



October 2022

Celebration of International Tenants' Day and World Habitat Day HOUSING CHALLENGES AND A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

On the 3rd of October 2022, the International Union of Tenants and Tenant Unions of Sweden, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and North Macedonia in cooperation with Freja Forum Foundation, celebrated International Tenants' Day (ITD) and World Habitat Day. This year's theme was "Mind the Gap. Leave No One and Place Behind", focusing on the problems of growing inequality and challenges in cities and human settlements.

On this occasion, IUT launched a **press release**¹ calling for moratoria on evictions, energy price caps and long-term climate allowances for low- and middle-income households.

The IUT, in fact, asks the governments to decide and implement a plan for the protection of tenants around seven objectives:

1. Insert a price cap for energy household consumption.
2. No energy cut-offs for households financially overburdened by increased energy costs.
3. Moratoria on evictions against tenants who have fallen behind with their payments.
4. Develop a policy of rent stabilization and controls to prevent the indexation of rents in the face of inflation driving up rents and limit rent increases, especially in the

private rental sector.

5. Long-term compensation for increases in energy costs by governments for low- and middle-income households (climate housing allowances) by using national public funding, which can be complemented by International Green Funds and the EU Social Climate Fund.
6. Develop an energy renovation policy which does not negatively affect tenants and does not lead to "renovictions" (no evictions by renovation and displacement of residents).
7. Ensure the maximum level of institutional tenants' participation and democracy, at level playing field with the landlords and housing providers.

Marie Linder (President of the International Union of Tenants and chairman of Swedish Union of Tenants) provided the opening remarks of the conference explaining the importance of informing civil society, activists and policy makers on housing rights through the ITD. She highlighted the growing inequalities and vulnerabilities, and the several crises affecting



¹ IUT Press release for ITD 2022:
<https://www.iut.nu/news-events/iut-calls-for-moratoria-on-evictions-energy-price-caps-and->

[long-term-climate-allowances-for-low-and-middle-income-households/](https://www.iut.nu/news-events/iut-calls-for-moratoria-on-evictions-energy-price-caps-and-long-term-climate-allowances-for-low-and-middle-income-households/)

our societies and, in particular, tenants. She recalled the IUT 11 claims² to the European Green Deal, which needs to combine economic recovery and social protection and be based on the housing cost neutrality principle. Mentioning the crucial role of renovations, she called for tenants' participation and for avoiding repossessions. In particular, she stressed the need for moratoria on evictions, climate allowances for low- and middle-income households, rent caps and the legal enforcement of the housing right. Condemning Russia's war against Ukraine, Ms. Linder moved the attention to the increasing energy costs and inflation. She finally presented the Swedish model of housing, and SUT efforts in protecting tenants from the worst consequences of crises. SUT will soon start the annual rent negotiation, which is expected to be tough due to the demands of the organization for homeowners which is asking for a 10% increase in rents. The SUT will therefore keep negotiating, working with policy makers, legal advisors, and civil society organizations to protect tenants.

European Housing Challenges



Mr Hans Dubois (Research manager, Social Policies Unit, Eurofound) presented some insights from the Eurofound report "Affordable and adequate homes - The cost of and access to housing in Europe"³ to be published in 2023. The report discusses the impacts of inadequate and unaffordable housing, describes the EU housing landscape and its development over time, maps housing problems, identifies population groups affected by them, and presents policy examples to address housing issues in a changing world. Mr Dubois highlighted that the number of tenants increased in the recent past, together with housing costs, which raised by 8% for

homeowners and 23% for tenants from 2010 to 2019. Rents have increased steadily while utility and maintenance costs increased steeply recently. Moreover, housing insecurity is perceived as a problem especially by tenants renting in the private market and unaffordability mainly concerns tenants. Regarding inadequacy, 71% of tenants report problems such as bad air quality, poor energy efficiency, lack of space or no access to green areas. He explained housing policies such as rent subsidies, which sometimes are dedicated to social housing tenants (DK, HU, SI), are only for minimum income/unemployment benefit recipients (CY, HR, IT, LV) or include the utility costs (CZ, EE, FI). The coverage of rent subsidies varies widely: Slovakia 0.1%, Belgium 1.5% (7.5% of private tenants), Estonia 1.6%, France 20%, NL 19%, IR 16%. Mr Dubois then mentioned policies to protect people at risk of eviction, such as services like in Sweden, where an upcoming eviction must be reported to an organization which helps households, and in 2022 60% of all eviction notices were not executed. He explained some discussion and policy pointers. For example, improving affordability of housing for one group reduces affordability for others (e.g. subsidies enabling payment of higher rents/prices, drive up rent/prices for others). However, policymakers should seek solutions also outside the housing-context (e.g., education, healthcare, social services). Also, too many groups are excluded from support (informal contracts, migrant groups, shared accommodation, just-above income threshold, etc.) and better support should be offered to people on social housing waiting lists. Finally, since there is now a large availability of energy efficiency funding, it is crucial to use it for addressing inequalities, protecting the most vulnerable ones, and also improving the local areas.

² <https://www.iut.nu/eu/energy/eu-green-deal/>

³ [https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/rep](https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2023/affordable-and-adequate-homes-the-cost-of-and-access-to-housing-in-europe)

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Housing Challenges in the Western Balkans

Ms Jasminka Tadic-Husanovic

(President Center for Support Organizations, Tuzla, Bosnia-Herzegovina) explained that in BH 57,3% of the population lives in rural areas, and 42,7% in cities. Inflation is now at 11,5%, the average salary is 500€, and the consumer basket is around 1500€. Moreover, housing demands increased during the pandemic and only 7-11% of apartments are rented. The demand side is still larger than the offer and prices are increasing, particularly energy. Finally, air pollution is a crucial issue, and it must be solved to proceed the EU accession negotiations.



Ms Maja Staleska

(President at Organization for housing and tenants HTO, Skopje, North Macedonia) stated that the situation in Macedonia is similar to BH and there is a lack of

official monitoring of the situation. However, the Macedonian tenants' organization is now recognized and invited to housing expert panels to discuss housing issues, which is a step forward. Yet, to have an impact in the short term, HTO is aligning with CSOs to put pressure on the government now. Moreover, it recently started working directly with tenants, creating tenants' movement following the SUT example. She then explained that there are some collective housings appearing, but not enough social and public housing.

HTO is doing everything possible to mobilize tenants and find partners in political parties, national and local governments, to shape housing strategies for the better.

A Q&A session followed, in which the importance of advocacy and not waiting for the next housing crisis was highlighted, together with some housing measures implemented during the pandemic.

In the conclusion, the moderator **Ms Aslihan Tekin** (Legal and Policy Adviser EU/International Affairs and Freja Forum partner) and **Margareta Eklund** (President Freja Forum) stated that the situation in Europe is complex, but everyone is involved and the human right to housing must be respected. Tenants represent one third of the households in EU and are at the forefront of housing crises, so it is crucial to give them assistance and support. Everyone should keep working hard for better conditions in housing.

Selected news on International Tenants' day:

- Swedish Union of Tenants: <https://www.hemhyra.se/nyheter/nufiras-hyresgasterna-over-helavarlden-ett-solidaritetsarbete/>
- German Tenants' Association: <https://www.mieterbund.de/presse/pressemeldung-detailansicht/article/72017-international-tenants-day-3-october-2022.html>
- Czech Tenants Association <https://www.iut.nu/news-events/milan-taraba-chairman-of-the-czech-tenants-association-interview-read-the-english-translation/>
- Housing and Tenants Organization (Bosnia-Herzegovina): <https://www.facebook.com/HTOmK/>
- Freja Forum Page: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100063463961428>
- https://www.eldiarioar.com/sociedad/dia-internacional-inquilinos-celebra-hoy-lunes_1_9588930.html
- Australia Council to Homeless persons: <https://chp.org.au/article/international-tenants-day-how-victoria-can-better-support-tenants/>

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