



## **IUT Priorities for the European Parliament 2019-2024**

When electing the next European Parliament, people can choose a social, peaceful and unified Europe, an open society with progress for the many in the spirit of solidarity.

The European Union has brought the people of Europe freedom, democracy and the longest period of peace in history. When migratory movements are not accompanied by the provision of affordable housing, they aggravate the housing shortage in European metropolitan areas.

Nationalist movements use this development to incite against immigrants and to fight against the achievements of European unification and integration on the occasion of the forthcoming European elections. Promoting the provision of affordable housing is therefore not only a social policy imperative, but a measure to combat xenophobia and nationalism. Housing is one of the key questions of a sustainable well-being for all. Therefore, the International Union of Tenants advocates better housing policies in a more social Europe.

### **Housing is a fundamental right**

As approximately a third of the EU citizens live in rented dwellings, tenancy law affects the daily lives of large numbers of citizens. To provide a level playing field for tenants, it is crucial that the European Parliament supports work at Member State level related to security of tenure and affordable rents.

As of the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU now rank alongside Treaty provisions as primary norms of the EU. Thereby, the European Union is obliged to ensure that social concerns are considered in its legislative procedures. In order to combat social exclusion and poverty, according to Article 34 of the Charter, the Union recognizes and respects the right to social and housing assistance to ensure a decent existence for people who lack enough resources. This obligation is limited not only to rules laid down by the European Union institutions but applies also to national law and practices.

Everyone should have the right to affordable and decent housing.

### **Tenure neutral policies are crucial**

Following the 2008 as well as the Euro-crisis in several EU Member States, austerity measures have exacerbated housing exclusion and homelessness. As Member States have withdrawn their support to social and affordable housing, during several decades investments has steeply decreased in all EU Member States. Notwithstanding commitments made within the Europe 2020 framework, the EU has failed to bring millions of citizens out of poverty and social exclusion. Member States have withdrawn their support to social and affordable rental housing resulting in large segments of the society being neglected. Instead focus has been on promoting home ownership by all means. Instead of promoting a model based on ownership, a tenure neutral stance expressed through public policy, financial requirements, and fair tax incentives could achieve wide availability of suitable housing alternatives irrespective of income, age, or gender of tenants.

The goal of housing policy should be housing for all – not home ownership for all.

### **Housing policy is a national competency**

The currently applicable EU State aid rules, in particular recital 11 of the applicable Commission Decision, by enforcing the single market rules on the housing sector, force Member States to limit access to social and affordable housing solely to socially disadvantaged groups while the needs of other groups in need have been largely neglected. Such application of legislation denies the fact that housing alternatives are not readily available for low and middle-income groups due to possible market failures in the housing sector .

Consequently, defining the mission and the role of social and affordable housing is a task that must remain under the exclusive competence of the EU Member States, including the setting of criteria for allocation of social and affordable housing to people in need.

EU and EFTA Member States should not, as a result of applicable State aid legislation, find themselves with limited alternatives when struggling with segregation, ghettoization and the promotion of social cohesion and urban mix. A wide diversity of social and affordable housing ought to be dictated by local and regional needs. Social and affordable housing should be accessible to large parts of the population, not only to a limited target group. Consequently, the rules relating to Services of General Economic Interest (SGEI) need to be adapted accordingly .

Subsidiarity should be strictly enforced in the housing sector.

### **Tenants' rights as consumers must be protected**

Housing needs are one of the most basic human needs. The rights of the tenants as consumers in the housing market need to be in the focus of good housing policy, as they are the weaker party. Consequently, tenants should not be subject to a weaker protection than consumers of other goods and services are offered. As housing is such a crucial need, tenants therefore should not be denied the same rights to demand agreements drafted in transparent, plain and intelligible language as any other consumer agreement. Tenants should also have a right to request that contractual terms are brought to their attention in such a way that the average and well-informed consumer can understand them. Tenants should in line with this have the right to challenge terms which are: unfair, written in small print, or written in unintelligible language.

The European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR) in Article 11 list freedom of association as a human right. The European Union considers these rights and freedoms as fundamental rights. In accordance with the ECHR tenants have the freedom of association and organizing themselves. Despite these fundamental human rights, many tenants meet a strong resistance to organizing themselves in tenants' associations and demanding collective bargaining rights. The European Parliament should actively support and promote consumers' rights to fair treatment on the housing market, as well as influence on their housing conditions including their neighbourhoods.

Misuse of international short-term rental platforms for purely commercial purposes jeopardizes tenant rights in touristic regions and cities. Urban planning and applicable legislation should be respected in the sharing economy to avoid "touristification" and the depletion of city centers at the expense of residents.

Tenants are consumers on the housing market and should enjoy strong protection in relation to their consumer rights.

## **Energy efficiency is an important part of good housing conditions**

The cost of energy represents a substantial part of living costs to many households. At the same time, for a multitude of reasons energy consumption should be reduced. When presenting the Winter Package on Energy, the Commission stated that the EU does not only want to adapt the global clean energy transition, but to lead this transition. We need energy-efficiency and renewable energy to stop the climate change, to raise European security of supply and reduce the need for importing gas. Solving these issues would contribute to a better air quality as well as provide the Europeans with healthier and more affordable homes. Costs and burdens related to renovations of residential dwellings, based on energy efficiency parameters however should also be distributed in an equitable manner to counteract differences between social groups.

Currently, the big challenge is to allow equal access to energy-efficient housing not only to those that can afford it but also to those who cannot. As the EU promotes energy efficiency measures, consideration must also be given to that housing conditions and energy systems differ greatly between the EU Member States and the details are best worked out in each Member State.

Energy-efficient housing concerns us all. Though subsidiarity should be strictly enforced in the energy sector, EU funding should be available where needed.

**The International Union of Tenants (IUT)** is a non-governmental, not-for-profit membership umbrella organization for global tenants' organisations. It was founded in 1926 in Zürich, Switzerland. Since 1956 its head office has been in Stockholm, Sweden with an EU liaison office in Brussels since 2008. The organisation consists of 72 national and regional tenant organisations in 47 countries and is financed through membership fees.

IUTs purpose is to:

- promote the exchange of information and knowledge among its members,
- safeguard the interests of tenants and to promote affordable and decent rental housing across the world. IUT is a non-party political organisation, working along democratic lines.

IUT considers housing to be a fundamental human right in every society. Housing needs to be addressed locally, nationally and internationally. Affordable and sound housing is one of the safeguards for peace and security, a fundamental pillar in all democratic societies and necessary for labour mobility. Lack of affordable housing and homelessness are major ingredients in social exclusion.

[www.iut.nu](http://www.iut.nu)

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