



Spring 2021

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EP vote on affordable housing wins the day – gamechanger in times of liberalization of national housing markets

On 21 January, the European Parliament voted for the Initiative-Report “[Access to decent and affordable housing](#)”. Ms. **Kim van Sparrentak**, rapporteur of the rapport, managed to unite a majority of votes (**352 Yes/179 No/152 Abstentions**) in the claims for security of tenure, the fundamental right to housing and fair access to affordable housing.¹ IUT supported the EP work actively- and we got the majority! This report is a gamechanger and milestone in our work and policy towards the European Institutions. **Marie Linder**, President of the International Union of Tenants and the Swedish union of Tenants, welcomed the vote: “The European Parliament leads the way how to achieve the overdue and profound changes.

Final votes - Second voting session				
Subject	AM	Voting		
(RC9-0056/2021) Venezuela Vote: resolution (as a whole)	682	391	114	177
Van Sparrentak (A9-0247/2020) Decent and affordable housing for all Vote: resolution (as a whole)	683	352	179	152

Whereas national governments still believe that the market will solve all housing problems- with devastating results for housing affordability all over Europe and beyond, the EU Parliament raises the red card – stop speculation and overcome investment barriers for an access to adequate and affordable housing for all!”

Read more about the content of the report and the press statements of the IUT members here:

<https://www.iut.nu/eu/ep-vote-on-affordable-housing-wins-the-day/>

¹ <https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/decent-and-affordable-housing-for-all-extracts->

[from-the-debate-2001-and-from-the-final-vote_I201144-V_v](https://www.iut.nu/eu/ep-vote-on-affordable-housing-wins-the-day/)

Progressive Housing Week at the Committee of the Regions

January 25-27 the PES group of the CoR organized an entire housing week with several webinars.



<https://www.pescor.eu/housing-week>

Affordable housing initiative

On January 27th, the Brussels Liaison Office of the City of Vienna organised a webinar on the “Affordable Housing Initiative” of the EU, announced by the European Commission as a cornerstone of its renovation wave strategy. The Affordable Housing Initiative aims at revitalising 100 neighbourhoods as lighthouse projects across the EU in the coming years. About 200 participants joined the online event. **Barbara Steenbergen**, head of liaison office to the EU of the International Union of Tenants, called for a need to combine the funding issues with the existing national rent law so that it is fair and socially balanced. “A main criterion of the initiative should be to apply strict rules to achieve housing cost neutrality.” Rent increases by renovation must be balanced by energy efficiency to avoid “renovictions” and gentrification”, said Ms. Steenbergen who also called for a “European Code of Conduct for Renovation” implementing tenant

participation in renovations, as the already existing European Responsible Housing Initiative ERHIN.

Read the press release with statements from the European Commission and IUT here:



<https://pes.cor.europa.eu/sites/default/files/Press%20release%20Vienna%20Workshop%20on%20AHI.pdf>

Decent housing for all

In second workshop hosted by the Socialists and Democrats group in the European Parliament, the housing dimension of European policy was debated by several members of the parliament with key stakeholders, including IUT’s **Barbara Steenbergen**. The lack of affordable housing is affecting more than 80 million people in Europe. The COVID-19 pandemic made the situation even worse, with an increasing number of people struggling to pay their rent or energy bill. But what comes just at the surface has longer structural reasons, rooted in more profound housing inequalities and which risk jeopardise the very essence of our society. **Agnes Jongerius** MEP: “housing is a human right that must be guaranteed to everybody. For a socially just and sustainable recovery, we need to make sure that every citizen benefits from

decent, affordable and sustainable housing.”



Agnes Jongerius MEP, S&D coordinator of the EP EMPL committee

Read more here:

https://twitter.com/hashtag/ProgressiveHousingWeek?src=hashtag_click

<https://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/de/events/decent-housing-all-workshop-hosted-sd-group-29-january-2021>

Towards a more equitable housing system: Is Vancouver a city for renters?

January 21, IUT head of EU liaison office **Barbara Steenbergen** was invited to contribute to an open citizens dialogue [The Future We Want: The Change We Need](#), an event series hosted by the City of Vancouver in partnership with Simon Fraser University, CA.

Beginning in the early 1970s the percentage of Vancouver households living in rental units has been greater than 50%. Nevertheless, renters consistently face

difficulties in finding housing that is adequate, stable and secure, with, in more recent years, rental affordability becoming a particularly challenging and detrimental issue for many households. While some in the city may strive for home ownership, data tells us that this possibility has become increasingly out of reach, even for those with moderate incomes.



Given the reality that a majority of Vancouverites will most likely continue to live in rental housing, what does this mean for the next generation, for seniors and families, for low-income, racialized and marginalized households, and for the many others who do not see a secure housing future in Vancouver?

How must the City of Vancouver think differently about housing and the housing market to better meet the needs of its residents, ensuring priority for those with the greatest need?

What is required of a new city-wide plan to ensure the urgent and transformative change necessary to establish an equitable housing system?

See the speaker’s list and watch the conference video here:

<https://www.sfu.ca/publicsquare/upcoming-events/the-future-we-want/towards-a-more-equitable-housing-system.html>

Building Tenant Power: Podcast “Below the Radar”, Simon Fraser University Vancouver with IUT



February 9, **Barbara Steenbergen** from the International Union of Tenants joined moderator **Am Johal** on this episode of *Below the Radar*. Together they discussed the role of the tenant unions in Europe as well as their advances in housing policies and protecting tenant rights.



Barbara talks about the European housing context, and how tenant social movements in Europe led to the establishment of tenant unions. She discusses successful progressive housing policies in Berlin, Vienna, and the Scandinavian model for public housing, as well as some of the progress being made in countries that have an extremely high home ownership rate, like Spain and Portugal.



Listen to the podcast  here:

<https://www.sfu.ca/sfuwoodwards/community-engagement/Below-the->

[Radar/episodes/episodes1/ep115-barbara-steenbergen.html](https://www.sfu.ca/sfuwoodwards/community-engagement/Below-the-Radar/episodes/episodes1/ep115-barbara-steenbergen.html)

<https://soundcloud.com/sfuw-community-engagement/btr-episode-115-barbara-steenbergen>

Berlin's revolutionary rent cap — success or flop?

Berlin's controversial five-year rent freeze — worldwide a unique experimental measure — has it worked?



Many cities around the world have some kind of rent control measures in place, but Berlin's rent cap law, in effect since February 2020, is unique. It meant that rents for 90% of Berlin's apartments were frozen for five years at the level they were at in June 2019. New rental contracts could not be above that level, and as of November 2020, any existing rents that were still above that level had to be reduced. Deutsche Welle International interviewed IUT's **Barbara Steenbergen** on this occasion of the 1st anniversary of the Berlin rent cap.

Read the full interview here:

<https://www.dw.com/en/berlins-revolutionary-rent-cap-success-or-flop/a-56664706>

Affordable housing in German cities is increasingly hard to find. What went wrong and can it be fixed?

Germany-between free play of market powers and expropriation of Deutsche Wohnen - tenants mobilize.

Radio moderator Soraya Sarhaddi Nelson brings together international guests from all walks of life in the Common Ground podcast in cooperation with Berliner Zeitung English Edition.

March 8, Soraya talked with Berlin housing activist **Thomas McGath** of Expropriate Deutsche Wohnen und Co; **Barbara Steenbergen**, head of the EU Liaison Office of the International Union of Tenants and **Konstantin Kholodilin**, senior economist at the German Institute for Economic Research. The episode also features commentary by Berlin MP **Iris Spranger** (SPD).



Listen to the podcast  here:

<https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/en/common-ground-no-roof-over-our-heads-a-look-at-germanys-growing-housing-shortage-li.144587>

<https://commongroundberlin.com/podcasts/episode-20-no-roof-over-our-heads-a->

[look-at-germanys-growing-housing-shortage/](#)

AIL 97th anniversary conference- with Saskia Sassen (Columbia University), Kim van Sparrentak, Leilani Farha and IUT

On next March 11, the tenants association of Lisbon AIL celebrated their 97th anniversary together with national politicians and international guests, including IUT president **Marie Linder** and IUT head of EU office **Barbara Steenbergen**. Based on the recent EP initiative report several guests debated at a round table about the great challenge and opportunities that this report represents for the Portuguese Presidency of the European Commission and for the future of the right to housing in the various Member States of the European Union.

Watch the video of the lively debate here:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nJsaM3e2QfU>

Euronews TV featuring IUT: Landlords switch to long lets as COVID hits Europe's short stay market on Airbnb



The debate is now focused on how to co-exist with Airbnb, whose main intention is to keep growing, and how to palliate its detrimental side effects.

Seeing that rent prices were becoming prohibitively expensive, local councils in Lisbon and Barcelona began buying houses available on Airbnb and turning them into affordable housing.

"We have now a massive amount of money coming to the European states to start up their economies. Many of them believe that this is the opportunity to change the entire housing market and use the EU recovery fund money to set up a non-profit housing sector towards a more affordable long-term housing," said **Barbara Steenbergen**, member of the Executive Committee at International Union of Tenants.



Watch the TV report on Euronews here:

<https://www.euronews.com/2021/04/02/landlords-switch-to-long-lets-as-covid-hits-europe-s-short-stay-market-on-airbnb>

Berlin rent cap overturned by Germany's top court

April 15th, Germany's constitutional court has decided that the Berlin rent cap violates Germany's constitution. The cap was one of the most-debated laws in the country.

The court has ruled that the Berlin state government had no right to impose a rent cap in the German capital. Since the federal government had already made a law regulating rents, a state government could not impose its own law that infringed upon that.

International campaigners saw the Berlin rent cap as one of the most radical rent control measures worldwide, because though other European countries and cities have introduced rent freezes, the Berlin law allowed tenants to actually sue their landlords to reduce their rents.

Barbara Steenbergen, EU liaison head of the International Union of Tenants (IUT),

said she was shocked by the German court decision, not least because other state-level in Berlin laws did in fact regulate private property rights: There is a law that bans landlords from keeping property empty as a speculation, for instance.

She also expressed some hope for other tenants' campaigns in other countries. "This decision is not about whether the rent cap is good or bad, it is purely about jurisdiction," she told Deutsche Welle International.

When the decision of the court was published, several thousand people quickly turned out in Germany's capital to demonstrate against the lifting of the rent cap. The demonstration was organized by Berliner Mieterverein and several tenants' initiatives.

Read the full interview here:

<https://www.dw.com/en/berlin-rent-cap-overturned-by-germanys-top-court/a-57209268>

Berlin tenants undaunted by recent court ruling that undoes a rent cap: US-radio "The World" with IUT

A German court has ruled that a rent freeze introduced by the Berlin state government in 2019 was unconstitutional. Tenants' organizations in Berlin say they are taking their campaign for a rent cap nationwide.

Tenants' organizations in other parts of Europe have been watching how the law

has been enforced in the German city.

Barbara Steenbergen, head of the EU liaison office with the International Union of Tenants, said other countries should take heed of what's occurred in Berlin and avoid similar missteps: "I think other countries, other cities, can learn from what happened in Berlin and possibly do better."

She hopes that they can put pressure on the national government to consider a nationwide rent cap: Steenbergen acknowledged that there's a way to go about bringing some political parties on board. But she said that the campaign #mietenstopp² is only getting started: "The story is not yet over. I think the opposite is true. The story is just beginning."

Listen to the full story on the US-radio "The World" here:

<https://www.pri.org/stories/2021-04-20/berlin-tenants-undaunted-recent-court-ruling-undoes-rent-cap>

Cities4rent- a comparative study how to achieve affordable housing in 16 EU capitals and metropolis



² <https://mietenstopp.de/>

The European journalists team Arena working in 16 countries³ invited IUT's head of EU office **Barbara Steenbergen** to an expert team debating 10 crucial housing policy measures to balance rental markets.

Read the full interactive interview here:

<https://interaktiv.tagesspiegel.de/lab/wie-europaeische-staedte-um-bezahlbare-mieten-kaempfen/>

RENOVATION SUMMIT 2021 – BY HOUSING EUROPE AND IUT

Most of the policy agenda at EU level is now dedicated to reaching the objectives of carbon neutrality in the EU by 2050. This year will see important legislative proposals in the field of energy that will have a long-lasting impact on the way homes are built and renovated. It is crucial to get the policy mix right to support tenants and social, cooperative and public housing providers in achieving a fair energy transition and decarbonisation.



To do so, we need to start from what works on the ground, for example with people-

centred measures. We also need to promote a low-carbon culture throughout the supply chain of renovation. Eventually, we need financial resources, from all levels (in particular the EU) and all kinds of institutions (in particular public ones) to achieve decarbonisation while preserving social fairness and affordability. Bringing together relevant stakeholders to discuss and promote this approach was the ultimate objective of the Summit May 1th and 11th, jointly organized by Housing Europe and IUT. **EU commissioners Elisa Ferreira** (Cohesion and Reforms) and **Kadri Simson** (Energy) joined the debate with many key stakeholders, including **IUT president Marie Linder** and **Barbara Steenbergen**

<https://www.ourhomesourdeal.eu/renovation-summit2021>

Watch the video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h-ZioQrs4Ng>

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³ <https://cities4rent.journalismarena.media/>