to prevent youth homelessness. Most effective are preventive measures, like early family mediation and community resources for afternoon and evening activities, preferably led by other young people. When homeless, young people need good quality information and advice preferably from other young people who can do counselling and knows the talk, and not only between 9 and 5.

**Italy is one** of the countries in Europe, together with Greece and Croatia, where young people are hard-



Prof. Hugo Primus of Delft University, and Prof. Yelena Shomina from Moscow compared experiences of housing.



Stéphanie Sotison, CNL, described young people’s housing in Paris.



Alain Hutchinson proposes a European Agenda for social housing.



My Malmström-Sobelius from [www.jagvillhabostad.nu](http://www.jagvillhabostad.nu)



Conny Reuter, President of Social Platform, brought up gentrification as a self-generating phenomenon which often makes prices on housing go up.



Albert Arnau, president of FAVIBC in Catalonia, Spain.



Václav Procházka, SON, Czech Republic and Karol Szylo, PZL, Poland.

est hit by unemployment and unaffordable housing, and a situation where almost 60 percent of all young Italians under 34 live at home with their parents. Irene Manera, representing the Italian tenant organisation SICET, said that: "From the post-war period until today Italy has had, together with all other Mediterranean countries, governments which have almost entirely supported home ownership. Delayed emancipation of young people will have a boomerang effect on all economic systems, in terms of demographics, pensions, productivity and social development."

**Stéphanie Sotison**, representative of CNL, French Union of Tenants, presented an overview of social housing in France, which in theory and income wise is open to 60 percent of the population. But there are currently 1.3 million households on waiting lists, so obtaining a social flat in Paris can take up to 10 years. Students in France can apply for housing grants, but there are currently some 600,000 grant holders for only 165,500 available student units. The private rental market is often the only solution, but landlords most often ask for a monthly personal income three times higher than the rent.

**Albert Arnau**, president of the Spanish Catalanian based FAVIBC (Federation of Social Housing and Neighbourhood Associations in Catalonia) together with Xavi Pastor, presented a country in deep recession, where unemployment among young people is the highest in Europe, over 40 percent, and where young Spaniards do not leave home until their 30s. At the same time 1.2 million dwellings are empty, of which half of them because they can not be sold, and another 360,000 where construction has made a halt. A huge political failure, according to FAVIBC.

**Poland**, a country with an almost non existing social housing stock, forces young people to seek housing in the ownership market or in the very limited private rental market – of which both are unaffordable to the most, according to Karol Szylo lawyer with the Polish tenant association Polskiego Zrzeszenia Lokatorów (PZL). Average price of a flat in Krakow is approx. 7,000 zloty/ m<sup>2</sup>, or €1,600, while the average Polish wage is 3,366 zloty or €780 Euro, and only about €500 for young people. So no wonder that young people in Poland stay with their parents.

**Czech housing** from 1991 until today is characterised by restitution and privatisation. Václav Procházka, from the Czech Union of Tenants (SON), presented a background of a very inflexible Czech housing market, with few 'social' dwellings for the very poor, like hostels, etc. The private rental market is very limited, with only some 150,000 flats in the whole country, unaffordable to the most. But the

Czech government has announced a new housing policy for 2020, which includes support for construction of rentals, 35 – 80 m<sup>2</sup>, through low-interest loans with state guarantees.

**My Malmström-Sobelius**, presented the Swedish youth network 'jagvillhabostad.nu' (i-want-housing.now), created by young Swedish home seekers who had got fed up with a constant housing shortage in major Swedish cities, and decided to do something about it. The network managed to get the ears of the building and architectural sector, and together they drew up the plans for a cost effective multi-family house, suitable for young people with limited incomes. In 2007 the first house, named VillBo, stood ready with 31 flats and with the lowest new construction rents in Stockholm that year.

**Giuseppe Porcaro**, secretary general of the Brussels based European Youth Forum, spoke of the right to housing as part of the right to autonomy. He stressed that: "We need also to bring in a holistic view on young people and their housing, together with urban and city planning. We should try to counteract the creation of young peoples' ghettos."

**Hegyi Gyula**, represented EU Commissioner László Andor, responsible for employment, social affairs and inclusion. Mr. Gyula spoke on the 2020 EU strategy which includes targets such as 75 percent of the population aged 20–64 should be employed, the share of early school leavers should be under 10 percent and at least 40 percent of the younger generation should have a tertiary degree and 20 million less people should be at risk of poverty. "These targets also include the housing dimension as early school dropouts often end up in housing difficulties, and poverty includes of course housing poverty", said Mr Hegyi.

"Politics is simply not able to deal with the financial crises", said Libor Rouček MEP with the Czech Social Democratic Party. In his talk Mr. Rouček referred to the situation in Europe after WW II, when most cities were in ruins and unemployment was high. But massive construction programmes, including housing construction, resulted in economic growth. This recipe could and should be used again.

**Conny Reuter**, Secretary General of SOLIDAR and President of the Social Platform, one of the concluding speakers, stressed that the market will not regulate itself, and that the market has no social or inclusive dimension. Therefore we need the state to intervene in areas which are crucial for the well being to all of us, like access to affordable housing.

**Text and photo** Magnus Hammar, IUT

### **Assorted proposals for increasing the output of affordable rental housing, particularly for young adults:**

- Promote tenure neutral housing policies, level playing field between ownership and renting, by e.g. decreased tax breaks for home owners,
- property tax on empty housing, to stop speculation
- stop conversion of flats into offices,
- improve the housing allocation systems, municipal housing queues,
- beware of gentrification of which often leads to more expensive housing,
- rental housing construction through low-interest loans with state guarantees
- allocate more land for public housing, and plan for young people's housing
- state as guarantor to young people's rental contracts,
- young people need housing advice at an early stage, family mediation to prevent homelessness
- public-private-partnerships, PPPs, are ok if they result in affordable housing,
- minimum wages for young people to enable them to enter the housing market,
- stop the possibility to terminate leases without reason,
- encourage governments to make use of the possibilities of EU co-funding towards housing
- in times of financial crises, governments should use the building sector, particularly construction of rental housing, as a mean to boost the economy.

**Full report, with more proposals, is available via [www.iut.nu/conferences.htm](http://www.iut.nu/conferences.htm)**

# IUT protests against plans to evict rioter's families in the UK

'We will kick convicted rioters and their household out' was the knee-jerk reaction from many English social landlords to the riots in London in August. Housing Minister Grant Shapps and others in his government joined the chorus.

IUT, in a letter to Minister Shapps, questioned this way of collectively punishing rioter's households.

By all means IUT says, punish the rioters, but do not collectively punish the entire household which have most certainly suffered as it is already. IUT asked Minister Shapps how he thinks that evictions will solve the problem, in the long run. Are these families going to be put out into the streets? Or is 'the problem' just being shuffled onwards to another local authority?

In a reply by letter, Minister Shapps' department answered that evictions such as these are already a ground for possession in existing legislation if a tenant or a member of their family is involved in anti-social behaviour. Furthermore, the Government believes that it is absolutely right that parents take



Rioters set fire to shop in Lavender Hill, Clapham Junction, England.

responsibility for their children's behaviour. Tenants evicted for anti-social behaviour, says the Government, are deemed to have themselves intentionally homeless and therefore the local authority will not owe them a duty to provide them new accommodation.

IUT agrees that it is the duty of parents to take responsibility for their children's behaviour. But everyone knows that with 17 and 18 year olds this is a not always an easy task. One does not have to be a genius, or a par-

ent, to know that teenagers do not always behave as wished. Also, we can assume that many of these kids are not very close with their parents, and probably – for many reasons – spend more time outdoors than indoors with parents. Evicting entire families will just make bad things worse.

IUT message is that collective evictions can never be tolerated, not in the UK, nor in any country.

**Text** Magnus Hammar, IUT

## Collective evictions violate UN conventions, says human rights expert

*– Collective evictions are gross violation of human rights, says Bret Thiele, Co-Executive Director of the Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.*

**Forced eviction from social housing**, particularly as a means of collective punishment, is a gross violation of human rights for which there must be accountability.

The Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights is an international human rights organization which, through its Housing Rights Program, works to promote and protect housing rights.

– As such, we are alarmed at the announcement that those convicted for riots in London and their families may be evicted from their homes, adds Bret Thiele. The United Kingdom is a party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and thus is legally obligated to respect, protect and fulfil the right to adequate housing. One means to meet the obligation to fulfil is to ensure that social housing is available to those that need it.

– The obligations to respect and to protect the right to adequate housing require the U.K. not to forcibly evict and to protect its residents from forced eviction, says Bret Thiele. It should be clear that violating human rights, including the human

right to adequate housing, should not and indeed cannot legally be used as means to punish people either individually or collectively.

– It should also be clear, continues Bret Thiele, that when forced evictions are used as a punishment they not only amount to a gross violation of human rights, but will exacerbate the marginalization that bred protests in the first place. Consequently, the Global Initiative urges the authorities to reconsider these egregious and unlawful policies, and if these policies are ultimately carried out, we urge those people and organizations that support human rights to work to hold those authorities accountable for human rights violations.



# Housing and the EU – current issues

## Energy reduction by 80 percent

The EU energy efficiency directive (EED) is a draft European Parliament legislative resolution on the proposal for a directive, an 'EU-law'. The EU Commission proposes on housing renovation, that Member States shall aim to reduce, by December 2050, the energy consumption of the existing building stock by 80 percent compared to 2010 levels. Furthermore, member states shall develop policies and take measures to stimulate renovations of buildings, including staged deep renovations. By 1 January 2014, member states shall establish and make publicly available national plans. These plans shall include at least: a record of buildings differentiated according to the category of building, deep renovation targets for 2020, 2030 and 2040, differentiated according to the category of building and the individual metering of the energy consumption in apartments.

The Rapporteur of the European Parliament, Mr. Claude Turmes, suggests in Art. 3 an amendment to ensure that tenants are not financially penalised.



## ERDFunding with a housing dimension

The European Commission has at last acknowledged that, even though housing remains an area of full competence of the Member States, the EU should support improvement of the housing for at least two reasons: the necessary shift to a low-carbon economy and the promotion of social inclusion.

The European Commission is proposing that regions in Europe support energy efficiency in the public buildings and housing sector, without any limit on the amount

of Regional Development Funding, which can be allocated to these measures. Further, the Commission would also allow regions to invest in social infrastructure, physical regeneration of deprived urban communities and in sustainable urban development, where in all affordable housing will have a key role to play.

## State Aid and social housing

In September the EU Commission DG for Competition sent out, to member states, its draft on how Services of General Economic Interest (SGEI) should be applied. The purpose was to clarify the key concepts underlying the application of the State aid rules to public service compensation, including state aid towards social housing.

First of all, state aid rules apply only where a certain activity is provided in a market environment. Further, member states have a wide margin of discretion in defining a given service as an SGEI and in granting compensation to the service provider – but no overcompensation is allowed. The compensation cannot exceed what is necessary to cover all or part of the costs incurred in the discharge of public service obligations, taking into account a reasonable profit. The Commission does only examine financial support granted by member states which exceeds € 200,000 per undertaking over a period of three years. Member states have to report to the Commission about their activities in state aid every 2 years.

## European Agenda for social housing

The right to decent and affordable housing is a concern that affects millions of European citizens. Alain Hutchinson, Member of Parliament of the Brussels-Capital Region and of the EU Committee of Regions, proposes for a real European agenda for social housing.

Hutchinson writes “the urgent need of a social housing policy. In Europe where 44 million people are at risk of poverty and where housing costs often make up for more than 40 percent of household spending, access to affordable housing should be a priority of economic and social policy of the European Union and Member States.

In addition, Alain Hutchinson says that the need to fight against the formation of bubbles in the housing markets is a serious threat to the economies of member countries.

## Regional and city policies

Today, more than two thirds of the European population lives in urban areas and this share continues to grow. The development of our cities will determine the future economic, social and territorial development of the European Union.

“Cities of tomorrow Challenges, visions, ways forward” is the outcome of three regional workshops during 2010. From the contents of the final report: Energy efficiency, energy poverty and spatial exclusion, social polarisation and increasing segregation, an ageing population, a holistic and integrated model of sustainable urban development, and resident mobilisation.

A full and more detailed report on these topics, and other EU and housing related topics, is available via: [www.iut.nu/EU/IUT\\_Brussels/Reports\\_News/BrusselsNews\\_November2011.pdf](http://www.iut.nu/EU/IUT_Brussels/Reports_News/BrusselsNews_November2011.pdf)

More information can be obtained from the IUT EU Brussels office,  
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## The Norwegian housing model:

# Homeownership triumphant

*Homeownership is an integral part of the 'Norwegian model of housing'. Since 1945 politicians from left to right have consistently and increasingly advocated for the expansion of homeownership. Arguably, this has made rental housing a forgotten tenure in Norwegian housing policy.*

Since the 1940s individual and cooperative homeownership has been promoted by the Norwegian state. In contrast to most other European countries, for instance neighbouring Sweden and Denmark, public-rented housing only played a marginal role after the Second World War. The full weight of the Norwegian state's housing policy, including brick and mortar subsidies, tax breaks and housing allowances, has been geared towards the expansion of homeownership. At the present time 80 percent of all Norwegian households are homeowners of some kind. Furthermore, it has been estimated that 95 percent of the population are homeowners for longer or shorter periods during their lifetime. Rental housing is a temporary stop for most people, with remarkably few exceptions Norwegians are not renters for life.

The dominant political conception of homeownership did, however, change during the course of the post war-years. The social democrats of Labor, the governing Party for much of the period from 1935 to 1981, had its own distinctive understanding of homeownership. Labor regarded cooperatively-owned housing as an instrument to better the housing conditions in urban areas and eradicate the exploitative power of landlords. The long term goal of Labor and its allies in the housing movement, including the Tenant's Association, was to replace all private-rented housing with collectively owned cooperatives. According to social democrats, homeownership gave families the right to a secure, decent and affordable dwelling, but not the right to sell their home at market prices to the detriment of others. In line with this non-commercial, non-speculative conception of homeownership, the



PHOTO MAGNUS HAMMAR, IUT

Karl Johans street in Oslo getting ready for Christmas.

sale of cooperative flats was subject to strict price regulations up until the 1980s.

The political and economic structures of Norwegian homeownership changed in the 1980s and 90s. Somewhat simplified, a rationed, regulated and state funded tenure was replaced by a form of homeownership governed by the market and individual families. The State's Housing Bank's interest subsidies for homeowners were gradually abolished, a development which paralleled the reduction of brick and mortar subsidies and the rise of "targeted" and market oriented housing

policies across Europe. In the same period financial deregulation and housing market liberalization increased the risks and freedoms of homeowners.

Whereas Labor continued to argue for price regulation and other restrictions on the housing market in the 1970s and 80s, little of this social democratic conception of homeownership remained by the 90s. All of the main political parties had accepted the notion that homeowners had the right to sell their houses at prevailing market rates. Very broadly speaking, a political conception of homeownership, which portrayed housing



as a communal resource which transcended the interests of individuals, was replaced with an understanding that homes existed for the benefit of the particular household who lived in it.

**Presently the political support** for the “Norwegian model” seems stronger than ever. Even though the Norwegian rate of homeownership is one of the highest in Europe, the government still advocates for further expansion. In oil rich Norway, a prosperous island in a Europe of economic turmoil and bleak prospects, low-income groups are encouraged to become homeowners. Arguably, the political emphasis on homeownership has made rental housing something of a “forgotten tenure”.

In any event, there seems to be ample room for changes to the state’s approach to rented housing. Firstly, whereas the state gives homeowners billions in tax breaks every year, no such favours are granted to tenants. Thus, a reform of housing taxation is necessary to alleviate this injustice. Secondly, ethnic discrimination seems to be a problem in the rental sector.

**Thirdly, the need for a stronger** national tenant’s association with a national coverage is evident. This would strengthen the position of tenants on the housing market, and give them a stronger political voice. However, as a public committee opined recently, financial help from the state is a necessary requirement for a well-functioning tenant’s organisation. This speaks volumes about the prevailing dominance of homeownership in the Norwegian housing sector, in stark contrast to neighbouring Sweden where around 500,000 households are members of the national Tenant’s Association.

**Text** Jardar Sørvoll is a PhD-fellow at Norwegian Social Research (NOVA) & Reassess (Nordic Centre of Excellence in Welfare Research).



ILLUSTRATION: PROVIVIENDA

## A rental mediation programme in Spain

**The Spanish Constitution** recognises ‘the right to enjoy decent and adequate housing’, but public housing policies in Spain have for long prioritised one particular form of tenure, home ownership. There is very limited availability of housing in other tenures for those who cannot afford, or do not want, to be home owners. State intervention is mainly through market mechanisms – financial support though reduced interest rates, subsidies and tax exemptions for home owners.

**Nationally 82 percent** of all housing is privately owned, the second highest percentage in Europe, about 8 percent is privately rented and another 10 percent socially rented.

A significant part of the population struggles to find decent housing, among them many people with social difficulties. The continuous increase in house and rental prices, while salaries have not increased, has increased the share of household costs for accommodation – in many cases over 40 percent. Overcrowding is one result of this, with poor living conditions for those who cannot afford to buy their own homes, or are ineligible for social rental. In 2007, over two million homes were empty in Spain.

**Provivienda**, a non profit NGO, mediates between property owners and individuals experiencing difficulties accessing housing in Spain. The aim is to open up opportuni-

ties in the rental market that would not otherwise be available. Provivienda was established in 1989, and initial work focussed on ensuring that young people had access to rental housing.

The methodology was later adapted to meet the needs of other groups at risk of social exclusion, and with limited financial means.

**Landlords are typically wary** of renting, or impose abusive contractual terms, for those they perceive as having insecure/irregular employment. Provivienda addresses this by arranging multi-risk insurance guarantees for rental payment, either through an insurance company or, more often, providing these guarantees themselves. Agreed rents are approximately 20 per cent lower than market rents, but still attractive for landlords, particularly those whose property was standing empty.

In 2010, Provivienda was directly involved in 32 different projects in five regions of Spain, housing almost 12,000 people and providing nearly 1,900 mortgages to young people. In the last 20 years, the programme has housed 87,000 people and has been scaled up within the autonomous region of Madrid and extended to other regions, where it is currently operating within 25 municipal authorities.

**More info from** [www.provivienda.org](http://www.provivienda.org)



# Increased importance of the private rented sector in England

The private rented sector in England comprises of 3.4 million dwellings, around 16 percent of all households, and has increased in size by around 40 percent in the last five years. Factors which have contributed to the increase include lack of social housing and home ownership being too expensive for many people. Tenant's in the private rental sector can now, through their local associations, apply for membership in the newly formed National Private Tenants Organisation.

The increase of private renters has been accompanied by a small fall in the number of social renters, today 17 percent of all households, and home-owners which form 67 percent of all households.

Deregulation in 1988 did not result in a significant increase in the size of the private rented sector but did make private tenancies insecure and introduced market rents. Private renting is increasingly becoming the only option for many households and rents have risen due to demand exceeding supply. The vast majority of private landlords tend to be individuals or couples managing a few properties often on a part-time basis, and who view their properties as an investment. Only a very small percentage of landlords belong to professional associations and only around 50 percent of letting agencies belong to self-regulatory professional organisations.

A decent home is one which meets modern standards of fitness, structure, energy efficiency and facilities. The English Housing Survey reported in February that around 40 percent of private rented homes would fail its decent homes standard. This percentage is higher than for social rented and privately owned properties. Furthermore, privately rented dwellings were more likely to experience damp problems than dwellings in other tenures. The highest proportion of dwellings with the lowest energy efficiency rating is currently in the private rented sector.

Local councils in England admit there are 1,477 known landlords who are giving them continued cause for concern, according to a report from Shelter. Shelter said that complaints about serious and potentially life-threatening hazards



PHOTO: IUT/MAGNUS HAMMAR

Multiethnic Camden.

have risen by 25 percent over the past two years. Despite the sharp increase in problems, just 270 successful prosecutions have been made by local councils against landlords during the same period. Many tenants fear reporting problems to local councils and raising concerns with their landlords because of the fear of eviction arising from insecure tenancies.

The reasons for the problems outlined above include lack of professionalism and wilful lack of care for tenants on the part of some landlords, the absence of landlord regulation, lack of security of tenure and under enforcement of existing laws.

**Changes to state financial support** with rent (housing benefit) for those on low incomes, and withdrawal of financial support with costs in bringing certain types of housing related legal cases (legal aid), will add to the problems faced by private tenants.

Laws protecting tenant's rent deposits have been weakened by court decisions. A plan to license all private landlords by the previous UK Government has not been taken forward by the present Government.

**The National Private Tenants Organisation, NPTO**, was formed in September 2011, by four private tenant organisations in England; Blackpool, Brent, Camden London and Scarborough. The aim of the NPTO is to work for professionally managed, secure, decent and affordable private rented homes in sustainable communities. Specific objectives of the NPTO include strengthening the voice of private tenants by encouraging membership of the Organisation by private tenants and private tenants' groups; encouraging private tenants to set up local groups in their own areas; campaigning for changes in legislation, strategies, policies and practices towards achieving the aim of the Organisation.

Membership of the NPTO is open to individual private tenants, private tenant groups and associate membership for other organisations.

– **More proactive inspections** by local councils and prosecute repeat offenders to send out a clear message that private tenants deserve the same decent homes as social tenants and home owners. Many tenants fear eviction if they try to enforce their legal rights, says NPTO founder member Richard Harrod.

– We believe that local councils should carry out more pro-active inspections and prosecute repeat offenders to send out a clear message that private tenants deserve the same decent homes as social tenants and home owners. Many tenants fear eviction if they try to enforce their legal rights, added Richard Harrod.

**Ignorance of legal rights** is common among private tenants. NPTO believes that a law should be introduced to stop retaliatory eviction of tenants who complain to their landlords about disrepair and poor standards, similar laws exist in some states in America, Australia and New Zealand.

The UK Government plans to use the private rented sector to house homeless families which makes raising standards in the private rented sector a pressing issue. According to recent Government statistics the number of households accepted as homeless increased by 10 percent on the previous year's figures.

**The role of the private rented** sector in providing homes for households is increasing in importance. A more balanced legal relationship between tenants and landlords is needed. Ultimately a return to more secure tenancies, rent control, mandatory minimum standards for accommodation like the minimum standard for social housing and a national licensing scheme for private landlords, present the best hope for private tenants. In the meantime NPTO campaigns for a range of measures to improve the private rented sector.

**Text** Kevin Allen, Chairperson  
English National Private Tenants Organisation  
and Scarborough Private Tenants Rights Group,  
[www.npto.btck.co.uk](http://www.npto.btck.co.uk)

**With home ownership out of reach for many people and the lack of social housing, private renting is becoming the only option for many.**

## Stockholm protests against privatisation of public housing

**Privatisation has been** one of the more dominating features of Swedish politics during the last two decades. Schools, public transportation, medical care, pharmacies, child care, etc. has been on the market for sale by central government decrees, while housing is being privatised by local governments.

In Sweden as a whole, in 2010, some 46 percent of all Swedes own a house while 36 percent rent their accommodation from a private landlord or from a municipal landlord. A further 18 percent lives in tenant owned cooperatives. In Stockholm the stock consists of 58 percent rentals, some 210 000 flats, while 42 percent are tenant owned cooperative flats.

Tenants in both the private stock and in the municipal stock



Tenants protest against the selling of municipal housing in Stockholm. Through privatisation, only some 11,000 municipal flats remain in Stockholm inner city, a decrease by 50 percent since 2006, according to Hem & Hyra magazine.

are encouraged to become owners. It takes a 2/3 majority of the residents before they can apply for a takeover of the whole house, and form a coop. Municipal tenants can buy with large discounts, and most often do not have to pay more than 50–70 percent of the market value. So, it's often an offer that few can resist.

By the end of October 23,300 flats, or 11 percent of all rentals, had been privatised in Stockholm, including suburbs. But privatisation often meets resistance from those who do not want to buy, and from the Swedish Union of Tenants, which fears a city consisting of only expensive flats for the few who can pay.

**Text** Magnus Hammar



PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA, PUBLISHED BY PERMISSION



Aerial view of the CN Tower in Toronto, the world's fifth tallest construction, 553 m.

# Toronto; a ground zero for new Canadian renters

*Canada is in bad need of a housing strategy. While often compared to Europe in terms of social programs and welfare models, Canada actually lags behind several areas of the US in terms of housing. The Federation of Metro Tenants' Associations is the oldest tenant organisation in Canada and organizes tenants in the Toronto area.*

In the early 1990's, Canadian policy took a sharp turn away from housing policy by eliminating funding for social housing at the federal level and consistent attempts to recreate an affordable housing strategy since then, even as recently as 2011, have failed.

The effect on Canada's housing stock and rental population has been dramatic and easy to track. The UN has scolded Canada in both 2007 and 2009 for its lack of action in terms of tackling homelessness and housing problems.

Meanwhile, the effects are being felt strongly in Canada's largest City – Toronto. With 50 percent of the population in rental housing, Toronto is ground zero for many new renters, especially new Canadians. Unfortunately, their housing conditions and



Luckily, even though the situation often looks bleak, a number of FMTA people work hard in the City of Toronto to bring housing issues to the forefront.

income levels have been falling dramatically. The medium income in Toronto's suburbs, where many of the hi-rise rental towers exist in Toronto, has fallen by \$6,000 in recent years while a lack of maintenance has many buildings crumbling.

**Rents have skyrocketed** during periods of low vacancy rates. Vancouver saw average rents double in the lead-up to the 2010 winter Olympics while a low vacancy rate in Toronto, mainly due to the condoization of the City, has caused rents to spike as well.

The largest effect has of course been on social housing stock. The City-owned Toronto Community Housing Corporation

is one of North America's largest landlord's and was created during the 1990's when Canada's then-premier Mike Harris down-loaded responsibility for social housing from the Province to cities and municipalities.

Since this download many buildings have been in a constant state of disrepair. Bed Bug outbreaks have taken over whole buildings with state apparatus' slow to be able to deal with the problem. Privatizations of property management for these companies have seen computer generated evictions, communication breakdowns and safety standards compromised. Social services for these buildings are, in many cases, non-existent leading to severe mental health issues, hoarding problems and neighbour disputes. Sadly to say, but many of these tenants are the lucky ones who actually got into social housing. In a Province of 1.3 million people almost 150,000 are on the waiting list for social housing, with 70,000 in Toronto. The average wait time now stretches to ten years.

**Lack of funding**, besides a lack of strategy, has been a major problem. In 2008, the Canadian federal government committed \$1.9 billion, or 1.4 billion Euros, in funding for housing to the 10 provinces over a 5 year period. Even this money has faced significant roadblocks



and has difficult conditions attached to it. Because of this, today only \$500 million of the \$1.9 billion has been spent. Recently the provinces and federal government agreed to release the money with less stringent conditions, however renewed infighting between the levels of government has held up the \$108 million that is supposed to be coming to Toronto.

Money is much needed as rental housing development continues to lag behind other building development in Toronto; only 8 percent of all new residential development in Toronto over the past five years is purpose-built rental while 92 percent has been condo/household. This further reduces the amount of affordable housing as the demand continues to increase while the supply does not keep pace.

**The lack of voter turnout** amongst the tenant population has long been speculated as a reason why federal, provincial and municipal elections tend not to make housing issues front and centre. While a Provincial election took place on October 6th, 2011, you might not know it as a housing advocate.

Roughly a dozen housing agencies in Toronto held a month long series of workshops, forums, candidate debates, movies and summits to promote the issue of housing, bringing our hundreds of tenants to participate.

While we have had initial success in the media we know that building a tenant movement takes time. We look forward to doing so in the future and will keep looking to our friends at the International Union of Tenants and around the world for continuing inspiration. Together We Are Strong!

**The Federation of Metro Tenants' Associations (FMTA)** is a non-profit Organization which advocates for better rights for Tenants. Founded in 1974, FMTA is the oldest and largest Tenant Federation in Canada. The FMTA is comprised of affiliated Tenant Associations and of individual Members. We have over 3,000 members and continue to grow.

**Text** Geordie Dent, Executive Director Federation of Metro Tenants Associations, [www.torontotenants.org](http://www.torontotenants.org)



PHOTO FROM WIKIMEDIA, BY PERMISSION

## Japan coping with disasters

**In March 11, 2011, almost 400,000 structures were totally or partially damaged by the earthquake which was followed by a tsunami that struck the eastern coast of the Tohoku District in Japan.**

**About 20,000 people** were either found dead or are still missing. Around 470,000 people became homeless and had to be housed in schools, sports centres, hotels, etc.

The state decided to build 60,000 temporary dwellings and make use of the vacant rooms of public rental and private rental housing. Five months later, in August, 20 percent of the temporary dwellings newly built have not been occupied because of the difficulty of the transportation to work places or schools and the cramped floor space.

Also in August, 8,500 refugees still lived in shelters while another 37,000 people lived in temporary dwellings. Furthermore, 15,500 public rental housing units and 50,500 private rental housing units were used as temporary homes.

Rents of the shelters and rental dwell-

ings have been made free by the local governments, during the lease term of one or two years. But, as to private rental housing, rents were limited to less than 60,000 Yen, or € 600. For families of five persons or more rents are limited to € 900.

Social consequences are hard as it is estimated that there are around 200,000 unemployed persons in the disaster area, including Fukushima, Miyagi and Iwate prefectures.

Furthermore, there are the very strict conditions to be eligible for rental housing designated for refugees. The applicants should be persons who directly lost their homes in the disaster, either from direct effects of the tsunami or from the threat of radiation, and do not have means to pay rent. However, they are scheduled to move out from their rental housing within one or two years, although some inhabitants already have difficulties with the cost of living.

The same housing policy, by which the government has neglected the housing rights of low-income groups until now, is now being used for refugees living in the disaster area.

**Text** Kazuo Takashima, JTA Tokyo

# South Africa with an aspiration to house all

*Since independence in 1994, South Africa has undertaken the task to house its citizens, mainly through heavily subsidized home ownership programs – which have become very costly. Still an estimated 90 percent of all South Africans cannot afford to buy at market prices.*



In the 'New Housing Policy' from 1994, the preamble reads: "Housing the Nation is one of the greatest challenges facing the Government of National Unity. The extent of the challenge

derives not only from the enormous size of the housing backlog and the desperation and impatience of the homeless, but stems also from the extremely complicated bureaucratic, administrative, financial and institutional framework inherited from the previous government."

The first government under Nelson Mandela estimated that only about 58 percent of all households, or 4.8 million households, had secure tenure; like ownership, leasehold or formal rental contracts over their accommodation. In 1994, some 18 percent of all households, or 7.4 million people in 1994, lived in squatter settlements, backyard shacks or in over-crowded conditions in existing formal housing in urban areas, with no formal tenure rights over their accommodation. In 2010 still an estimated 13 percent, or 1.1 million people, lived in unseemly living conditions.

**Homeownership has been** the predominant choice of tenure since independence, partly due to the fact that black Africans were excluded from owning urban property until 1994. Since then the government has funded the construction of 2.4 million homes, which have been allocated to the needing citizens. If you are a South African, have turned 18, with a dependant and you qualify for state support, you can have your name listed in a queue for a free or subsidized house. When after a few years this person gets his or her house, and instead of moving in, they let the house to others – and themselves return to informal settlements. It is estimated that 90 percent of government-supported housing built over the past 15 years is occupied by people who do not actually qualify for state support.



The South African government has subsidized the construction of 2.4 million homes, of which the vast majority are 1- or 2-bedroom houses of 40–50 m<sup>2</sup>, like these homes outside Cape Town.

**7.4 million people in 1994, lived in squatter settlements, backyard shacks or in over-crowded conditions in existing formal housing in urban areas, with no formal tenure rights over their accommodation.**

**But still after seventeen years, 90 percent of the population cannot afford to buy a home right off.**

The legal right to housing in South Africa was entrenched by the introduction of the Housing Act of 1997, and the national Housing code in 2000. The Constitution from 1996 unequivocally guarantees the right to adequate housing; everyone has the right to have access to adequate housing and that the state must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of this right.

**A recent conference** in Cape Town, in September, organized by the Southern African Social Housing



## Housing and tenants' rights are major civic rights

**The Organisation of Civic Rights**, OCR, was founded in 1984, by Billy Nair (1929–2008) who was one of Nelson Mandela's comrades. Billy Nair formed the organisation barely two months after his release from Robben Island where he had been detained for 20 years in the B-block for political prisoners. Today OCR is a community based NGO run by an equally devoted housing activist, Dr. Sayed Iqbal Mohamed. OCR has been an IUT member since 2005.

OCR has its office in central Durban and is a well known outpost for all needing tenants in particularly the south eastern province KwaZulu Natal. But the organisation does also provide nation-wide service to tenants. Furthermore, OCR conducts workshops nation-wide to empower and educate tenants.

OCR and Dr. Mohamed fights slumlords who rent depilated flats to vulnerable tenants, and owners of buildings which houses refugees who pay unreasonably high rents for a single bunk – see photo below.

Tenants in South Africa have comparatively secure tenure and rights, but few tenants are aware of these rights, or how to claim them when needed. As a previous member of the KwaZulu-Natal Housing Tribunal Dr. Mohamed is well equipped when dealing with juridical matters with regards to housing – he knows well his Rental Housing Act.



**– Helping renters in South Africa can be a dangerous business, says Dr. Sayed Iqbal Mohamed, Chairperson of Organisation of Civic Rights. Some landlords arrive to collect monthly rent checks totting a gun. This is a high risk job due to the mafia mentality of the landlords. I have been beaten up many times by both tenants and landlords – and almost shot at.**

– There is a feudal system of landlord-tenant relationships in South Africa, explains Dr. Mohamed. Tenants suffer being locked out of their apartments, living in apartments with poor or non-existent services, paying higher-than-market rents, and having to pay “goodwill” or “key money” as an illegal way of gaining accommodation – for which receipts are not provided and records not kept.

These practices prevail because there is a general shortage of housing in South Africa, and because renters continue to be a marginalized group in post-apartheid South Africa. After the fall of apartheid, the Mandela government promoted a housing policy that focused on individual home ownership because most people lacked the security of owning a home. Guaranteeing home ownership was a reasonable way for the Mandela government to ensure that people felt protected. The result has been a massive national program of housing construction and services, for which the government ambitiously promised one million new houses during the first five years of democratic rule.

– Unfortunately, this doomed the rental-housing sector to neglect, concludes Dr. Mohamed. The government needs to work with the private sector to develop more rental housing to the poor.

Foundation gathered expertise from many African countries, as well as from the US and from Europe.

The South African government estimates the backlog of housing to plus 2,1 million housing units, which translates into approximately 12.5 million people of which many are living in one of the 2,700 informal settlements in South Africa. Still ‘only’ 220,000 dwellings are produced each year, which corresponds to only 10 percent of the backlog.

But the sustainability of government's policy to provide partly or fully subsidized homes to needing households is being questioned.

– It's nice to believe that housing is a benefit that the state can pay for on behalf of its citizens. It makes us feel good. It makes us feel that we have made progress. But it is unfortunately unaffordable from an economic point of view and eventually, if we do not start to exclude housing from the welfare package, we will be joining the Greece group, said Rory Gallocher, CEO of Johannesburg Social Housing Company, JOSHCO.

**The rental sector** in South Africa corresponds to 17–20 percent of the total stock. This sector includes everything from backyard renting and shacks to private rentals in cities. Over 40 percent of renter households live in slum conditions. Access to the regular rental market, from a European perspective, is unattainable to the most.

In Cape Town outskirts, the average size of rental flats is small, only 8m<sup>2</sup>, for which the typical rent is R700 per month. An average 40m<sup>2</sup> flat in the



centre of the city rents for R 3,500, or ~ €300, at the same time as 55 percent of all South Africans have an income of less than R3,500 per month. Of those earning R3,500, or less, 75 percent owned and only 15 percent rented. The remaining 10 percent lived rent free, according to Nedbank.

Even though ownership is favoured by the most, the government's “National Rental Housing Strategy has set out to deliver 100,000 rental units in the period 2007/08 – 2011/12. Government officials say that the rental market clearly has scope for expansion, of up to 50 percent of the total stock. So rental housing clearly has a future in South Africa.

**Text and photos** Magnus Hammar, IUT

**OCR presently investigates the appalling living conditions for Zimbabwean refugees who live in Carlisle Street, downtown Durban. Up to 16 men share one room which also contains cooking possibility, but without proper ventilation. In the yard, the landlord houses up to 12 men in metal shipping containers.**



# Germany with the lowest birth rate in Europe

*More German couples decide to have no children, or at least not more than one. This at the same time as the number of old people is rising. One of the central issues for city life has to be a child- and a family friendly environment and a happy coexistence of old and young.*

Result from the latest micro-census, the annual survey of households, gave that in 2010 there were 13.1 million children under 18 in Germany. Ten years before, in 2000, this number was 15.2 million. This is a drop of about 10 percent in the western part of Germany and about 29 percent in the eastern part of the country.

Roderick Egeler, president of the Federal Statistical Office, commented on the report 'How kids are living in Germany' at a press conference in August by stating: "This makes Germany the child-poorest country in Europe". The report further reveals that in no other country in Europe children represents such a small share of the whole population; only 16.5 percent, of all 81 million Germans, are younger than 18 years.

**German youngsters** seem to grow up later these days, according to the same report. "Especially young men like to stay long in the 'Hotel Mum'" said Roderich Egeler. "At the age of 25, only every fifth young woman was still living at their parent's home, in 2010, while for young men at the same age almost twice that many lived with their parents, or 38 percent".

"Looking back, in 1980 only 21 percent of all 25-year old West Germans lived with their parents, compared with 30 percent in 2010", said Egeler.

**Childlessness** is caused by unemployment and insecure jobs, economic insecurity and unemployment keep the young people away from having kids. These are some of the results from a poll made by the Leipzig Insti-



PHOTO BERLIN TENANTS' MAGAZINE, BY PERMISSION

Playgrounds in Berlin are still filled with children, but for how long?

tute for Market Research, in August. Many couples want to settle in their jobs first and want to take the first steps in their career before deciding to have children. Additionally, the incompatibility of job and family and the shortage of day care make it difficult for them and is one of the main reasons for the low birth rate in Germany.

The poll also gave that that 85 percent of the respondents asked for family-friendly working hours and said that long working hours were the main reason for the delay in having children. Two thirds of the interviewed persons asked for better day care for children and more child-friendly housing areas, such more playgrounds.

**Rents rise in Berlin.** In May 2011 the new rent index was published, which according to the

tenant association in Berlin indicate that the rents are increasing in all parts of Berlin. In general the net rent increased by almost 4 percent. Above average increases of rents are noted for old buildings, build before 1918, as well as for flats in popular housing areas with and flats between 40 and 90 m<sup>2</sup>.

The main reasons for rising rents are an insufficient number of offered flats on the one hand and high demand on the other hand, especially in densely populated areas or places with universities.

Therefore the Deutscher Mieterbund, DMB, would like to see more stimulation, from the federal states, for new construction of affordable rental flats.

**Text** Heike Zuhse, Deutscher Mieterbund, DMB, Germany



# What future for social housing, in the UK?

*continued from page 3*

pristine and futuristic, were becoming grim havens of decay and lawlessness.

And there was a powerful smell of corruption emanating from some town halls, as the cosy relationship between local politicians and their friends in the building and architecture was laid bare, along with the shoddy standard of many of the “system built” homes they had created.

It was against this backdrop that “right to buy” began to take off, with the number of council houses sold in England going up from 7,000 in 1970 to nearly 46,000 in 1972.

It was not, initially, opposed by Labour.

In 1977, Labour housing minister Peter Shore published a green paper endorsing home ownership as a “strong and natural desire” which “should be met”.

He backed shared equity schemes, aimed at getting council tenants on the property ladder, and the growth of the housing association movement, although he still envisaged that the bulk of the nation’s affordable housing needs would continue to be met by local authorities.

But the world Shore was describing was about to be swept away by the 1980 Housing Act and the explosion of “right-to-buy”.

The Labour Party, which had lurched to the left under Michael Foot, bitterly opposed the “right-to-buy” arguing that it would lead to a dangerous depletion in council housing stock. They also feared it would spell the end of Labour’s vision of a “cradle to grave” welfare state, as working class people embraced a more materialistic, Thatcherite way of life.

Blair came to power, in 1997, and then such rose-tinted notions were a thing of the past.

New Labour was an enthusiastic champion of the right to buy and home ownership in general, seeing it as their mission – not to ensure affordable rents for working people – but to help them get a foot on the property ladder.

Mr Blair and his chancellor, Gordon Brown, presided over an unprecedented boom in house prices, fuelled by cheap credit and a shortage of affordable rented accommodation.

The “right-to-buy” phenomenon had led, as some on the left had predicted, to a massive depletion in council housing stock – made worse by the refusal of successive governments to allow local authorities to spend the windfall they received from council house sales on building new ones.

The housing bubble was also fuelled by the “buy-to-let” phenomenon – as speculators bought up rundown former local authority housing as a source of income. Council housing estates were fast becoming the

accommodation of last resort for those left behind by society, as families on middle incomes sold up and moved out. People living on estates increasingly tended to be on benefits or in low paid work or had drug and alcohol problems. The growth in asylum seekers and economic migrants, towards the end of Labour’s time in power, added further to the pressure on the system.

**Efforts to build more social housing** in the dying days of Gordon Brown’s premiership were, most observers agreed, too little and too late. And the near collapse of the banking system ended the hopes of many on average incomes of ever owning their own homes.

With the amount demanded by banks as a mortgage deposit, a growing number of working people found themselves trapped in costly private rented accommodation until early middle age.

**Today’s coalition government** knows that the housing crisis is one of the biggest problems it faces.

Conservative housing minister Grant Shapps has pledged to kick-start building, which has fallen to its lowest level in decades, by releasing more public land and easing planning restrictions.

But he has also caused alarm among housing charities by announcing the end of secured tenancies – or council houses for life – claiming it will boost social mobility and allow tenants to move around the country in search of work.

It is too early to tell whether these policies will have the desired effect.

**But Labour’s best hope of returning to power** at the next election may lie in finding a way to help those trapped in costly and often inadequate private rented accommodation.

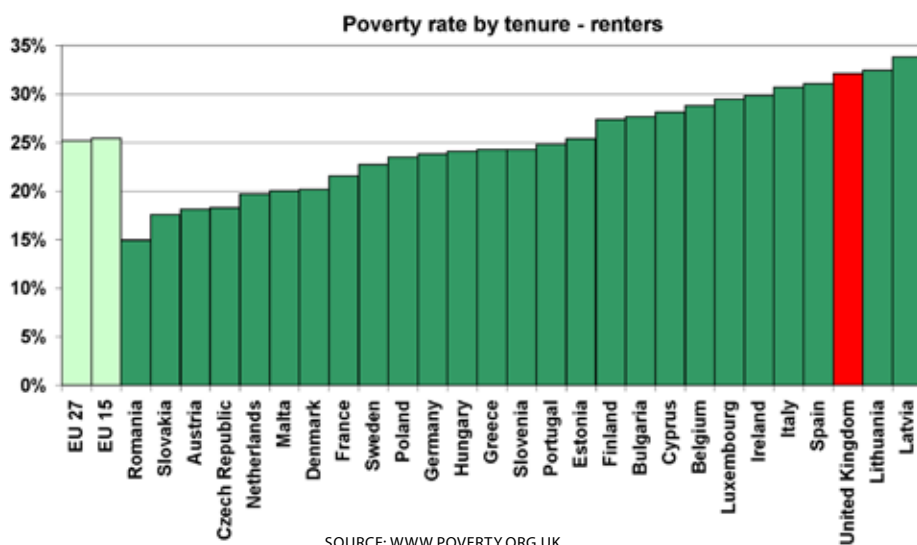
Some on the left may hope that will mean a return to building council houses – something coalition ministers have not ruled out. But whoever wins power, there is no chance of a return to the days when government ministers proudly cut the ribbon on giant new council estates on the edge of town.

Time and the aspirations of voters – in a country where the national obsession is property prices – have moved on.

**Text** Brian Wheeler

Political reporter, BBC News

Courtesy of BBC News, August 4, 2011



In the UK, 32 percent of all tenant households are considered ‘poor’, meaning a household below 60 percent of the contemporary, national, median household income before deducting housing costs. All household incomes are after taxes have been deducted and after adjustment for household size and composition. This level of income is referred to here as ‘the poverty line’ as that is the term used for it by the EU.



# AUSTRALIA:

## Social housing houses happy tenants



The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) has found that nine out of 10 respondents to the 2010 National Social Housing Survey reported they were satisfied with their social housing.

The survey collected information from households within both public rental housing and community housing. Furthermore, three out of four social housing respondents said their housing met their household's needs in terms of amenity and location.

On the less bright side is that among the households surveyed, unemployment was six times that seen in the general population, and educational outcomes, for both post-school and tertiary qualifications, were lower than for the general population.

Source: AIHW

## Hong Kong, with every second person in subsidised housing



Hong Kong's public housing is a set of mass housing program, through which the city government provides affordable housing for lower-income residents. It is a major component of housing in Hong Kong.

According to the 2006 census, 3.3 million Hong Kong residents, or 49 percent of the city's then total population lived in rental or subsidized-sale public housing. Among them, 31 percent lived in public rental housing, 17 percent lived in Housing Authority subsidized-sale flats and about 1 percent lived in Housing Society subsidized-sale flats.

The city government has, in August, put up for sale a number of sites with restrictions on unit size, aiming to increase the supply of small- and medium-sized flats in the market and meet public demand.

– The demand for housing is keen, and I fully understand the importance of having a home, says Hong Kong Chief Executive Donald Tsang

To address the housing needs of the low-

# ENGLAND:

## Increase of fight-dogs

Pit bulls were one of the named breeds banned by the 1991 Dangerous Dogs Act, but the number being bred and crossed with other, legal breeds, including Staffordshire and English bull terriers, is on the rise in England.

Aside from being used in organised dog fights, they have grown in popularity as "status dogs" to intimidate others, taken out on the streets instead of a knife or a gun, for which the penalties are harsher.

The rate at which dogs of banned breeds are being seized in the Birmingham area has doubled this year.

There is also money to make. One breeder said he had bred the bitch three times so far, earning about £500 per puppy. He also described dog fights, held in the area fortnightly.

Dog homes say they are struggling to



Scarred fight-dog.

cope with the surge in the numbers of bull breeds being abandoned. Some 80 percent of those contacted by the BBC said they were being inundated with requests to house them.

Source: BBC News

income families and individuals, Tsang said the city government will continue to find suitable sites for public rental housing to maintain the average waiting time at three years.

Source: xinhuanet.com

# NEW YORK:

## The 80/20 Program – a lottery



New York State Housing Finance Agency offers financing for buildings where 20 percent of the units are rented to low-income households and the rest are leased at market rates. The maximum rent on all units that are set aside for low income households cannot exceed 30 percent of the applicable income limits. The 80/20 Program is one of the most popular financing programs for projects located in New York City and other high cost areas in New York State.

All applicants must meet the individual program requirements to be eligible and be selected through an Open Lottery System to ensure fair and equitable distribution of housing to eligible applicants.



## European Social Charter 50 years

– There is still a long way to go before social rights get the same recognition as political and civil rights, said Secretary General Thorbjørn Jagland in his opening speech on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the European Social Charter, in Strasbourg on October 17.

The Human Rights convention was adopted in 1950, but it took more than ten years of difficult negotiations before the Social Charter was finally signed in Turin, October 18, 1961. The adoption of the rev. Social Charter in the 1990's, which includes housing rights, and the collective complaints procedure has made the Charter a true human rights mechanism with today 43 state parties.