

This week, the European Responsible Housing Awards (ERHIN) are being held in Helsinki. The awards highlight good initiatives and innovative ideas to inspire the housing sector and strengthen tenants across Europe.

There is an ongoing housing crisis in Europe. There is a lack of affordable housing that is palpable all over Europe. Coupled with the current stock of rental housing in need of renovations that will cost several billions– the ERHIN awards are more relevant than ever.

At the International Union of Tenants (IUT) we recognise that housing is a fundamental human right, and we are working tirelessly to realise the right of everyone to good housing, and to a sound and healthy residential environment, at an affordable and fair rent.

Housing is a central component in all our lives and ensuring that there is a sufficient supply of good quality affordable rental housing is one of the most important cornerstones of an inclusive society.

As it stands, many people do not have access to the necessary capital to own their own homes. For these people it is therefore essential that society, including governments, public and private actors work together to create a balanced rental housing market that is viable for both landlords as well as tenants.

We see this is reflected in the 19<sup>th</sup> principle of the EU social pillar, it states that access to social housing or housing assistance of good quality shall be provided for those in need. Vulnerable people have the right to appropriate assistance and protection against forced eviction, and finally, adequate shelter and services shall be provided to the homeless in order to promote their social inclusion.

Against this background it is worrying that so little public funding is being spent on public housing. Even before the covid-pandemic, general public spending on housing and amenities in the European union amounted to 0.6 percent of GDP.

Looking at the situation today, with member states still reeling in the wake of the pandemic, the availability of decent, affordable and adequate housing has now become more difficult than ever. Without sufficient public investments, the right to housing is being undercut by market interests that works to maximise profit in the housing sector. The underfunding of the sector has led to a housing crisis across Europe, wherein too few rental housing units are being built, and the costs of renovations are being passed on to the tenants and places further pressure on an already vulnerable group.

As the President of the IUT I believe that much more must be done for the tenants in Europe. Considering the low public spending figures from 2020, it is clear that public investments must increase considerably. This is why we at the IUT call on governments to work actively to increase public spending in order to secure the right to adequate housing.

The EU and its member states must work actively to make massive EU and national level investments in public housing. These investments, coupled with intensive cooperation on all levels of government, as well as tenants and homeowners. All of which needs to be

implemented in line with national-level regulatory measures in order to disincentivise the financialization of housing, while at the same time respecting the principle of subsidiarity. Housing policy is a national competence, and although the EU member states share the same problems, the solutions need to be tailored to fit the needs of each country. There is no panacea to solve the housing crisis, but it starts with increasing public spending and facilitating access to funds to make the necessary investments.

Marie Linder, President of the IUT  
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