



***IUT EU liaison office Brussels Plan of Action 2023-2026:
Tenants united in solidarity: exchange of knowledge, advocating and policy***

The IUT, EU and housing: 15 years of advocating for tenant's rights

For 15 years IUT runs a liaison office to the EU in Brussels. IUT's lobby work in Brussels has made IUT a respected actor in the EU capital. Although housing as such is not an EU competence, but up to the EU member states, regions and cities to decide and create laws on, several EU topics have great influence on national housing policies, such as EU energy policy, EU state aid regulations for social housing, EU funding for social and affordable housing, energy efficient renovation and urban renewal. The EU urban agenda, the EU stability and growth pact, the EU semester, and the EU Green Deal of the common energy and climate policy and the Fit for 55 package have immediate impact on the housing policy in the member states of the EU.

IUT serves as expert in the relevant committees and working groups of the EU institutions (European Parliament, Committee of the Regions, European Economic and Social Committee and European Commission) and is formal member of the EU Urban Agenda Housing Partnership, a high level stakeholder group set up by the EU commission and the EU member states to revise EU legislation for better funding, better knowledge and capacity building in the field of affordable and social housing. EU policy is a complex issue, produced in a multi-level governance between several Directorates General of the EU Commission (DG Regional policy REGIO, DG competition COMP, DG energy ENER, DG social affairs and employment, EMPL, DG ECFIN, DG justice and consumers JUST, DG internal market and growth GROW, Joint research centre JRC, EUROSTAT) currently 27 EU-Member States, cities and key stakeholders like the tenant organisations, represented by the International Union of Tenants. In contrast to the several organisations representing social, public, private landlords, not for profit cooperatives, for profit real estate investors, short-term rental platforms, property and landowners, the representation of the tenants is unified- there is only one IUT.

Housing is a fundamental right and a common good

As approximately a third of the EU citizens, 20 million people, live in rented dwellings. Tenancy law and energy law affects the daily lives of large numbers of citizens. To provide a level playing field for tenants, it is crucial that the EU supports work at Member State level related to security of tenure, affordable rents, and the fight against energy poverty.

According to Article 34 of the Charter of Fundamental rights of the EU, 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.

The European Union and integration 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 refugees, immigrants and to fight against the achievements of European Union and integration. Promoting the provision of affordable housing is therefore not only a social policy imperative, but a measure to combat xenophobia and nationalism.

IUT's vision of Europe is one where all citizens have a home that they can afford easily. Housing constitutes a fundament for all to participate in our society. Secure, affordable and healthy housing is a precondition to access education, employment and genuine social security. The social and affordable housing sector contributes actively to the Europe social and climate 2030 goals as it has the capacity to create growth and jobs, thus contributes to sustainable local economies, combats poverty and social exclusion, and delivers an important part to work against climate change and energy poverty. EU legislation affecting housing policies thus has direct effects on the lives of European households. Housing is one of the key questions of sustainable well-being for all. Therefore, the IUT advocates for better housing policies in a more social Europe- social justice and climate justice must go hand in hand.

For 2023–2026 IUT Brussels, together with the member unions, plans to continue its activities in raising awareness on the increasing housing and energy costs for tenants, which have negative aspects on the entire economy. **“Tenants united for affordable housing and security of tenure”** will be the central message towards EU decision makers. Increasing public financing from EU funds and a favourable legislative framework for affordable housing and sustainable energy will contribute to the national, regional, and local provision of more affordable and social housing, energy-efficient renovation that is housing cost neutral, investment in deprived communities and urban renewal. Tenant's empowerment, structured tenant participation in decision making about their living environment is the key to create inclusive and strong neighbourhoods.

Stop the selling out of our cities and regulate Short-Term-Rentals

Counteract housing speculation will contribute to more housing affordability- IUT needs to advocate against the sale of the public and social housing stock, the massive concentration on European housing markets, the financialization of housing, and tax evasion and money laundering in the real estate sector.

The touristification of cities by the massive expansion of short time rentals is aggravating the European housing crisis. It is important to work together with the cities to enforce measures and strategies at city and supranational level. The European Commission has launched the first draft legislation to regulate the platforms in November 2022. 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 the depletion of city centres at the expense of residents.

Housing and state aid- de-block investment in affordable housing by changing the existing state aid rules

As the state aid package is one of the most important legal frameworks of the EU. State aid rules are the top tier in EU advocacy- we are in the middle of a long and hard political negotiation process which we can only influence with the strong support of the national tenant unions and concerted actions at EU and national level.

The currently applicable EU State aid rules, 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.

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), in particular recital 11 of the EU commission's decision need to be adapted accordingly. Subsidiarity should be strictly enforced.

Affordable energy efficiency for tenants- housing cost neutrality in renovation is the key

The cost of energy represents a growing part of living costs to many households. At the same time energy consumption should be reduced. The Commission state that the EU does not only want to adapt the global clean and green 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 and other fossil energies. Solving these issues would contribute to a better climate quality as well as provide the Europeans with healthier and more affordable homes. Costs and burdens related to renovations of residential dwellings should be distributed in an equitable manner to counteract differences between social groups. The IUT is intensely involved in the legislation as part of the EU Green Deal. Our manifesto, "A tenant-friendly Green Deal", available in 8 languages, <https://www.iut.nu/eu/energy/eu-green-deal/> serves as a leitmotif in many debates at EU level. Several directives, with the most relevant the Energy Performance Buildings Directive

and the Energy Efficiency Directive, will come into force in 2023. The IUT EU office is in the middle of the key stakeholder debate with the institutions.

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. Therefore, an extended financing of the EU must be the starting point to empower national climate plans, subsidies, grants and loans for renovations and climate housing allowances for tenants.

The EU institutions acknowledge the key role of housing construction and renovation for an economic recovery in Europe. IUT follows this new development precisely to influence it in the right way, for more affordable, social and cooperative rental housing and a tenant-friendly EU Green Deal.

IUT has shaped the EU-wide discussion around 2 key objectives: “housing- cost- neutral renovation” and “prevention of renoventions.” Housing cost neutrality means that increase in rent after renovation, legally possible in 21 countries in the EU, must be fully balanced by energy savings. Evictions by renovation, (“renovictions”) are the worst outcome of the EU renovation wave, part of the EU Green Deal. Displacement of residents, gentrification and squeezing out money of real estate under the guise of lofty climate goals is the policy we need to denounce and legally fight – Tenants united in Europe and beyond.

EU stability and growth pact, European Semester, Country Specific Recommendations and the EU pillar of social rights: Tenure neutral policies are crucial

In the yearly cycle of economic policy coordination, called “European Semester”, the EU analyses EU member states reform programs and provides them with country specific recommendations. In the last years, progressive social housing policies and rent regulation mechanisms in a growing number of member states have been in the focus of the EU commission, claiming e.g. for downsizing the social housing sector in the Netherlands and deregulation of the rental market in Sweden. IUT Brussels will, in cooperation with the member unions in the affected states, continue to claim for an incorporation of the social objectives of the EU pillar for social rights in the European semester. The European Pillar of Social Rights is intended as a key response to the aftermath of the financial crisis and as an update of the European social model in the light of a changing labor market. The Pillar is meant to stimulate the reduction of poverty and social exclusion through adequate social protection, and to support labor market access and well-functioning welfare systems. In article 19, the pillar foresees the access to social housing or housing assistance of good quality for those in need. This claim should be mirrored in the EU semester assessment of member states housing policy.

But- 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 position 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 a just housing policy should be housing for all – not home ownership for all.

European Responsible Housing Initiative- 10 years of best housing practices all over Europe

IUT is chair of the Jury of the European Responsible Housing Awards, the common initiative with Housing Europe and Delphis to promote Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and tenants' empowerment in the housing sector.

The European Responsible Housing Awards, firstly issued at International Tenants Day 2014 in Brussels, in a second edition 2016 at the Committee of the Regions (CoR) in Brussels, 2019 at the International Social Housing Festival in Lyon and 2022 at the International Social Housing Festival in Helsinki, is based on the Code of Conduct of the European Responsible Housing Initiative, available in 17 languages: <https://www.responsiblehousing.eu/code-of-conduct>

IUT members of the jury are **Eddie Jacquemart**, Confédération Nationale du Logement, France, **Dr. Melanie Weber-Moritz**, Deutscher Mieterbund, Germany, **Anne Viita**, Vuokralaiset, Finland, **Christian Hellevang**, nominated by Leieboerforeningen, Norway, **Maja Staleska**, Housing and Tenants Association, Skopje North Macedonia, **Zeno Winkels**, Nederlandse Woonbond, Netherlands and **Marie Linder**, Hyresgästföreningen, Sweden, chaired by the head of the IUT Liaison office in Brussels, **Barbara Steenbergen**: <https://www.responsiblehousing.eu/jury>

We will prepare for a new ERHIN Awards in 2025 together with Housing Europe and Delphis.

EU Parliament elections Spring 2024

IUT will publish the Tenants' priorities for the EU legislation period 2024-2029, and will continue the regular dialogue with the Members of the European Parliament and with the members of the Committee of the Regions (CoR) and the European Social and Economic Committee (EESC) and the European Commission. IUT will encourage MEPs to continue the Urban Intergroup, dealing with urban and housing issues.

Major events

International Tenant's Day, 1st Monday of October
European Responsible Housing Awards
European Sustainable Energy Week
European Week of the Cities and Regions
International Social Housing Festival
European Elections

Internal Affairs

Information on relevant EU policies and IUT actions by the quarterly EU Brussels newsletter and newflashes on topical issues

Regular meetings of the think tank of IUT, the Housing Policy Working Group, chaired by **Dan Nicander** (Swedish Union of Tenants)

Continue the exchange of knowledge, good practices, opinions, and advocacy strategies in the IUT housing policy working group and follow international trends in housing policy to keep members well informed.

Continue regular meetings of the Energy Policy Working Group, responsible for our general line in the EU Green Deal and EU Fit for 55 package.

Strengthening ties and exchange with members by contributing to their national conferences and events and inviting them to EU panels, working groups and conferences

Establish closer cooperation with housing researchers and scientific institutions

Continue working in strategic European partnerships

IUT Memberships/Partnerships in Brussels

- Member of the EU Urban Agenda Housing Partnership
- Member of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) liaison group
- Member of the European Housing Forum, EHF
- Member of the Social Platform
- Member of the Progressive Society Initiative
- Partner of the Intergroup Urban of the European Parliament
- Partner of the Intergroup on Public Services of the European Parliament
- Member of the EU Commission's regulatory energy roundtable (DG JUST/DG ENER)
- Member of the social domain working group of the European Federation for Living (EFL)
- Member of the urban renewal and housing working group of the German Länder representations in Brussels
- Member of the working group for European Integration of the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation
- Member of the European Alliance for Just Transition (various EU based civil society NGOs and stakeholders)
- Founder of the European Responsible Housing Initiative (ERHIN)
