

GLOBAL TENANT

IUT INTERNATIONAL UNION OF TENANTS' QUARTERLY MAGAZINE

November 2016



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in Glasgow**

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IUT member organisations in:

Austria, Australia, Belgium,
 Benin, Bosnia-Herzegovina,
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 Croatia, Czech Republic,
 Denmark, England,
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 Germany, India, Israel, Italy,
 Ivory Coast, Japan, Kenya,
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 New Zealand, Nigeria,
 Northern Ireland,
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Scotland as a role model

This issue of the Global Tenant magazine contains a lot about Scotland, in relation to housing, and also a report from IUT's most recent world congress in Glasgow – a tenant friendly city in a tenant friendly country.

Yes, Scotland is indeed, already, an independent country when it comes to housing. Scotland has its own housing laws that regulate the housing sector. And indeed, very proactive and progressive housing policies.

Scotland's own housing minister, Kevin Stewart, personally welcomed the congress's 130 IUT delegates to Scotland on October 14. Later, the city of Glasgow hosted a dinner for all delegates at the most magnificent City Chambers. Not only that, the Scottish government sponsored the IUT congress with a generous sum of money – first time in IUT's 90-year history!

The congress was planned, organised and realised together with our colleagues at TPAS Scotland – whose staff put in every effort and resources towards making this 20th IUT congress memorable for a long time.

Moreover, Scotland intends to build 50 000 new affordable homes over the next 5 years.

Scotland has banned the controversial Right to Buy of social housing by sitting tenants, something which England continues to promote.

As long ago as 2001 Scotland created a legal requirement for landlords to actively develop and support tenant participation. All Registered Social Landlords and local authorities in Scotland must have a tenant participation strategy.

The Social Housing Charter came into force in 2012. The Charter also includes Tenant Participation Officers, TPOs, who play a key role in helping tenants to get their voices heard. Read more about what Angela and Lorna say about TPOs on page 3.

All in all, as tenants, and as tenant representatives from 25 countries, we had a royal welcome to Scotland and Glasgow! Sorry, that you couldn't all be there!



Magnus Hammar
 Secretary General IUT

CALENDAR

2016

December 1: Global Renewable Energy Forum, in Bonn Germany
December 17–19: Asia Pacific Network for Housing Research, APNHR, Guangzhou, China

2017

March 13–14: Tpas England: Engaging Communities Conference, in Nottingham
March 22–23: Housing Finance Conference and Exhibition, in Liverpool
April 2–4: National Low Income Housing Coalition, NLIHC 2017 Forum, in Washington DC
April 3–6: 8th Annual Affordable Housing Projects flagship event, in Singapore
June 8–10: German Tenants Day, Deutscher Mietertag 2017, in Magdeburg
June 9–11: TIS, Annual Conference 2017: Health, Wealth, and Housing, in Glasgow
June 13–23: International Social Housing Festival, in Amsterdam
June 27–29: CIH Housing Annual Conference, Manchester UK
July 12–13: Tpas England: National Tenant Conference
September 4–6: ENHR Conference: Redefining the role of public and private sectors, Tirana, Albania
November 8–10: 78th session UNECE Committee on Housing and Land Management, Geneva
Nov. 29–Dec. 1: Australian National Housing Conference, in Sydney

For more information on conferences and other events: www.iut.nu/conferences.htm

In Scotland we take tenant participation seriously

PHOTO: BY PERMISSION WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

A hearty hello from Scotland and the Highlands to the rest of the world! My name is Angela and I am a tenant of the social landlord Highland Council. The Highland Council is the largest local government area in the UK and covers an area the size of Belgium. When I started a tenancy with this social landlord, I was asked if I would be interested in tenant participation. And honestly I had no idea what I was getting myself into. But now I know!

Tenant participation in Scotland is a way for tenants and landlords to share information, ideas and power to improve the standard of housing conditions and services. Tenants in Scotland now have the right to be consulted and to participate in this way. Effective participation benefits both tenants and landlords. It gives tenants an opportunity to influence decisions about the housing service they receive. And it gives landlords better links to the community and the opportunity to carry out partnership working.

The introduction of the Housing Act 2001 in Scotland created a legal requirement for landlords to actively develop and support tenant participation. All Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and local authorities in Scotland

must have a tenant participation strategy. The Housing Act includes powers to modernise the regulation of social housing. It created an independent Scottish Housing Regulator to look after the interests of tenants, homeless people and others who use the services that social landlords provide.

The Scottish Social Housing Charter¹, from 2012, is the document that contains the outcomes that social landlords should achieve, such as customer/landlord relationship, housing quality and maintenance and neighbourhood and community and how to get good value from rents and service charges. To meet these targets and getting tenants involved, the Tenant Participation Officers, TPO, play a key role in helping tenants to get their voices heard.

To have a look into the work as a TPO working for the Highland Council I interviewed Lorna Simpson, whom I met four years ago. She is passionate, hearty and has the gift of encouraging people to get involved.

Angela: Please tell me what tenant participation is and how it is supported

Lorna: Tenant Participation is integral to the work of all social landlords, local authority and registered social landlords only, not private landlords. It is about tenants having a voice in housing service which will help to shape, develop and improve the service.

All tenants of local authorities and Registered Social Landlords are regularly invited to get involved in tenant participation but

the take-up varies from area to area.

Angela: What is a Tenant Participation Officer and what area do you cover?

Lorna: The official definition of tenant participation is: “Tenant participation is about tenants taking part in decision making processes and influencing decisions about housing policies; housing conditions; and housing, and related, services.”

It is a two-way process which involves the sharing of information, ideas and power. Its aim is to improve the standard of housing conditions and service. As a TPO I see my role as empowering tenants to have a voice in housing service and to help provide knowledge, understanding and skills.

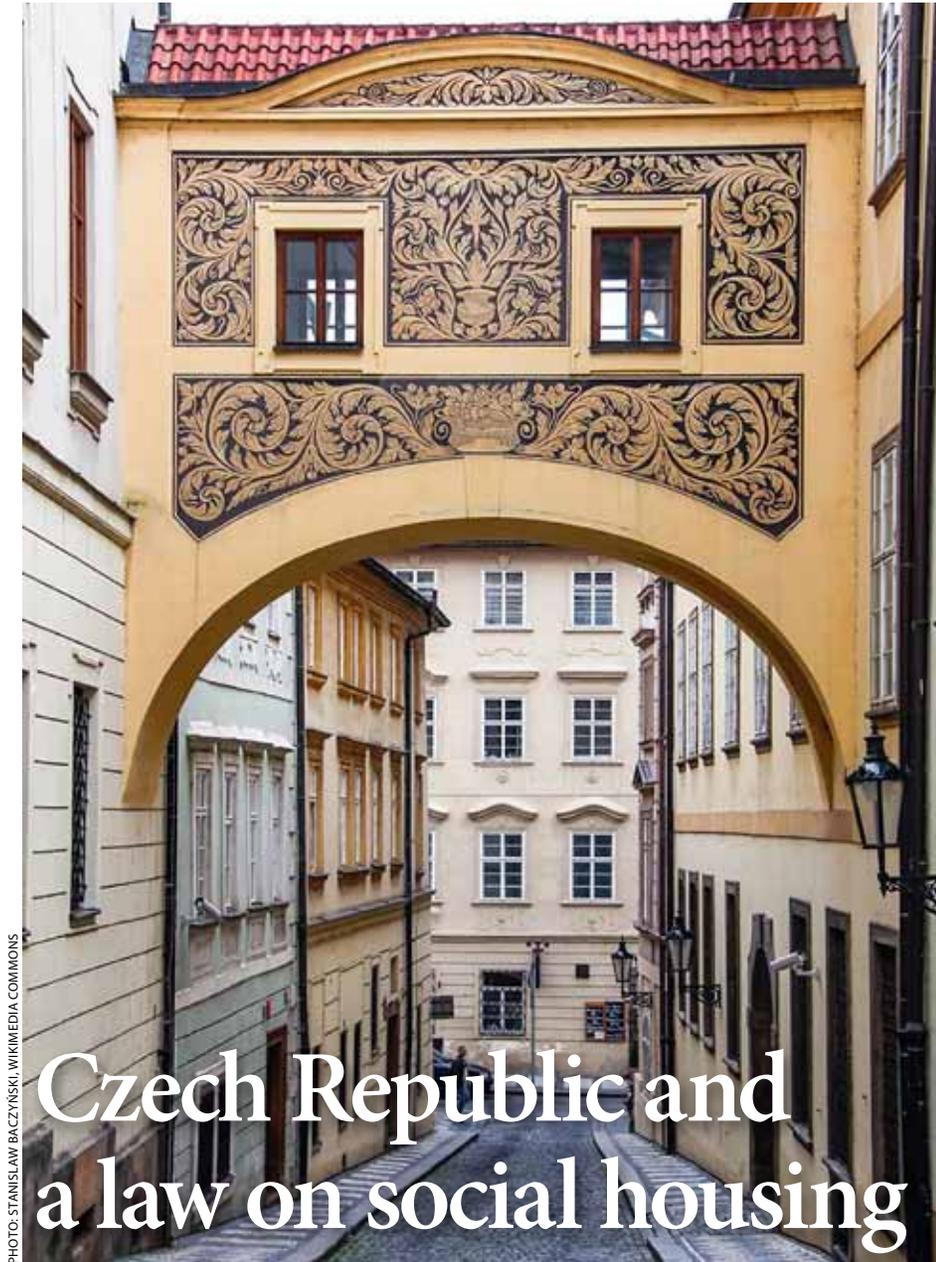
Angela: With what groups are you working?

Lorna: As a TPO covering a huge land mass, I work closely with a wide range of tenants and groups including Young Mothers, tenants with mental health issues, young tenants aged between 16–25, Sheltered Housing groups, Focus groups, Interested Tenants groups and Registered Tenant Organisations who mainly want to carry out improvements within their respective communities. In many ways the Tenant Participation Officer is a community development worker and I believe that the two roles overlap.

Angela: Thank you Lorna, and good luck in your important work as Tenant Participation Officer!

Text Angela Krueger

¹ www.gov.scot/resource/0039/00390305.pdf



Malá Strana street in Prague, address of the Czech senate.

law on social housing, as well as increased output of affordable rental housing.

On November 1, the Association of Tenants of the Czech Republic (SON) together with the Council of Senior citizens, organized a conference in the Senate, on the topic on Housing for Seniors. The elderly in the Czech Republic, with often very modest pensions, have been seriously affected by unaffordable homeownership, as well as unaffordable private rentals.

The conference attracted over 170 participants under the auspices of the Chairman of the Senate Milan Štěch and with the participation of Minister of Labour and Social Affairs Michaela Marksová and Minister for Regional Development Karla Šlechtová.

Representatives of IUT's office in Brussels, Barbara Steenbergen, and of the Austrian tenant association, MVÖ, Elke Hanel-Torsch, attended the conference and presented IUT's and Austrian models of housing for senior citizen.

The organizers, including the Chair of the Association of Tenants of the Czech Republic, Mr Milan Taraba, supported the adoption of the law on social housing and the construction of affordable rental housing in the Czech Republic.

The most important, and tricky, issues appear to be: A. For whom is the law on social housing – for the poorest of the poor, or? B. How and who will finance the construction of social housing – local governments or the central government? And C. Who will administer social housing – again, the local governments or the central government?

According to the Council of Seniors, seniors need barrier-free homes of around 30 m² to 50 m², with access to social services, and should not cost more than max. 1/3 of retirement income.

Social affordable homes are also needed for single mothers and disabled people, and for families with low-income families. Also important is also that any new construction of housing should be a mixture of various tenure forms, to prevent social exclusion, including a certain percentage of social housing. Finally, we need to have a separate control apparatus, to discourage any abuse of social housing.

Text Lenka Tarabová, Sdružení nájemníků ČR, Czech Union of Tenants

PHOTO: STANISLAW BACZYŃSKI, WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Czech Republic and a law on social housing

After years of negotiations and debates about a law on social housing, many Czech NGOs now fear that the draft law will not make it all the way.

Many Czech governments, mostly right-wing, have promised a law on social housing. But nothing has happened – until the current government, in power since 2013, started the process of introducing this law. The present government coalition comprises Social Democrats, Movement ANO (YES) and the Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party, KDU-CSL.

A working group composed of experts prepared a draft law, and now the law is in, so called, interdepartmental management. And unfortunately, the process is now prolonged.

The Czech Republic does not have a Ministry of Housing as such, so the new draft law is an exercise for several ministries; the Ministry for Regional Development, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Human Rights, Equal Opportunities and Legislation. Three ministers are Social Democrats and two are from Movement ANO. So a lot of chefs here! And who will have the last word?

Parliamentary elections are due in the autumn of 2017, so if the law does not pass in the meantime, we will be back to square one.

Senior citizens in the Czech Republic have experienced increased difficulties in finding housing they can afford. Many Czech NGOs have organized various meetings and conferences over the years to emphasize the need for a

Why do Barcelona and Catalonia need a tenant association?

Thousands of evictions have taken place in Barcelona since 2009, when the economic crisis hit Spain very hard. The mortgages and foreclosures have been a nightmare for thousands of people in Spain. Today, still, between 8 and 10 households are evicted every day in Barcelona alone. However, over the 90% of these evictions result from the lack of capacity to pay the rent. Our housing problems have therefore moved from mortgages to rents.

Even if Spain has been, ever since the Franco era, a society consisting of mainly homeowners, it is not that easy to afford to buy a home today. About 30% of the population of Barcelona rent their homes, but most of them do not choose this alternative voluntarily because the rental market is expensive and insecure.

Rents in Barcelona have increased by 11% between 2013 and 2016. Also, the rental law, modified in 2013 after the banks' request, protects the landlord and weakens the position of the tenant. Spain's three years' lease contracts, plus one year, are absolutely unfair for the tenant, as rents can be raised without limit every time the lease-term ends.

Other imbalances between owners and tenants are that the landlord can claim the flat with only one month's prior notice, and you can be evicted if you miss only one month's rent. This law was originally designed to make the rental market more attractive for investors, thinking that if owners could evict more easily, they would more likely let their house or flat, and the stock would increase and the rents would go down, etc. Nevertheless, the consequence has been almost the opposite.

Three main phenomena can be added to explain the situation today in Barcelona.

Firstly, the massive tourism industry. Over 8.3 million people visited Barcelona in 2015, a city with 1.6 million inhabitants. People living in the most central areas complain about the transformation of their neighbourhoods, and of the increases of the prices and rents. The impact that Airbnb, hostels and hotels have

on housing is evident: People make more money in letting a room or a flat on a daily or weekly basis than letting a flat to someone on regular basis, for one or two years.

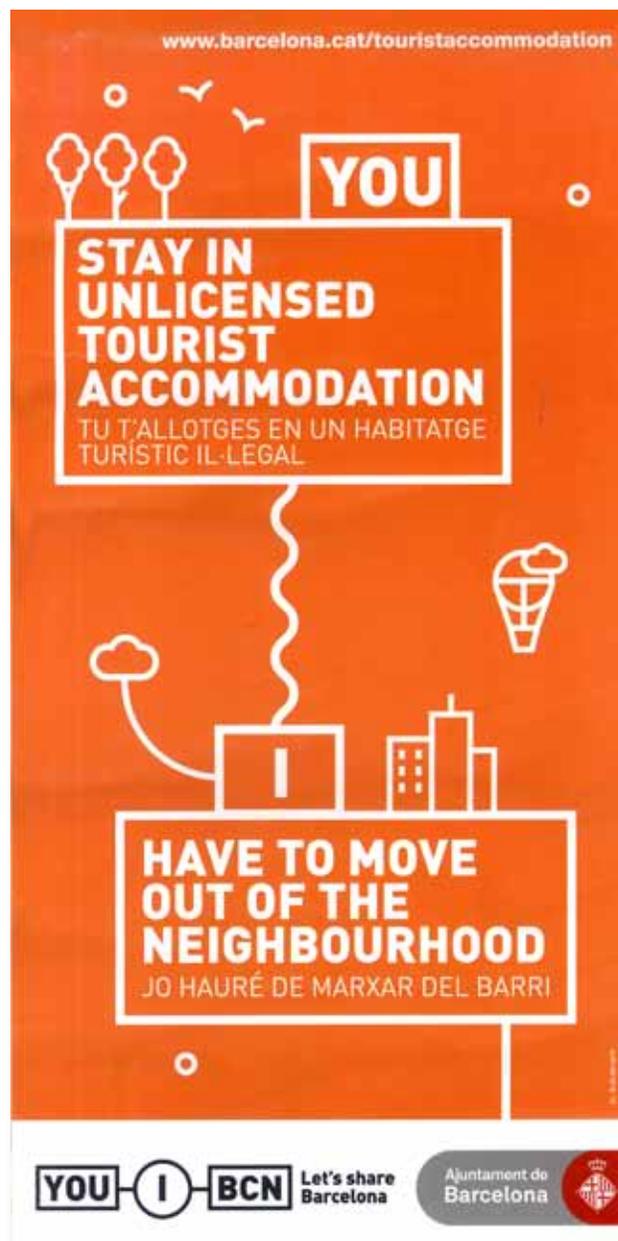
Secondly, gentrification is also affecting many areas of Barcelona. Some low-income neighbourhoods are getting fashionable, so they are attracting wealthy people, both from the city and other European countries. Expensive restaurants and hipster boutiques are increasing prices, and also the rents.

Thirdly, the way people speculate and invest is changing too. During the boom, the best investment option was to buy and then sell housing. Today, investors start speculating in the rental market. Investment funds and big enterprises called SOCIMIs, which do not even pay taxes, are buying buildings, evicting the tenants and letting for a higher price.

All in all, unaffordable rents, unemployment and low wages, together contribute to a desperate housing situation. The minimum wage is 647 Euros per month, while the average rents in Barcelona are about 750 Euros.

In this context, it is clear that we need a strong tenant organisation, able to denounce the vulnerability of tenants, and to claim for a more protective rental law and a stabilization of housing costs. The Observatori DESC is a human rights centre focused on the right to housing. DESC has always believed that tenant participation is the key. DESC has organized meetings with housing and neighbourhood entities, and also with tenants who have problems with their rent or landlord. The aim of these meetings is to build a tenant association, step by step.

Text Irene E. Blasco,
Direcció Observatori DESC,
www.observatoridesc.org



City of Barcelona asks tourist not to stay in unregistered accommodation, in an attempt to counteract gentrification.



The 20th IUT world congress in Glasgow, Scotland

– Is control of rents outdated, or a necessity worldwide?

The 20th IUT world congress in Glasgow, Scotland, gathered some 150 delegates from 25 countries. The congress theme – Is control of rents outdated, or a necessity worldwide? – seemed to be a pressing issue in most IUT member countries and was intensively debated. The congress 2016 also coincided with IUT's 90th anniversary, and IUT together with the congress' host and co-organiser TPAS Scotland, reflected on 90 years of tenant cooperation across borders.

The Wheatley Group generously hosted the IUT congress this year. Wheatley is Scotland's leading housing, care and property-management group. It comprises six Registered Social Landlords, of which the largest is Glasgow Housing Association, Scotland's largest social landlord.

"I want to renew the Scottish Governments' commitment to good housing and tenant participation", said Kevin Stewart, Scottish Minister for local government and housing, when he opened the public session of the 20th IUT congress on 14



Kevin Stewart, Scottish Minister for local government and housing.

October. "Tenants have a legal right to participate in Scotland, which is visible by the involvement of 9 tenant regional networks in the development of housing policy. The Scottish private rented sector is today three times bigger than 15 years ago, representing 14% of the national housing stock. The Scottish government decided to reform the private rental sector to make it more professional and more functional functioning. Recent legislation has created a new private residential tenancy. This provides security, stability and predictability for tenants while providing appropriate safe-

guards for landlords, lenders and investors”.

Mr Stewart also said, “This Government is committed to preserving and expanding its social housing stock and that’s why we recently ended the Right to Buy, which will safeguard up to 15 500 existing homes for future generations”.

Furthermore, the Scottish government generously sponsored the IUT congress, and hosted the congress dinner in beautiful Glasgow City Chamber. TPAS Chief Executive, Lesley Baird, welcomed the delegates to Glasgow and said that she was delighted to see so many old friends and hoped to make new ones during the three congress days.



Lesley Baird, TPAS Chief Executive.

IUT president Sven Bergensträhle said in his opening speech “In some countries there are huge subsidies for homeowners therefore developers prefer houses for sale. We need subsidies to support decent housing for all, but any subsidy must be tied to conditions resulting in lower prices and rents. Otherwise subsidies are just contributing to doping the prices”.



IUT president Sven Bergensträhle.

“Many economists say that deregulation results in a better supply of rental housing, but in reality this rarely happens. Free rent setting for new tenancies hampers mobility of workers and students. What we need is affordable rental housing in the cities where the jobs and education opportunities are. What is important is that existing and fair rental laws make it possible for organised tenants to challenge unfair rental conditions.

“We must continue to organise ourselves, and fight bad landlords and governments that do not take tenants’ rights and tenant organisations into consideration!” Mr Bergensträhle concluded.

Rent control is enforced in Paris. Sébastien Jolis, City of Paris representative, explained what Paris is doing to solve the increasing problems in the rental market.

“Prices in the private rented sector in Paris have doubled in the last 15 years. The city decided to use three levers: rent control, restrictions for illegally let dwellings, and more social housing construction. Reference rents are calculated according to different criteria including 18 different locations. If the rent is higher than what it should be, tenants can go to a local commission and ask for a revision. “However, the system implementation is rather slow”, Jolis said, “and tenants lack adequate support”. Jolis explained



PHOTO: CAMERON WILLIS, TPAS SCOTLAND

From left, IUT Vice president Jan Laurier together with Kees de Jong, Editor Woonbond, and Ronald Paping, Director Woonbond.

Many economists say that deregulation results in a better supply of rental housing, but in reality this rarely happens.



Sorcha Edwards, Secretary General of Housing Europe, representing social landlords.

that as 20% of rental apartments are illegally let, the city of Paris introduced more controls with the aim of preventing abusive practices. Furthermore, to counteract the long-term supply reduction, mainly due to the Airbnb boom, the city introduced an obligation to declare rentals for tourism purposes.

Finally, the “Charte promoteur” has been adopted to promote a non-speculative way of building. The idea is to reduce land costs and prices for sale, thus promoting access to housing for everyone. The city is making many efforts”, Sébastien Jolis said, “however we need associations and organisations to promote rent control and social housing construction”, he concluded.

Social housing is not the problem but the solution! Sorcha Edwards, Secretary General of Housing Europe, representing social landlords, said that: “The private market is blocked; its unaffordability is affecting the purchasing power and competitiveness of cities, local economy and key workers. Most of the buildings in Europe were built between 1946 and 1970. There was a big mobilisation to deliver large proportions of social housing. We now have to push for a similar level”.

According to a recent study by Housing Europe, public spending for housing in the EU 17 has decreased from 1.1% of GDP in 2003 to 0.8% in 2012. There is an increasing role of private finance both at EU and national levels, and a “revisualisation” of the social housing sector. Today, according to EU figures, 81 million Europeans are overburdened by housing costs. Sorcha Edwards said that if there is a political will, there are tools to improve affordability.

“The refugee crisis has become a housing crisis”, Sorcha Edwards said. “245 000 new homes are needed in the UK but not even half of them are being built. We have to start gaining public support from the ➔

increasing demand for affordable housing and for a fair energy transition. We have to promote a new idea of Europe, which consists of cross-border cooperation and exchange of best practices, not only the institutions!”

Mary Taylor, CEO of the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA) presented the Scottish housing situation under the point of view of different ageing groups.



Mary Taylor, CEO of the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA).

“Elderly people are really well housed”, she explained. “And services to social tenants are recognised to be good. However, there is a big housing shortage in Scotland, and supply has not been adapted to the change in population. This has mainly affected young people who face sky high prices and are forced to delay the start of their adult life.” Government support leaves a big gap, says Mary Taylor, and if they do not have a well-paid job they suffer.

Prof. Isobel Anderson from Stirling University presented a comparison between housing policies in Europe and Cuba. The findings from her research were most interesting: there is no clear link between welfare state type and percentage of social housing in the countries analysed. A common trend is the path-dependency of housing policies, which is shown by the continuity in the groups who are experiencing homelessness and housing exclusion.

“The EU and Brussels’ institutions have a major impact on how we live”, said Barbara Steenbergen, head of the IUT Liaison to the European Union, when she presented IUT’s priorities and work in Brussels.

“One of the major issues that affect us is about the State Aid Rules. Today these rules say that state aid for housing has to be directed to the most disadvantaged citizens only, something that we don’t agree with. We see state aid as a universal method of providing



PHOTO: CAMERON WILLIS, TPAS SCOTLAND

Supporting Communities, Northern Ireland, was one of eight finalists of the Awards for Great Achievements 2013–2015, here represented by Colm McDaid, Chief Executive. Barbara Steenbergen, head of the IUT Liaison to the European Union, presented the award.



affordable housing to large income groups”. This is a difficult issue to influence, but the IUT is working to build as many alliances as possible to make changes possible. Our main argument for changing the rules is that housing is regarded as a national competency. The limitation of target groups also makes it harder to reach a social mix between various groups in society. Many middle income groups also need access to affordable housing. A broader social housing sector would make it possible for working families to spend money on other items than housing.

The IUT is also lifting the big problem for tenants when apartments are renovated in a way that makes the rent too expensive for the sitting tenants who are then evicted from the apartment, this is called renovictions. Therefore, the IUT is working for a Housing Cost Guarantee.

Barbara Steenbergen also pointed out that the EU has significant funds to support energy saving refurbishment, social housing and housing for refugees. Today, too few countries make use of these funds.

Rent control in the private rental sector was discussed by Dr Marietta Haffner, from the Delft University of Technology in the Netherlands.

The labour markets are getting more flexible



Wibke Werner, Berlin Mieterverein, Germany

Berlin is a tenants’ city, where 80% of the population rent their homes.

Lately rent levels have been hiking, especially in new contracts. Rents are still low compared to the German average, but on the other hand, salaries are also lower. The new rent-cap does not work, and 85% of the new contracts break the rent cap law. Also, Berlin has begun restricting private property rentals through Airbnb, threatening hefty fines.



Anne Lucet-Dallon-geville, CNL France
CNL is the first national Tenant Organisation in France. CNL was originally found-

ed by women, because men were at war at the time. CNL has official status as a consumer organisation by the French government. The organisation has 4 600 local associations, and 70 000 members. Their main focus is to lobby and have contacts with local, regional and national government. Paris tries to curb Airbnb. There is now a legal limit of 120 days a year.



Natalija Jolkina, Latvia Tenants Association

Latvian tenants have experienced enormous problems in the post-Soviet era. Particularly all those who were tenants in houses built before WWII, and were put under restitution in the years after independence in 1991. These tenants suddenly found themselves with new, often unscrupulous, landlords, who wanted to raise the rents or evict the sitting tenants. Private tenants live without security, and rents are high.



Prof. Elena Shomina, Russian Tenant Union,

Scarcity of student housing is a big issue in Russia, and students most of-

ten have to lodge with private persons in too small flats. Their contracts are very badly regulated so it is hard to make any demands or to feel safe. Especially students from other countries, often post-Soviet, are forced to live far away from the city centres and schools. Prof. Shomina wants to initiate a project, a comparison study of student housing in Europe.



PHOTO: STEFAN RUNFELDT, IUT

Liz Ely, spokesperson for Living Rent.

She therefore did not see any benefits from making common European rules in this area. The various housing models in Europe are simply too different.

“It has been quite a year for Living Rent, said Liz Ely, spokesperson for Living Rent. “Together we took thousands of voices to the Scottish Parliament, held countless stalls and signed petitions. We have met with policy makers, and given evidence in the Scottish Parliament. After nearly 18 months of tireless campaigning we have won greatly improved tenants’ rights. One thing that has become clear over the course of our campaign is that tenants need to get organised, to have more power to be able to get our voices heard”, said Liz Ely.

Following a successful campaign, Living Rent was founded as a Tenants Union for tenants in mainly the Scottish private market in the summer of 2016. Living Rent has also joined the IUT. During its first year of campaigning Living Rent collected over 10 000 names for a petition on a bill presented to the Scottish government in order to increase the security and conditions for private tenants. The campaign also met with the Scottish Housing Minister, worked hard to lobby politicians and achieved real changes in the rental law.

post-industrialisation and urbanisation is getting more rapid, especially amongst young people and newcomers. This leads to an increasing demand for the flexible kind of housing that renting is. Due to this trend, Haffner has seen an increasing willingness to regulate the rent levels and other conditions (length of lease, evictions etc.), especially in the big cities that are affected by gentrification. She also notes an increasing discussion on the need for government support to new construction.



Dr Marietta Haffner, Delft University of Technology in the Netherlands.

Interestingly there are no clear links between the level of regulation and the size of the private rental sector. It is usually a common argument, that tougher regulation of the private rental sector leads to a smaller sector, but Dr Haffner’s observations showed no support for that conclusion. The regulations are a way of guaranteeing affordable housing for more people, and make it possible for the tenants to feel more at home. There are also benefits to the landlords in the form of better transparency and decrease turnover rates. Dr Haffner underlined that the regulation has to be smart and adapted to the situation in the country in order to work out.

Rent setting models in Europe

according to Dr. M. Haffner

New contracts (Around 2010)

Free rent setting	England, France, Germany, Netherlands (deregulated stock), Spain, Switzerland
Regulated rent setting by quality	Netherlands (regulated stock), Sweden (negotiated)

Annual rent increase

Free rent setting	England (deregulated stock)
Regulated by / based on market developments	Germany
Regulated by an index	France, Netherlands (regulated stock), Spain, Sweden (negotiated rent increases), Switzerland



Xavi Pastor, FAVIBC, Catalonia Spain

Catalonia, and also Spain as a whole, has suffered a lot in the aftermath of the financial crisis, and many homeowners have been evicted, often due to unemployment, and become tenants. At the same time as there are many homeless people in Spain, there are also an estimated 100 000 empty homes nationally. There is no real tenant union in Spain, but FAVIBC wants to support the development of such organisations.



Leen Swinnen, PASH, Belgium

In Antwerp there are problems with sustainability and energy issues. Many flats are renovated extensively, hence the rents increase a lot. Individual metering has been introduced in many flats, and they have a good experience of individual metering in terms of energy savings, but the price hikes sometimes make it difficult for the sitting tenants. Leen was happy to meet housing-people from all over the world!



Ilene Campbell, TIS Scotland

Tenants Information Service, TIS, provides independent advice, support, and training for tenants and landlords across Scotland. We believe that tenants and residents associations should have more influence in making decisions and that increased involvement will bring benefits for tenants and landlords alike. TIS’ main method is to evaluate how landlords are involving tenants in projects and decisions.



Marie Linder, Hyresgästföreningen Sweden

Marie Linder presented the Swedish Union of Tenants, SUT, with 530 000 members and over 800 employees. SUT negotiates the rents for 95% of Sweden’s 1,5 million rental homes. Marie said that the SUT is committed to strengthening its international engagement, not least in the light of the strengthening influence on housing policy from the European Union. SUT has sponsored the IUT office since 1983.



PHOTO: STEFAN RUNFELDT, IUT

François Zutter, left, representing the Swiss tenant organisation, said that Switzerland has a housing stock of 60% rental housing, of total housing stock, but a scarcity of rental homes with affordable rents. Lukas Siebenkotten, Director of the Deutscher Mieterbund, DMB, represents a country with 55% rental housing, with a rent cap. Penny Carr, CEO of Tenants Queensland, represented Australia where private tenants usually sign only 6–12 months' leases.

In a panel debate moderated by Penny Carr, CEO of Tenants Queensland, Australia, panellists from a number of countries shared their respective experiences and knowledge on the private rental sector. Private rental tenants across the world share many common problems, mainly because this sector is often unregulated and insecure.

Tenants in Wales, England and Australia have lease terms of only 6 to 12 months, and rents for new leases can usually be increased without limits. Furthermore, landlords do not need any reason for giving notice.

Tenants in Quebec, Canada, seem to be slightly better off, as rents for sitting tenants in the private rental sector are regulated. Elisabeth Pham, Director of the tenant association, FLHLMQ, said that: “But, initial rents for new leases are mainly free. The notice term is six months and deposits are illegal by law. Tenants in Quebec can also challenge rents in court if they are too high or if the landlord fails to give notice”.

Switzerland, which has the most rental housing in the world – 60% of total housing stock is rental housing – still has a huge lack of affordable rental housing. There are no rent regulations in the private market in Switzerland, and this has led to high rent levels, especially in the cities.

“We have collected over 120,000 signatures in Switzerland, enough to bring the proposal to the Swiss Parliament”, said François Zutter, from the local tenant association in Geneva. “Our main mes-

sage is simply; More affordable rental housing!”

In Austria however, rent levels are regulated and the tenures are secure both for short and long lease contracts.

Alexandra Rezaei, Federal Manager of the Mietervereinigung in Vienna said that: “Lease terms are mainly a commitment for the Austrian landlords, but the tenants could decide to leave before if they want to.”

“Leases in the Netherlands are on average for about eight years,” explained Ronald Paping Director of the Woonbond. “The leases are very stable and rent increases are regulated by an index. Currently the index is inflation rate + 1%; the number used to be higher but thanks to successful lobbying of the Dutch tenant association it is now 1%”.

In Germany there has been some newly introduced regulations, meaning that sitting tenants can have an increase of max 20% in three years – 15% in metropolitan areas.

Lukas Siebenkotten, Director of DMB, said that: “For new leases there is a maximum 10% increase over the neighbourhood average. This is however difficult to control, because the tenants do not know the average and they have to individually challenge the rent in court to get a lower level. Because of the lack of housing many tenants feel that they have won the lottery when they get offered a contract, so they do not fight about the rents”.

Text Stefan Runfeldt and Davide Lanzillotti, IUT

“We have collected over 120,000 signatures in Switzerland, enough to bring the proposal to the Swiss Parliament. Our main message is simply; More affordable rental housing!”

The rent is too high:

We need a 21st century rent control

Extract from IUT Congress Statement,

Glasgow, October 15, 2016

Signed by 29 heads of delegation

Regulation of rents has different names in different parts of the world: rent control, rent regulation, rent stabilisation, rent certainty, etc. But in reality, they all mean basically the same: the real goal of rent regulation is to protect the moral rights of occupancy. Long-term tenants who contributed to their homes being a desirable place to live have a legitimate interest in staying there.

Rent regulation is a response to the power imbalance between landlords and tenants, which creates an opportunity for landlords to exploit tenants that certainly exists in cities with a tight market.

For too long politicians and commentators have been dogmatic in their rejection of any form of rent control. But it is time to look at the issue again. There is more than one method of regulating rents:

In Germany, a rent-cap is imposed on new leases, and on-going leases are also controlled. In Sweden, all rents are negotiated – between the tenants' union and private and public landlords. In New York, rents for about 1 million rent stabilised tenants are annually set by the Rent Guidelines Board. In Paris, rent control regulations on all new or renewed leases came into effect in 2015. In the Netherlands, a rent increase is never allowed to exceed the legally established maximum rate, determined every year by the government.

In some countries, even when rent levels for sitting tenants are controlled, rents for new contracts are not regulated, hence they are being set much higher by landlords. To keep housing affordable and have a more equal treatment between new and sitting tenants it is necessary also to have rent regulation for new contracts.

Some argue that the answer to high housing costs is simply increasing supply. This might work if the world's housing markets functioned normally. But the economic concept of supply and demand, the backbone of the market economy, never seems to prevail in practice – when it comes to housing.

Millions of tenants are seeing increasing amounts of their wages taken up by rent. This affordability disaster is hitting some of the poorest people in society.



Helene Toxværd, President of the Danish Tenant Association, LLO, signs the IUT Statement. Magnus Hammar, IUT, supervises!

Due to high rents, businesses move out, the service and leisure economies suffer, whilst hitting the poorest hardest, undermining the diversity of big cities and exploiting the most vulnerable. Rents have to be affordable – and controlling them should be a major political priority.

As the growing cost of rent continues to be ignored by those in power, we need a policy that tackles affordability head-on.

The International Union of Tenants and its members are calling for controlled rents in the private rental sector, anywhere in cities where escalating rents are pricing people out of housing where they live and work.

PHOTO: KJELD HAMMER, LLO

Five young organisations

Fighting gentrification, speculation and unaffordable rents

IUT consists primarily of quite well established national and regional tenant organisations, which have been around for sometimes 25 years, 50 years, or even 100 years, or more. These organisation, with often many members, are influential and have a say in the political housing debate. But sometimes these organisations are seen as maybe too big and too much part of the establishment

The traditional tenant organisations might not have engaged themselves enough in issues like gentrification, and what Airbnb and other agencies do to neighbourhoods.

In some countries, like in Ireland, England, Scotland and Spain there have not existed any true tenant organisations for many years, particularly none that represents tenants in the private rental sector.

These five rather young organisations have all originated from groups of people who got fed up with how housing policies have been run in their respective countries, or cities. They all have gentrification, speculation and insecure and unaffordable private rental conditions as common 'enemies'. They are very active on the social media, they often attract the media, and they run effective campaigns.



Generation Rent, in England is the oldest of these five, founded in 2011. According to their website, Rent Generation campaigns to change the way renting works across England: "There are now over 9 million renters in England, and too many are getting a bad deal on something that should be their basic right – a decent, secure, professionally managed and affordable place to live."

Generation Rent is currently campaigning for the introduction of a national landlord register in the private rented sector. The campaign includes a briefing and a possibility to sign a petition and examples of letters that can be sent to political parties, to MPs and to the government.

Other current campaigns are: "Make Private

Renting Decent – Electrical Safety Campaign", "Ask the Government to ban rip-off letting agent fees", "Ban revenge evictions", "The rent's too high: 21st century rent control", and "Oppose the expansion of Right to Buy in England".

Generation Rent also does crowdfunding.
www.generationrent.org

Living Rent is Scotland's tenants' union, for tenants in the private rental sector. Living Rent was founded in 2014, but existed already before as Edinburgh Private Tenants Action. Living Rent is now a national organisation and meets with members regularly in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen.

Living Rent has been lobbying the Scottish government for a new set of laws that would improve the tenant's situation. After 18 months of



In March 2016, after 18 months of campaigning by Living Rent, a Bill was passed by the Scottish Parliament that will improve the deal for private rented sector tenants in Scotland.

tireless campaigning Living Rent won! In March 2016 a Bill was passed by the Scottish Parliament that will improve the deal for private rented sector tenants by:

- Removing the 'no-fault ground' for repossession, meaning tenants cannot be evicted from the properties they rent at will.
- Increasing flexibility by making tenancies roll on automatically, meaning there is no pre-set minimum or maximum period that a tenant has to stay in a property for.
- Enabling local authorities to apply for the powers to implement 'rent pressure zones' in areas where rents are rising particularly rapidly.

Living Rent also calls for the introduction of rent controls. The organisation is about to launch its first membership drive, turning it into a nationwide tenants' union.

www.livingrent.org

Dublin Tenant Association, DTA, emerged from the debris of the credit bubble



and the following financial crisis in 2008. DTA is a peer-advocacy and tenant support group set up in early 2015 by a group of tenants concerned by the deepening housing crisis in the country.

The laws in Ireland give private tenants little security of tenure and weak protection against rent increases. This weak regulation has led to severe problems for tenants, especially regarding rent levels. In Dublin rents have increased by 26% 2011–2015.

At the same time as the homeownership is out of reach for larger parts of the population, the share of social housing homes has gone down from some 16% in 1971, to only 7% today. So now both groups seek housing in the private rental sector which has grown from just 11% in 2006, to 23% in 2014.

The group of people who set up the organisation first came together to inform themselves of their rights as tenants. Throughout this learning experience they are now able to give advice to other tenants.

<https://dublintenants.wordpress.com>

The Crown Heights Tenant Union, CHTU, is a union of tenant associations in Crown Heights neighbourhood in Brooklyn, New York. The union began meeting in late 2013 in response to rampant gentrification,



In some countries, like in Ireland, England, Scotland and Spain there have not existed any true tenant organisations for many years, particularly none that represents tenants in the private rental sector.

displacement, and illegal rental overcharges. Over 40 buildings/unions in Crown Heights have now come together to demand new, stronger protections that guarantee tenants' rights.

The tenant's demands a call for a stronger tenant voice in decisions that impact rental housing and include a five year rent freeze and restrictions on tenant buyouts.

The Crown Heights Tenant Union has identified a cycle in which low paying tenants are being pushed out, and newer tenants are charged rent far higher than the legally regulated limit. In response to this cycle, CHTU have adopted a unique "Unite and Fight" strategy where long-term tenants and new residents of the neighbourhood come together with the understanding that the landlords are the true target.

In October 2016, CHTU acted together with Swedish Union of Tenants in a naming and shaming campaign targeting the Swedish real estate company Akelius, whose model rests on displacing tenants, renovation followed by much higher rents. See FB www.facebook.com/stopakelius and common statement via www.iut.nu/IUT/Statement.pdf

www.crownheightstenantunion.org

Alla Ska Kunna Bo Kvar – Everyone should be able to stay – is a Swedish association which constituted itself in March 2016. The association's main aim is to fight high rent increases



in flats that have been renovated. And in the longer run, to fight gentrification of Swedish neighbourhoods.

Sweden right now experiences major housing renovations all over the country, of the rental housing stock that was built mainly in the 1960s and 1970s. Often much needed, but – when the renovations are done many tenants cannot afford to move back in. Renovations often include changes of indoor drains, from kitchens and bathrooms. Unfortunately, many landlords seize the opportunity to throw out well-functioning kitchen cabinets, floors, etc., and exchange them for more expensive products, and install upmarket bathrooms – and then ask for a much higher rent. Rent increases of 20%, 30% up to 50% are common.

In May 2016 the book *The Right to Stay* was published, written by researchers and also people from Alla Ska Kunna Bo Kvar. This guide provides practical ideas on how tenants can fight luxury renovations, and unaffordable rent increases.

<http://allaskakunnabokvar.se>

Text Magnus Hammar, IUT

Sweden;

Reasonable rents benefit the society

The Swedish Union of Tenants negotiates the rents for almost all tenants in Sweden, meaning almost three million people, or 1/3 of the population. With 540 000 members the organisation possesses power in both the political arena and power when it comes to the annual rent negotiations with public and private landlords.

The representatives of the Swedish Property Federation often claim that rental housing will not survive in Sweden with the present rental law on annual rent negotiations with the Swedish Tenants Union.

But, owning rental housing has perhaps never been more profitable than in recent years. Figures from the Sweden Property Index show that total yield for residential properties has been 7.6%, on average, in the last twelve years. The Swedish Housing Fund likewise reports that residential properties have had positive yields in 23 years out of 25 years, with an annual yield of over 13%. Levels that most investors dream about!

“Housing, homes, is not a commodity

like a car, a TV or a sweater, where you can choose models according to your income – or choose to be without, if you cannot afford them at all. But we simply cannot opt out from housing,” explains Erik Elmgren, chief negotiator at the Swedish Union of Tenants in Stockholm.

“Housing has a great social and economic impact, on the personal level, but also on the society as a whole. The labour market, along with industry and commerce, needs flexible and affordable rental housing,” says Erik.

Rent increases for 2016 were 0.65%, on an average across Sweden, for the private and public sector together.

“We expect similar increases also for 2017,” says Erik Elmgren.

Text Magnus Hammar IUT / Swedish Union of Tenants



François Zutter, Avocat ASLOCA.

Switzerland

125 000 Swiss citizens sign for more affordable housing!

Six months before the deadline, on October 18th, the Swiss tenant's association brought 125 000 signatures to the federal government in Bern, asking for more affordable housing.

“We ask that all public entities should build more affordable housing instead of building luxury dwellings or office buildings,” says François Zutter of the local Swiss tenant association in Geneva. “If the Swiss government and the Parliament do not accept this demand, then the Swiss people will vote on it in a referendum.”

Although Switzerland is the country in Europe - in the world, perhaps - with the highest proportion of tenants (69%), there is a big shortage of available homes: Only 1,3% of housing, including individual houses, are available and much less in big cities like Zürich, Basel and Geneva, where less than 0,5% is available.

Text François Zutter, for SMV-ASLOCA-ASI

Portugal

Government decision causes evictions

The effects of the right-wing and neo-liberal government's



decision and changes of the rental act four years ago, is now clearly visible. The changes have resulted in many families having to leave their homes, due to higher rents.

Our organisation, The Associação dos Inquilinos Lisbonenses, AIL, presented in 2015 to the current government and Parliament proposals that would restore tenant's rights, ensure more affordable rental housing and correct the negative effects of the 2012-legislation.

Furthermore, Airbnb and rehabilitation are reducing the supply of rental housing, particularly in Lisbon and other major cities.

Source: The Associação dos Inquilinos Lisbonenses, AIL



Erik Elmgren, chief negotiator Swedish Union of Tenants.

FRANCE

Budget cuts for social housing

 In France, as a consequence of the budget that is still being discussed in mid-November, the State is again going to cut the subsidies for social housing construction. These subsidies have been decreased for many years now, even though President François Hollande once promised to double them! In parallel, in the 2017 budget that has still to be voted, the tax cuts for private owners are on an historical high levels.

Source: Confédération Nationale du Logement, CNL

THE NETHERLANDS

Elections coming up

 In March 2017 there will be national elections in the Netherlands. The Dutch tenant association, Woonbond, is campaigning on one issue in particular: The tax that has been imposed on social housing. In order to abolish this tax, Woonbond is lobbying every political party to create a favourable program. Housing is looking to be one of the major issues in the elections, and a growing number of parties are claiming to adjust or abolish the social housing tax.

Source: The Woonbond

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO, DRC

Majority of residents in Kinshasa are tenants

The situation for tenants in the Democratic Republic of Congo, DRC, does not leave anyone who clings to the protection of human rights indifferent.

Tenants represent the majority of dwellers in capital Kinshasa and in other cities and major urban centres in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In spite of this majority, tenants' rights are not respected as required by law and some tenants are victims of evictions.

There exist some small urban housing projects, but nothing in the rural parts of DRC.

Our NGO ACALOC is planning a project for training and awareness of provincial and local committee tenants in 2017 and we are seeking a partner to do this together with. Please contact us at e-mail: acaloc2000rdcongo@gmail.com

Source: Association Congolaise d'Assistance aux Locataires, ACALOC



Jennifer Atkinson's artwork Not Available.

AUSTRALIA

International Tenants Day celebrated in Canberra

Tenants' Union ACT, Australia, celebrates the International tenants Day each year with a series of free events. This year's theme was "...and it Feels Like Home" and included a range of activities exploring tenancy issues and the theme. Events included art workshops, a portrait project, a story share, a forum on people with disabilities, a film screening and free workshops on home security and gardening. Events culminate in an art competition and exhibition now in its 12th year.

This year, first prize went to Jennifer Atkinson's for her artwork Not Available – "Transgender and Gender Diverse, TGD, people have great difficulties in finding rental property to live in due to high rates of being discriminated against and denied housing. This artwork attempts to bring attention to this issue in the hope that by raising awareness, discrimination against TGD people can be countered."

Jennifer is renting privately in an inner suburb of Canberra.

Source: Deb Pippen, TUACTION

GERMANY

Capping limit for rent increases in new leases

The rent cap, in German; Mietbremse, has been in place for 1,5 years. The cap means that tenants can complain to their landlords if their rent is more than 10% above the local average rent. The caps apply only to tight housing markets in Germany. It is a novelty and the first law regulating re-let rents in new contracts.

Owners and landlords, however, criticize the rent cap and try to ignore the caps. So the landlord can demand further an excessive rent from the previous tenancy.

The DMB and the tenants criticize the many exceptions, e.g. the new law does not apply to new construction and modernization.

Therefore, the rent cap does not function as hoped. This has become obvious in cities such as Berlin, Hamburg, Munich and Frankfurt where the new re-letting rents are well above the local comparative rents. The DMB advocates the rent cap and postulate to close the gaps in the law.

Source: Deutscher Mieterbund e.V

SENDER: International Union of Tenants
Box 7514, SE-103 92 Stockholm
SWEDEN

ENGLAND

Loss of Cora Carter, MBE, a long time tenant activist

Cora Carter passed away on November 2. Cora was very well liked in the housing sector in England and within the IUT circles. Colleagues paid tribute to her “indomitable” and “inspiring” role in defending tenants’ rights for more than 32 years.



Cora Carter, MBE.

Cora was chair of Communities Who Can, and was a founding member and chair for Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing Board. She was previously secretary of the Tenants’ and Residents’ Organisation of England, TAROE. Cora regularly greeted international delegations to Huddersfield, north of Manchester, where she lived.

Sources: Inside Housing and Communities Who Can

CZECH REPUBLIC

Czech Union of Tenants 25 years



The Czech Union of Tenants, Sdružení nájemníků ČR (SON), celebrated its 25 anniversary in Prague on

November 16. But, the first Czechoslovak organisation for tenants was set up already in 1891, and was also one of the ten founders of IUT, in 1916.

SON has been a role model for other countries in Central and Eastern Europe, for how governments and NGOs should work together for the benefit of tenants.

The Czech Republic is today the only country in the CEE-region with an adequate stock of rental housing, of some 18%.

CANADA, TORONTO

Rent control works for sitting tenants, but not for first-time tenants



Toronto has historically had a higher degree of vacancy and therefore a very fluid and renter friendly environment, but this started to erode in 2001 as housing prices began to

SCOTLAND

Scrutiny Approved Accreditation is a framework developed by TIS and Scotland’s Housing Network

It harnesses expertise to measure performance and highlight the initiatives social rented landlords are taking to lead the way and sustain tenant scrutiny throughout Scotland. It recognises a level of customer participation, engagement, and influence by a standard of



gold, silver, or bronze.

The Accreditation is aimed at housing organisations within the Scottish social rented sector.

For more information: <http://tis.org.uk/scrutiny-accreditation>

Source: Tenant Information Service, TIS

increase in tandem with US housing prices. This led to a total abandonment of rental stock construction in lieu of building condos. In 2009, things went into even more overdrive and with increasing demographics this has created a major housing crisis in the City. Rent control has prevented the crisis from affecting sitting tenants, but has meant chaos for tenants who move or those entering the rental market for the first time.

Rent control in Ontario only applies to units that were first built or occupied before November 1, 1991.

Source: Federation of Metro Tenants’ Associations. FMTO Toronto

ENGLAND

Pay to stay’ social housing plan dropped!

Plans to force higher-earning social housing tenants to pay more in rent have been scrapped by the government. It would have applied to social housing residents in England earning £31,000 or £40,000 in London.



Housing minister Gavin Barwell scraps ‘pay-to-stay’, but ends life tenancies.

But on the other hand, housing minister Gavin Barwell also confirmed the government would be ending the right of social housing tenants to stay in their homes for life, by introducing compulsory fixed-term tenancies.

This will mean tenancies are periodically reviewed “to ensure tenants still need a socially rented home”, he said, with councils told to prioritise lower-income households.

Source: BBC

CZECH REPUBLIC

Anna Pachtová 1951–2016

JUDr. Anna Pachtová, a long-time employee of the Czech Union of Tenants and IUT contact person for 23 years passed away in September. Anna was IUTs’ highly appreciated liai-



son person in Prague, and organised many meetings and conferences in Prague with IUT members from Central and Eastern Europe. She is missed by many!

NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand tops world house price increase



New Zealand has the highest house prices in the developed world, according to a global ranking by estate agents Knight Frank.

There is a housing crisis in New Zealand, with families sleeping rough, in cars, garages and camping grounds. State owned public houses have been sold off to private landlords. So, affordable rental housing is vanishing in New Zealand, while the government is pumping \$300 million (~200 million euro) into providing emergency housing for needy families, like short term motel units and hostels. The present government housing policies have failed to deliver housing for New Zealanders.

Kevin Reilly, Manawatu Tenants Union, New Zealand