



France 2007

National Action Plan against Substandard Housing

Synthesis Report

Iskra Dandolova
Institute of Sociology



On behalf of
European Commission
DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities



Content

Executive Summary	3
1. European context of the Peer Review on Substandard Housing	4
2. The issue: Struggle against substandard housing	10
3. National Action Plan against Substandard Housing in France	12
4. Peer country comments.....	19
5. Discussion of the transferability. Conclusions and lessons learnt	28
6. References	34

Executive Summary

Access to adequate housing in Europe for almost all European Member States is starting to be a key priority, requiring more attention and efforts. It is acknowledged that housing exclusion has until now been underestimated as a factor of social exclusion, lagging behind the social requirements of European society for a variety of measures against the different forms of social inequality. Now adequate housing is evaluated as a particularly vital factor for creative social behaviour of individuals and their integration in the everyday life and in labour market. The fight against substandard housing involves basic preconditions of prosperity and well being of individuals and society as a whole.

At this stage the policy against substandard housing in France is evaluated as the most developed in Europe. It implies that a decent housing is seen as a basic human right. In fact, a statutory right to be housed in France was introduced on 5 March 2007. Legally, the health, safety and dignity of the occupants are the main criteria on which the fitness of housing is judged. Special French laws on housing were substantially updated since 2000. At the same time, an action plan for the gradual elimination of unfit housing was launched. This went nationwide in 2003, and formed part of France's National Action Plan for Social Inclusion. The housing action plan has been recognised as a priority and has also been integrated into several other inter-ministerial work programmes. The methods for achieving the objectives were defined by the law of 2004, while the law of 2006 made unfit housing a compulsory topic within relevant programming documents. The main work methods and powers include: **Preliminary mapping** of possibly unfit housing, providing a *département*-level cartography of areas at risk; **Administrative policing** - the authorities can oblige owners to carry out essential work. Targeted expropriations are possible. The occupants' right to temporary or permanent rehousing is guaranteed. **Public financing** for accelerated remediation of unfit, unhealthy or dangerous accommodation increased subsidies to both owner-occupiers and landlords, for necessary repairs. **Grouping of housing refurbishment** operations with other structural work, such as urban renewal is organised. **Coordination of the services concerned**, by the *préfet* (the State's representative in a *département* or region), and the establishment of local work programmes and local work tools are put on the way. **Cooperation between the State and the municipalities** or their groupings in areas with substandard housing is particularly widespread and encouraged. **Partnerships** with other actors in housing, health, social inclusion, justice and the police – notably in order to combat exploitative landlords or landladies (the “sleep merchants”) is stimulated.

The peer country participants presented the situation in their respective nations. Despite the great differences in the fight against substandard housing the seminar discussions in Paris proved that the simultaneous and interconnected assessment of the housing environment and its inhabitants, viewed as a whole, and especially the specific features of housing conditions of risk groups - children, women, the poor, the elderly, etc. - is particularly important. Participants also shared experience and lessons learnt. Differences in policy, governance, resource constraints, traditions and cultural particularities, economic development and comprehensive housing strategies highlight the need for the transfer of effective approaches and policies from one country to another in the fight against substandard housing.

Among the key aspects that might be transferable to other countries and lessons learnt above all the **political willingness** to combat housing exclusion and precisely substandard housing as well the clear concern to improve housing conditions are underlined. However, national conditions,

systems and starting points vary considerably. France's emphasis on the preliminary mapping of possible substandard housing is generally highly appreciated. The Danish system of administrative registers containing detailed information on all dwellings that is constantly updated attracted attention (changes or renovations have to be notified by the owner). It is underlined that a full legal toolkit in every country is needed to tackle substandard housing. A set of basic housing standards is considered as useful to be established everywhere. However, these vary from one country to another in line with differences in income levels and culture. It is recognised by all participants that public sector housing has an important role to play in improving housing quality. While home ownership may be desirable in itself, it does not necessarily guarantee that owner-occupiers can afford to maintain the housing stock in good condition. This is particularly the case in the less prosperous EU countries.

The idea of establishing a European network and a partnership to combat substandard housing issue is one of the important subjects discussed during the seminar.

Housing issues should be mainstreamed into social inclusion policy, at national and European levels. Housing is relevant to all social inclusion topics. There is a need for tools to evaluate the economic, social and health effects of public policy interventions on housing. This is particularly the case for public subsidies paid to the private sector or private individuals. For example, subsidising the building work needed to enable elderly people to stay on for longer in their own homes can be expensive, but it produces savings elsewhere. Evaluation tools could usefully be developed at the European level.

A good social mix in housing is vital for all Member States. Housing ghettos, whether on the basis of income, class or ethnicity, are to be avoided. One policy tool for promoting a good mix is to ensure a wide geographical distribution of social housing. For environmental reasons, sustainable housing is now part of EU policy. It should be promoted at national and local levels, but this involves human factors as well as technical ones. In many EU Member States urban housing policy has shifted from demolition and new building to housing remediation (where possible). This is for social reasons as well as for economic ones. Europe's urban communities have developed over hundreds, even thousands of years and preserving local identities and solidarities can lower crime rates, reduce isolation and promote social inclusion.

1. European context of the Peer Review on Substandard Housing

The Peer Review on Substandard Housing is a result of the initiatives at EU level and in particular of the European Commission following the decisions of the Lisbon Strategy (2000) and the established policy to implement it. This Strategy is in action and since a development plan aimed at improving European society through the formulation of various policy initiatives is set up. The main areas of concern are including "the modernisation of social protection", "the promoting of social inclusion" and "enhancing sustainable development and social coherence" – all identified as long-term goals. The Commission estimates that the costs of the under-use of available human resources and wider costs of wastage in the European economy, including poverty and social exclusion, are huge. According to the Commission "These are cancers at the heart of European society". As a result the key challenge of the European model of development is orientated to move from an agenda of tackling social exclusion to one which secures social inclusion and mainstreams it at the heart of all policy making. This means investing in people and environment, making social protection more sustainable and "active" to deal with vulnerability

of the population and ensuring equal opportunities as well as improvement of living conditions: in short, enriching the European concept of services of general interest.

In December 2001, the European Parliament and the Council agreed on a Community Action Programme to Combat Social Exclusion (SEP) to encourage cooperation between Member States to combat social exclusion, for the period between 2002 and 2006. Since 2007 the SEP has been replaced by PROGRESS, a programme which combines existing Community programmes and budget lines in the field of employment, social inclusion and protection, working conditions, gender equality and anti-discrimination. PROGRESS is intended to play a major role in supporting and advancing the implementation of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). Peer Reviews are one of the key tools of the OMC.

The new common objectives from 2006¹ for an integrated Open Method of Coordination is strengthening EU capacity to support Member States in their drive for greater social cohesion in Europe. This is starting to create more impact on the ground, making the EU attachment to social values more visible to European citizens. The Open Method of Coordination is helping to deepen mutual learning and to widen involvement of stakeholders at national and European levels. It has increased awareness of the multi-dimensional nature of exclusion and poverty and forged a shared approach to social protection reforms based on the principles of accessibility, adequacy, quality, modernisation and sustainability. The National Reports on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion illustrate how joint consideration of all the objectives improves policy effectiveness and the quality of public spending. The new working methods of the Open Method of Coordination are starting to bear fruit, though further efforts at EU and national levels are required to make full use of its potential.

The PROGRESS programme (2007-2013) encourages cooperation between Member States for fighting social exclusion. In this context housing exclusion is a significant element in the frames of the target. The improvement of housing and living conditions of citizens, especially of socially vulnerable and disadvantaged people, is a basic component of the social inclusion policy and the ambitious programme against housing exclusion.

In the framework of the Peer Review Programme different seminars were held, which have had a direct or indirect bearing on the topic of substandard housing. The topic of homelessness and unfit accommodation was discussed at three seminars, the first - on "The Rough Sleepers Unit", held in 2004 in London (May 5-6), the second - on "Preventing and Tackling homelessness", held in 2005 in Copenhagen, Denmark (April 26-27), and the third one - on potential homelessness, held in 2006 (September 5-7) in Oslo and entitled "National Strategy to Prevent and Tackle Homelessness".

The main lesson of these seminars was that the accommodation of homeless people with adequate shelter, with housing conditions adapted to their needs (as it is shown by the use of the "staircase of transition housing"), in most cases changes their lives for the better. In connection with the case of homeless persons, part of whom refuse to spend the night in night shelters, where they feel insecure and have had unpleasant experiences, the improvement of conditions in shelters proves to be of decisive importance. Successful shelters and homes are those adequately adapted to the characteristics of the homeless, especially when they wish to get off the street and to accept a shelter. The case of London in this respect is worth following. Even more successful is the impact of the housing environment on those groups of homeless people

¹ Common objectives: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_inclusion/objectives_en.htm;

who live in inadequate housing conditions but have a relatively active social behaviour. In their case accommodating them with a permanent standard home has proven decisive for their integration, for their breaking away from a complicated life. Such were the results of the implemented strategy in Oslo. Security of habitation or a permanent dwelling is the strongest factor for preventing homelessness and social exclusion, problems that are inevitably compounded by unemployment, depression, and crises in personal relationships. The social conditions for achieving such sustainable results lie not only in the financial factor, which is certainly important, but above all in high-level political commitment and clear political responsibilities, in the links with other social strategies of the government, in the courage and creativity of governments in setting clear goals.

The Peer Review seminar on "Preventing and Tackling Homelessness", held in 2005 in Denmark, is particularly important and rich in findings and in good practices. It is closely related to the subject of substandard housing. The Danish government has focused since 2001 its social efforts on the most marginalised people. The aim was to improve the quality of life of these target groups on their own terms rather than to attempt to integrate them forcibly into the community. The programme is to insure that user involvement serves as the foundation of decision-making. Danish law on social services defines homeless people as "persons with special social problems who are without – or unable to live in their own apartments, and who are in need of a place to stay, and of offers of activating support, care and subsequent assistance". The major priority areas are "housing assistance": to move residents at reception centres to permanent dwellings, including special housing for alienated people.

Another Peer Review seminar on the "Municipal Programme of Shanty Towns Eradication in Avilés" was conducted in 2006 in Spain, Asturias. This topic is relatively close to the substandard housing issue. Some of the lessons produced by analysing the Spanish case can be adapted and applied in fighting substandard housing. Some of the conclusions are: the need for strong political and social leadership, long-term commitment and continuous action programme, careful selection and preparation of case-studies before acting, social housing promotion which goes hand in hand with the eradication of the shanty towns, alignment and synergy with EU policies on inclusion etc. The final conclusion is that the housing factor is a basis for the inclusion of the Roma and the urban poor (the Peer Review in Spain was predominantly focused on Roma communities). These conclusions should be taken into account in fighting substandard housing and should be applied in other countries.

The European Union's active policy on social protection and social inclusion is clearly expressed in the Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2007² by the European Council and the European Commission. One of the main issues in the report is improving access to housing and fighting homelessness based on the political understanding that "adequate housing is a particularly vital factor for social and labour market integration."³ According to the Joint Report "[...] almost all Member States consider housing a key priority requiring more efforts. A number of them (BE, CZ, DK, FI, FR, HU, IE, PL, SE, UK) set out to address all dimensions: improving access to affordable housing, helping the most disadvantaged and their families to obtain housing suited to their specific needs, tackling the poor quality housing of people on low incomes, and tackling homelessness. Others (AT, CY, DE, EE, EL, ES, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, SK, SI, PT) present actions focused on specific groups or problems, such as improving access to housing for

² http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/spsi/docs/social_inclusion/2006/joint_report_en.pdf.

³ Quotations in the following paragraphs are from the Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2007, p. 56-57.

vulnerable groups, re-housing for people living in slums or shanties, housing refurbishment and the prevention of evictions.

Most Member States set out to address the shortage of affordable adequate housing, in particular in high-cost urban areas (BE, CZ, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, LU, LV, PL, PT, SE, SK, SI, UK). Measures targeted at low-income groups include: new social housing units, rent subsidies, tax relief, favourable housing loans, earmarking of land or requirements that local authorities build new social housing, and state funds for housing development. The need to increase the supply of adequate and reasonably priced independent homes for disabled people, for people with health problems or social integration difficulties or with special needs is addressed in some reports (BG, DK, FI, HU, MT, SE, SK). This will help contain pressure on supported and service accommodation organised by social services. The transformation or the demolition of housing falling below the minimum standards of decency are also priorities highlighted by some Member States (BE, DK, FR, HU, MT, SL, PL, PT and UK).

With a view to halting the influx of disadvantaged people into the most deprived estates (and the corresponding exit of the most resourceful) and to curbing trends towards urban segregation, a few Member States (DK, FI, FR) plan measures such as: obligations on municipalities with a shortage to construct new social housing, tenants selection, the sale of social housing without efforts to re-let them first, removal support for disadvantaged residents in troublesome areas, more say for local authorities in allotting land to cater for social needs, specific integration initiatives in disadvantaged housing areas (e.g. special crime prevention activities, homework help, voluntary work and business start-ups).

Homelessness is an extreme example of social exclusion, usually indicative of shortcomings in a range of policy areas (for example health, welfare, housing, employment and justice). According to the Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2007 rather than focusing on homelessness only, Member States are increasingly adopting a structural approach to tackling housing exclusion. The growing issue of families with children without permanent homes is receiving more attention (e.g. SE). Some Member States set out to ensure that people leaving institutions find homes (CZ, ES, FI, NL). In addition to improving temporary housing, some Member States (BE, DK, IE, HU, NL, SE, FI, FR) are committed to ensuring alternative forms of housing for homeless people with multiple problems as well as opening up the housing market to those excluded from it. Some Member States (AT, FR, HU, SE, LV, NL, IT) are working on preventing eviction, often in relation to families with children or older people, and linking this to plans to address debt problems.

Some countries have successfully implemented comprehensive strategies in recent years."[...] Some programmes contain a "prevent eviction" aim in view of durably reducing and preventing homelessness with a special focus on lone parents"[...]. The initiative "aims at ensuring proper cooperation between all stakeholders (landlords/landladies, communities, social services providers and courts) that can help prevent the multiple factors that lead to the risk of eviction. The specific objectives are, for instance, to prevent forced eviction, and provide integrated access to welfare structures (enhancing access to social services), as well as affordable housing for the most vulnerable. In the Vienna region, where they have long been implemented, the projects have produced positive and sustained outcomes."

Member States are proceeding in various ways against the degrading of housing (those who have taken this as a political objective), but it is recommendable to act in all countries and to exchange and adopt good experiences and practices in this matter. According to the constitutions of most European countries and the Human Rights Declaration (1948) *decent housing is one of the basic human entitlements*⁴. But this political agreement is interpreted differently. Sources⁵ comment that in many countries regulations concerning substandard housing are not well developed and need special policy and attention. France is recognised as a country which sets a good policy and actions in the fight to improve the living conditions of the population and, especially with regard to vulnerable people, implements tools against urban and housing segregation. This fight is one of the key issues in the European policy against housing and social exclusion. One of the main objectives of this Peer Review initiative on substandard housing is to enlarge knowledge about the policy and results of actions to combat unfit housing in the Member States, to establish a policy of prevention and, through these experiences and measures, to outline new European perspectives for the social inclusion movement.

Some quantitative pattern about the housing deprivation in Europe could be given by the privately owned homes statistics. This private part accounts for a major share of substandard housing. Privately owned houses represent a significant proportion of the housing in most European countries. Some of them like Hungary, Portugal, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, Italy, Spain and Ireland have more than 80-90% of their housing stock private and the largest portion is occupied by owners. This situation of homeowner occupation is similar in the majority of Central and Eastern European countries, but involves severe problems of dilapidation and permanent needs of maintenance. In France 57% of the population are homeowners and a considerable part of them, especially in rural areas, are poor or unable to maintain their homes, most of which are identified as substandard. The same situation is in Slovenia, Bulgaria, Portugal, Hungary, Spain, Poland etc.

⁴ *Déclaration universelle des droits de l'homme*, Articles: 13, 17, 25; *Charte Européenne pour le Droit a Habiter et la Lutte Contre l'Exclusion*, Article 1: " Nous défendons le droit de tous au logement. C'est un droit fondamental de l'homme. Ce n'est pas seulement le droit à un toit. C'est un droit à la dignité et à la citoyenneté."

⁵ Edgar W. and Meert H, 2006, *Fourth Review of Statistics on Homelessness in Europe*, FEANTSA, Brussels. FEANTSA, 2004, *Prevention and Homelessness in Europe*, FEANTSA, Brussels; Tossi A., 2004, *Unfit Housing*, FEANTSA, Brussels; Busch-Geertsema, Volker (2001) *Access to Housing for Disadvantaged and Vulnerable Groups in Germany*, National Report 2000/2001 for the European Observatory on Homelessness, Bremen/Brussels (FEANTSA).

Table 1 Housing owner occupation⁶ levels in selected European countries

Country	Owner occupation in %	Year	Country	Owner occupation in %	Year
Albania	99**	2003	Belgium	74/70***	1998/ 2001
Serbia	97,2**	2001	Malta	74***	2007
Bulgaria	97**	2005	Estonia	72*	2001
Hungary	92,4**	1998	Luxemburg	70***	2001
Latvia	87***	2007	Italy	66	1998
Slovenia	82*	2002	Finland	61	1997
Spain	81		Sweden	60	
Ireland	80		France	57***	2006
Greece	78		Netherlands	53	2001
Poland	76		Denmark	51	2001
Norway	76		Czech Republic	47	2001
Portugal	75*	2001	Germany	41	1998

Source: *Housing in South Eastern Europe* (2004), Council of Europe, Development Bank, The World Bank, Paris.

*Sources vary

** Figures correspond to private ownership.

*** Figures from the Comment Papers by the participating Peer Countries, Peer Review seminar 27-28. 09. 2007, Paris.

According to the 'Material deprivation in the EU' Report⁷, the most recent periodic census (2001) identifies differences across the EU-25 as regards the ownership of different types of dwellings: in Latvia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania and Austria there is a high proportion of ownership for one-dwelling houses, while there is a tendency for lower levels of ownership in other forms of dwellings (mainly apartments and flats). Nevertheless, ownership of other types of dwellings is above 75% in the Netherlands, France, Germany and Ireland. It is difficult to pinpoint the reasons for such differences, as the distribution of households may be related to the degree of urbanisation, the quality of accommodation and the supply of new/renovated housing⁸. As may be expected, in 2004 a large proportion (75%) of the population in the EU-25 lived in households which owned their accommodation, while the corresponding figure for persons at risk of poverty is 63%. In some of the southern Member States (Greece, Spain, Cyprus and Portugal) and certain eastern Member States (Estonia, Latvia and Hungary), income levels appeared to play a much stronger role in determining whether or not a household lived in its own accommodation (no data is available for the Czech Republic or Slovakia). The proportion of people facing at least one problem in terms of housing conditions (dampness, darkness, a lack of indoor facilities) shows some variation across countries in 2003. Economic strain appeared to be particularly prevalent among a higher proportion of households in many southern Member States; it can be illustrative to compare this indicator with the standard monetary risk-of-poverty indicator.

The Material Deprivation Report in Europe (2005) indicates that at EU level the most frequently used common indicators in the field of poverty and social exclusion are based only on the relative monetary approach. The information should be complemented by summarising the impact from

⁶ Unfortunately the figures about 'owner occupation' differ in the understanding of the countries: for some of them 'owner occupation' correspond to 'ownership' (the proportion of the private stock), for others – to the occupation (owner occupation).

⁷ *Statistics in Focus: Population and Social Conditions*, N°21/2005: Living conditions and welfare (Eurostat), © European Communities, 2005, Author: Anne-Catherine Guio.

⁸ Eurostat: "Living conditions and well being", 2001.

the 'absolute' material deprivation measures, based on different dimensions. The overlap between relative monetary poverty and material deprivation as well as the risk factors of being deprived are valuable and important in the establishment of a convenient policy. The figures highlight the need to complement the information provided by indicators of relative monetary poverty in order to give a more complete picture of the living conditions of people in different national contexts. Material deprivation is defined as the enforced lack of a combination of items depicting material living conditions, possession of durables and capacity to afford basic requirements.

Table 2 Proportion of people deprived for different items of housing deprivation and poverty risk

Percentage of individuals deprived	BE	DK	FR	LU	LV	MT	RO
Warm home	6	10	3	1	25	21	51
Rot in windows, doors, floors	-	-	-	-	32	21	30
Damp and leaks	-	-	-	-	29	31	29
Lack of indoor flushing toilet	-	-	-	-	20	1	39
Leaky roof, rot in windows, damp walls	14	8	20	19	-	-	-
Too dark	11	4	9	8	-	-	-
Bath and shower	2	1	1	0	-	-	-
At risk of poverty rate	15	12	15	10	16	15	18

Source: *Material deprivation in the EU*, Statistics in focus: Population and social conditions: 21/2005, p. 10. BE, DK, LU: EU-SILC 2003; FR: ECHP 2001; LV, MT, RO: European Quality of Life Survey 2003.

Table 3 Share of people affected by housing deprivation (by number of items)

Dimensions	BE	DK	FR	LU
Deprived in 1 housing item	19	10	21	20
Deprived in 2 housing items	4	2	5	3
Deprived in 3 housing items	0	0	0	0
Deprived in all housing items	0	0	0	0
Not deprived	77	88	74	76

Source: *Material deprivation in the EU*, Statistics in focus: Population and social conditions: 21/2005, p. 4. BE, DK, LU: EU-SILC 2003; FR: ECHP 2001.

2. The issue: Struggle against substandard housing

The Peer Reviews should contribute to the three main aims of the Social Inclusion process: mutual learning, improving the effectiveness of policies and facilitating the transfer of key policy components in combating social exclusion. In the context of social exclusion substandard housing is an expression of housing exclusion.

The background of the struggle against unfit housing in France dates back to 13 April 1850 when the first law on '*logement insalubre*' was adopted. The revolution of 1848 had been sparked by the issues of worker poverty, urban poverty and slum housing. In 1902 the second law on unfit housing was adopted and created the first legislative tool for use against the then all-powerful property owners. In 1970, after the great post-war clearances and demolitions, a policy reappraisal led to the launching of a massive rehabilitation programme. Legal decisions were

again adopted against unfit housing. Despite that long-term struggle today in France there is still a remaining core of unfit housing.

Political decision and commitment

The contemporary starting point for the fight against substandard housing dates back to the winter of 1997-98 when serious fires in Paris in highly deteriorated buildings lead to the deaths of occupiers. An absence of legal texts for intervention by public authorities was discovered and the "SRU" law of 2000 (regarding solidarity and urban renewal), substantially updating the texts relating to housing inadequacy and security, was adopted. The government took the decision to launch an action plan for the gradual elimination of 'unfit housing', inscribed as an element of the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, adopted at the European summit in Nice in December 2000. In 2004, after a period of experimentation, the action plan has been recognised as a priority by public authorities and has been integrated into several inter-ministerial work programmes to take place over several years such as: 1. The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion; 2. The National Environment and Health Action Plan; 3. The Social Cohesion Plan; 4. The Fight against social exclusion. This multifaceted political decision expressed by the operational national programmes and plans is based on specific legal, administrative and financial tools with consequences flowing onto the local level.

Definition

The precision⁹ of the notion 'unfit housing' is basic for the adequate orientation of the legal, administrative, financial tools and their implementation in practice. In the French context the notion 'unfit housing' (*logement indigne = unworthy housing*) is a political, and not a legal one, so this term does not appear in legal texts allowing public intervention. Rather, legislative documents use the words "inadequate" or "dangerous". The term "unfit housing" is moreover inaccurate, for it is not the housing that is unfit, but rather the housing conditions linked to the inadequate or dangerous (or precarious) character of the housing, that have consequences not only on the living conditions of its occupiers, but also on their dignity, that is, their self-respect. First of all, such dwellings may present risks for the security of its occupiers (falls, electrocution, fire), as well as for their health, such as carbon monoxide poisoning linked to the malfunctioning of heating, lead poisoning linked to the presence of lead in damaged paint, or allergies and respiratory problems linked to humidity or cold. However, in a less "physical" sense, inadequate housing¹⁰ in premises that are by nature uninhabitable (cellars, cabins, garages, precarious installations) or which have consequences of a psycho-social type, notably on the psycho-motor development of children, their schooling, as well as the sociability not only of children, but also of adults, mainly women and of course uncomfortable conditions specifically for elderly or disabled people.

The psycho-social manifestations in the housing are more difficult to detect, for they depend heavily on the social background of individuals, their origins and residential history, their cultural environment, average housing standards of their economic, social and cultural environment etc.

⁹ The interpretation of this chapter is close to the French National Action Plan against Substandard Housing provided by the documents from PNLHI.

¹⁰ Cf. research from May 2005 international colloquium on "inadequate housing and health" in the section "References".

Legal tools

Given the existence of legal tools that have been in force for decades, it can hardly be said that the political decision to protect and assist poor families that are vulnerable with respect to housing, has started in France in 2001. This legal policy has many aspects which permit combining particular legal cases that abound in practice. The legal documents used as important instruments in the fight against substandard housing are briefly listed as follows:

- 1970 - *La "Loi Vivien"*, amendments in 2006 – concerning expropriation of housing;
- 31 mai 1990 – *La "Loi Besson"* – right to housing, programmes for helping disadvantaged people (PDALPD), creation of Housing Funds for Solidarity (FSL);
- 29 juillet 1998 – *La "Loi de lutte contre les exclusions"*, concerning social housing (reinforcing the right to housing for the poor, provision of permanent housing for the homeless);
- 13 décembre 2000 - *La "Loi SRU"*, regarding solidarity and urban renewal, aiming at a radical modernisation of documents relative to houses at risk; establishment of relations between landlords/landladies and tenants in such housing; obligation for cities to offer 20% rented social housing;
- 18 janvier 2005 – *La "Loi de programmation pour la cohésion sociale"*, about construction of social housing for renting and of shelters for emergency accommodation;
- 15 décembre 2005 – *Prescription about modifications and adjustments of procedures* regarding dilapidated, risky buildings combined with Rules for Housing Construction;
- 13 Juillet 2006 – *La "Loi ENL"*, national concern about housing, reinforcing the role of the programmes for helping disadvantaged people (PDALPD); taking into account the substandard housing issue in the plans and local housing programmes; establishment of district observatories for substandard housing;
- 5 mars 2007: *La loi instituant un droit au logement opposable* – establishment of an opposable right to proper housing.

3. National Action Plan against Substandard Housing in France

The key components of the French National Action Plan against substandard housing can be described briefly. The plan is established with clear objectives: first, to eradicate substandard housing in the long term together with the improvement of the quality of urban and housing environment; second, to prevent the dilapidation of the build environment in order to avoid the presence of unacceptable housing degradation. Two particular groups of people are the target of this plan: private homeowners (as landlords/landladies and owner occupiers) and tenants-occupiers in private rental housing. The achievement of the objectives is measured by very

specific methods and indicators expressing physical, material quality of the housing build environment and healthy, secure, human quality of the living conditions for occupiers.

The establishment of the National Action Plan against substandard housing in France is characterized by some very specific institutional, legal and financial arrangements. First, a coordination centre: the National Pole for the Combat against Substandard Housing (Pôle National de la lutte contre l'habitat indigne – PNLHI), set up in 2001, is organising and coordinating the activities of the institutions concerned with substandard housing and is proposing political decisions to some authorities. Second, a vertical and horizontal institutional network is developed: from the State through the regions, *départments*, different local authorities and NGOs combined with the assistance of specific units of experts and specialised groups of enterprises. Third, a strong legal set of documents is adopted, giving support to the institutions to act in a cohesive way against some landlords/landladies of substandard housing and in a protective way toward tenants and victims of different circumstances of substandard housing. Fourth, a key to the implementation of the Plan is the funding provided by the State, the local governments and some associations and special programmes of rehabilitation. Fifth, a special set of methods for identification, evaluation and prescription for the remediation of substandard housing is elaborated accompanied by tools for control, consultancy and training for landlords/landladies and tenants.

The most valuable quality of this French Action Plan against substandard housing is that it functions as an integral system, in which all necessary components have been built, are maintained and are operating. Substandard housing is a multidimensional phenomenon and thus has to be mainstreamed in all important policy areas.

The French National Plan against substandard housing is showing positive results: Tens of thousands of cases of substandard housing have been put in proper condition. Its leading principles are: to preserve to a maximum the existing housing fund while renewing and maintaining it; to keep, if possible, the inhabitants of the renovated dwellings in place and not to allow the aggravation of social segregation in the urban environment; to protect inhabitants of substandard housing, whether tenants or owners; to demand strict responsibility from owners who rent substandard housing and trade in the misery of the urban poor.

Legal arrangements

The legal part in the French National Action Plan comprises several parts and is made up of a series of legal documents relevant to the way of establishing relationships between tenant and landlord/landlady (rights and duties of both); the physical condition of the housing, a diagnosis and evaluation of its characteristics with respect to the basic standard for housing conditions, the interrelations between owners and authorities at various levels in connection with the qualities of the housing environment, the rights of the separate institutions to demand improvement of the conditions of housing, to assist the weak and vulnerable, to control the implementation of the orders and prescriptions, and to penalize (which may include expropriation) those who do not obey the orders of the public authorities.

A noteworthy law is the envisaged expropriation of homes. In French practice this law has proven quite useful and had an impact toward stricter abidance by the prescriptions of the public authorities, but also a preventive and safeguarding effect for people who might be put at risk by

un-conscientious owners neglecting their property. Such a law and mechanism for action might be very useful in cases when, in buildings with collective ownership, one of the owners creates a problem and hampers the security of the other inhabitants.

Institutional arrangements

In France, the State, represented by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, makes political decisions about housing conditions of citizens and is responsible for the implementation of these decisions. The French local governments are the executor, the intermediary and the collaborator of the State with regard to housing problems.

The operational unit that organizes and coordinates the action of the separate institutions at national level for the implementation of these ambitious plans and programmes is "*Le Pôle national de lutte contre l'habitat indigne*" (PNLHI), ("National inter-ministerial centre for the struggle against substandard housing"). This is not an administrative organ. PNLHI is a combination of representatives from the ministries entrusted with responsibility regarding housing, health, social policy, migration and immigration, of representatives of the Ministry of the Interior and the large national agencies such as: Agency for Housing, Agency for Urban Planning Renovation, Agency for Housing Information. Associated with PNLHI are some other institutions providing housing assistance to persons and households, for instance the National Fund for Family Assistance, the Central Mutual Aid Fund for Farmers. The mission of PNLHI is to implement constant actions supporting the fight against substandard housing, such as legal and technical programmes, training of staff and various operational actors included in the programmes, to work with various institutions for their inclusion in general actions, to develop specialized networks of services at various territorial levels, to distribute information, to organise exchange of experience and other initiatives. A special internet address has been opened and is regularly updated.

The powers of the State in relation to housing are: the main issues of housing, the status of ownership and its usages, the expropriation; the protection of the environment; the social protection and the protection of public health. These duties and responsibilities are exercised by law, with the help of financing attributed to certain of these missions. According to the cases and different terms, the local conditions for the application of legislation or financing are carried out by territorial authorities (town-planning projects, local programmes on housing, social actions ...), or by State services (housing, public health, cultural heritage and sites, protection of nature, inspections and examinations...). In the area of housing, the State can delegate the management of funding for the construction and renovation of social rental housing and the renovation of private housing to local government groupings competent in housing issues, or to the *départements*.

The powers of the *départements* in relation to housing are: financing of the social policy action sector and its organisation (social workers, social establishments, aid for the elderly...). The *départements* have elaborated, in conjunction with the State, a *département*-level action plan in favour of housing for vulnerable households which sets out measures aimed at helping individuals and families in difficulties to have access to or remain in decent housing. In each *département*, a housing solidarity fund finances project actions in favour of households. Since the 2004 law, *départements* are able to request from the State that they may act as a proxy for housing grants. To achieve this, they must sign a convention with the State and the National

Agency for Housing (ANAH, Agence nationale de l'habitat) that specifies a programme taking place over several years for the building of social rental housing, the renovation of social housing and private housing, as well as detailing the commitments of each party.

The National Housing Agency ANAH was created in 1971 to support private small-sized landlord/landladies in the maintenance of their housing. The aim of the ANAH used to be the general improvement of the uncomfortable dwelling stock through an economic redistribution action. Nowadays the agency is responsible for the repairs and refurbishment of approximately 150 000 private housing units per year.

The powers of municipalities or their groupings in relation to housing are: The elaboration and management of town-planning projects, land actions, planning operations, actions relating to urban rehabilitation or embellishment, the carrying out of local housing policies. The mayor furthermore exercises administrative police powers to secure public order in the local district. Municipality groupings, competent in the area of housing, can ask the State to act as a proxy for housing grants: to achieve this, they must sign a covenant with the State, founded on a local housing programme, which specifies the objectives over several years for the construction of social rental housing and the renovation of social housing and private housing, as well as the commitments of each party. They also must simultaneously sign a covenant with the National Housing Agency ANAH which determines the conditions for the management of subsidies aimed at private owners.

Different kinds of associations – governmental and nongovernmental are taking part in the housing arrangements in France and specifically in substandard housing actions. The National Action Plan cannot be implemented without their activities and help. To be mentioned are the National Housing Agency ANAH, the Fondation 'Abbé-Pierre', PACTARIM etc. Specialised for the protection of different social groups and situations the role of NGOs in the housing issue in France is very strong, their movements provide a basis for policy commitments and decisions. Thanks to them a lot of urban inequalities are put on public discussion and political decisions are taken protecting the vulnerable, risky groups and homeless people.

There is a variety of distribution of responsibilities connected to the Action plan. The distribution passes through several levels and is done among different services and specialists. The first level is territorial and involves the Prefect, who is free to select the most appropriate organization for acting in the fight against substandard housing. In some *départements* local PNLHI ("National inter-ministerial centre for the struggle against substandard housing") services are organized, even though at present there is no formal obligation to set up such services. The nature of the work is such that there are no restrictions in the organization of partnerships, so it may include a large number of participants, including the court of justice, the prosecution, the police, financial institutions, private and public intermediaries, non-governmental organizations, etc. Organizing partnership at the local level is the most important part of applying action programmes. These also include social workers at the *département*-level and officials from the social insurance service.

Financial arrangements

The National Action Plan against substandard housing in France is funded from several sources. The biggest provider of funding is the State through the Ministries and certain national agencies

as the National Housing Agency ANAH and specialised services. The ANAH, fully funded by the State, evaluates planned repairs and refurbishments and allots the contributions to private landlords/landladies under some conditions.

Apart from State sources of financing, direct or indirect, there are also local and private sources. For funding purposes the Housing Solidarity Fund plays a particularly important role. All housing owners have the right to assistance from state agencies and services, but there are specialized institutions connected with the funding of various types of housing buildings: for social housing and for private housing. Institutions are also specialized according to the kind of renovation being made, since loans are given for specific purposes. There are separate funds, gathered in connection with the fight against social exclusion, for buildings at risk, for families at risk, for the homeless, etc. The budgets of the separate units in the overall policy for fighting substandard housing are distributed and specialized for funding various activities that are elements of a single operation: for technical diagnosis of the site, for control during the renovation, for hiring experts from private or public bureaus for specialized operations, for moving and temporary accommodation of tenants in another dwelling, etc. In the French system of fighting against substandard housing and the funding of this activity, it is possible to accumulate means from various sources and thus carry out the operation.

A specific point is the funding of building and logistics activities in a given renovation operation of substandard housing. If the cause for the substandard housing condition lies with the owner, which is the prevalent case, the latter is obliged within a specified term to carry out the order and the prescriptions of the authorities. In case the owner fails to carry out the order or delays carrying it out, or deviates from it, the Mayor or Prefect hires a firm that will carry out the order at the expense of the owner. These penalties are carried out, and in exchange for the sum owed the owner may lose the property through expropriation if the sum is not paid out in full. Temporary local funds are used in advance for these penalty operations. Thus, it is always in the owner's interest to carry out the order within the required term. It has been registered that after these strict rules and measure were introduced, the cases of non-fulfilment of orders has sharply decreased in number.

Operational process: identification, evaluation, classification of cases

Inadequate housing is common in run-down districts, sites of precariousness and de-valorisation, and rural zones, but it can also be found in more recent housing complexes. For many years, this problem was visible in entire urban districts and zones. However, following renovations undertaken in private housing over the last 30 years, inadequacy has today become more diffused in urban as well rural areas. Nevertheless, pockets of inadequate housing remain, and precarious housing forms continue to develop in places where poor, fragile, immigrant populations inhabit – all the less visible as they are masked by widespread progress in housing improvements. In France close to 57% of households are owners of their dwelling, 38% rent an unfurnished house or flat and 5% are inhabitants with 'other' statuses or residences. Out of the 38% being tenants of unfurnished dwellings, 21% live in private and 17% in public housing. The tendency is to increase the proportion of owner-occupiers. All this stock needs permanent maintenance and renovation. An estimated 1.7 million of dwellings from this stock is classified as potentially unfit in 2005, 400 000 to 600 000 could be considered as truly unfit.

Public intervention in these substandard living situations today considered as contrary to human

dignity, either by renovation or demolition, is carried out by the coercive powers of "administrative police" acting under mayors and prefects, in spite of owners or "landlords/landladies". Moreover, these coercive measures are not used in the same manner for an owner-occupier as for an owner-lesser (or "landlord"): while physical safety should be secured for all and is an aim of legislation, in matters of inadequacy, coercive measures are rarely taken against owner-occupiers¹¹.

The identification and the evaluation of unfit housing is the starting point for the implementation of the National Plan against substandard housing. Since the year 2000, studies in the pre-identification of unfit housing have been launched with the aim of establishing, on a departmental scale, a cartography of potential sites of inadequacy, as data relating to discomfort provided by general population census do not allow such pre-identification. The objectives are to offer to State services an effective aid for identifying priority zones and the profiles of affected households and to allow them to exchange information with local authorities and local parties concerned in order to rapidly put in place operational plans for detailed identification of addresses and for the treatment of these inadequate situations.

The method used to pre-identify "Potentially Unfit Private Housing Stock" is founded on the cross-section of two approaches:

- a global approach founded on a centralised tax source (coming from local rates dossiers based on the categories of residential buildings and data concerning the income tax of individuals) based on the idea that an occupier with modest means is more likely to live in an unfit dwelling than a better-off occupier.
- a local approach, corresponding to knowledge held by local partners (number of complaints, local studies, alerts from social workers, requests for re-location...).

It is from the cross between the level of income of occupiers and the category in which the building is classified that a highly detailed map of data is composed and dispatched to all *départements*. It is then the responsibility of services to match this data with their knowledge of the area, either by comparisons with existing data or by on-spot inspections of dwellings identified as fragile. This work is carried out using data updated every 2 years at the initiative of the Ministry of Housing and the Pole, with the support of the National Agency for Housing (ANAH), which provides all departments with extremely detailed geographic information.

In order to refine the global approach based on national data and to bring extra support to local actors, the Ministry of Housing is to proceed to a new analysis, based on a comparison between data coming from tax bases in a given territory and data coming from on-spot inspections carried out in the same territory, allowing for more finely tuned figured evaluations on the reality of unfit housing, based on a typology of territories. This analysis may well lead to accurate numbering in the national stock of effectively unfit dwellings. The identification of unfit housing has become an obligation in local housing programmes.

After the groundwork, the classification of "inadequate" that can justify a coercive procedure or an increased financial grant for the renovation of the building, requires an exhaustive inspection of the building and each dwelling. This inspection is carried out by agents of the health and social

¹¹ The financial tools are preferred.

services agency (Direction départemental des affaires sanitaires et sociales – DDASS) or certain local services, according to a detailed analysis grid.

The evaluation of the reality of the inadequacy is partly based on the economic, social and cultural environment of the area, depending on what a given society – its elected leaders, its administrative and social authorities, associations, media, the public – deems as acceptable or not at a given moment. Subjectivity is not absent from this process, despite the rigorous procedure undertaken by the ministries concerned.

Conclusions

The summary of the main operational approaches of the French National Action Plan against substandard housing could be focused on:

- Pre-identification of substandard housing and preliminary mapping of possibly unfit housing, providing a *département*-level cartography of areas at risk.
- Administrative policing: The authorities can oblige owners to carry out essential work and to pay it. They implement these rights.
- Targeted expropriations are possible and they are implemented.
- The occupiers keep their housing (if remediable). Occupants' right to temporary or permanent rehousing is guaranteed.
- After the refurbishment works rents are not increased.
- Consultancies for free concerning renovation of the substandard housing are provided for owners and for occupiers.
- Training of the housing use for occupiers after the renovation is provided for different kinds of occupiers.
- Public financing for accelerated remediation of unfit, unhealthy or dangerous accommodation is provided.
- Increased subsidies to both owner-occupiers and landlords/landladies, for necessary repairs are possible.
- Grouping of housing refurbishment operations with other structural work, such as urban renewal is preferable.
- Coordination of the services concerned, by the *préfet* (the State's representative in a *département* or region), and the establishment of local work programmes and local work tools.
- Cooperation between the State and the municipalities or their groupings in areas where substandard housing is particularly widespread.

- The implementation of the National Action Plan is based on the functioning as a system of components – a great number of different components are working together in a relative harmony connected by specific roles and links. Their number and variety is according each case. The objective is to achieve the improvement of the housing quality for the occupiers.
- Partnerships with other actors in housing, health, social inclusion, justice and the police – notably in order to combat exploitative landlords/landladies (the “sleep merchants”) is stimulated.

4. Peer country comments:

Relevance of strategy components to other national contexts

Participants from six European countries took part in the Peer Review seminar and gave some comments about the French experience in the fight against substandard housing – Belgium, Denmark, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania. They described briefly the general housing situation in their respective countries and gave some specific features connected to substandard housing and details from their policy and practices about the discussed subjects.

Belgium

The housing situation in Belgium is rather complicated due to the separate governance of the territory and the relative autonomy of regions. In any case in Belgium responsibility for housing is transferred to regions, but taxation policies are still decided at the federal level or responsibilities are at the regional level, but the money is still at the federal level. At present the feeling in Belgium tends to be that property rights are more important than housing standards.

'Decent housing' in Belgium has never been a political priority. There is no definition of substandard housing, neither a State agency monitoring nor enforcing the application of the housing standards. The country has no comprehensive policies on substandard housing at either the federal or the regional levels. Budgets for housing renovation have always been very low. When in the 1980s Belgium launched an urban renewal drive, only one in three municipalities took part. In 1995, Flanders brought in new legislation to combat slum housing, but only about half of the municipalities followed up on it.

However, there are a number of instruments with both incentive aspects (renovation subsidies, reduced VAT rates for the renovation of old buildings and some other tax exemptions for renovations) and coercive provisions (a mayor can prohibit the renting of a house and landlords can face criminal penalties, including imprisonment, if they exploit poor people). Compulsory renovation at the landlord's expense and compulsory rehousing at the landlord's expense are also now possible in Belgium, but these provisions only took effect in August 2007.

The increase of homeownership occurred between 1976 and 1997 was remarkable. About 70% of Belgian households own their home and in principle landlords are looking after their properties.

In this context it is obvious that substandard housing exists and is used and rented as in the case of France. According to the recent census and the included quality issues it is well known where the neighbourhoods with a high proportion of bad or old housing are. The problem is that the government does not use the data to detect bad housing items. The process is reactive and almost never proactive. The housing inspectors or the mayors react to complaints. When the social services come across bad housing, they tell the inspectorate and then the inspectors visit the dwelling.

Private rentals have remained a federal matter. There are some quality standards in the legislation on private rentals. But to have them applied in the case of a dispute, the tenant would have to go to court. The implication being that housing rental is simply a contractual matter between the tenant and the landlord and not a housing policy issue. Where mayors have strong powers to tackle bad housing, they rarely do so because they cannot rehouse the occupants. The Belgian experience over the past 20 years is that the social profile of tenants becomes weaker and weaker. These are not the kind of people who will go to court to protect their rights. Also, many landlords/landladies are poor and do not have the money to renovate their houses. The lack of regulation on the private rental market in practice and the quasi inaccessibility of the social rental market homeownership is the sole stable housing option in the country.

In Belgium the certificates to let or "rent-permits" exist but they are not compulsory, so few landlords/landladies ask for them. This scheme is not really working, due to the lack of compulsion. Belgium has a system of social renting agencies. These are NGOs subsidised by the governments of all three regions to rent and renovate housing and then sublet it to poor tenants. Although it is a good model, it is on a very small scale.

The general picture of housing policy in the country shows a lack of permanent and efficient political concern of substandard housing. Political decisions and instruments are not missing, some of them are similar to those in France, but they are evaluated as insufficient. Coordination of activities to combat substandard housing and adequate organisation on administrative housing level are missing. The use of the existing instruments and the implementation of political decisions in housing are not enough developed.

The complex system of elements in the fight against substandard housing in France and particularly the used legal set of documents and the connection between housing and health, which are not familiar in Belgium, attracted special attention. This health aspect as a new element could be useful to be introduced in the country. The budget for the struggle against substandard housing in France is considered also substantial and appreciated. The framing institutions in France are also evaluated high because they are to a large extent settled and work embedded in an administrative cooperation.

Denmark

The housing situation in Denmark is strongly connected to the urban context. Urban development and regeneration, not housing, is the political priority in the process of performance of living conditions in Denmark. This objective should be seen in relation to the long-standing policy of ensuring proper and healthy housing conditions for the population. Danish housing legislation is relatively well developed and connected to urban development. It started 70 years ago by the Danish Redevelopment Act of 1939. New redevelopment acts were produced in 1959 and 1969.

The objectives of these acts were to ensure that housing had a basic health standard. A lot of bad housing was demolished and the urban space reshaped. Then the focus shifted from health standards to greater awareness of installations (inside toilets and bath), low cost maintenance and qualitative features of the open space located in the vicinity. The demolition was replaced by renovation following the movement in the majority of European countries. The 1982 Urban Development Act was to ensure restoration and updating of existing properties and housing areas. The objective of the new 1997 Urban Development Act was to improve general living conditions and was focused on the contemporary standards of housing and countering the low level of maintenance, supplemented by efforts aimed at improving social housing conditions.

As a result of these permanent long-term political initiatives the number of unfit housing dropped quickly. Today housing standards in Denmark are generally high and exceptional: 2,0 persons per dwelling, the average footprint housing area is 55 m² per person, the majority of the units have toilets, district heating and bath. Social housing and private rental housing are in a very good condition and half of the housing stock is owner-occupied.

In Denmark as a difference from France and other countries there is no definition for substandard housing, neither a specific policy against substandard housing and there is no Ministry of Housing. In 2001 housing merged as a subject into the Social Affairs Ministry, because it is considered a very important part of social policy. The word "dignity" is not used at all in connection with housing. As regards social inclusion the Danish saying is that: "To have a place to live is a good start." Denmark has a registration system for all dwellings with details on the facilities. Expropriation is very difficult to apply in practice as it is not comparable with the constitution. But in certain cases it is evaluated as necessary.

At the moment about 10 000 housing units are estimated as substandard housing in Denmark, spread in peripheral regions and small provincial towns. The majority are single-family homes, owner-occupied or privately rented. The poor housing stock causes problems in some local authorities. They attract residents on social assistance and a process of negative impact on the areas is going on, but there is political decision to eradicate the housing dilapidation. The Ministry of Social Affairs is cooperating with other ministries to elaborate a programme for their regeneration. Local authorities are responsible for the housing maintenance. Financing is provided by the State but it is allocated by the local authorities. The publicly-funding urban renewal is paid for by the central and local governments and private sector. No other agency is involved.

A special attention is given to ghettos – areas with social housing, in order to achieve better social mix. There is nothing wrong with the dwellings as such. Whenever older housing is renovated strong attention is given to making it accessible for people with disabilities.

The French Action Plan gives rise to many considerations, however the scale of Denmark is not comparable with France and the housing policy established yet in Denmark gives a relative satisfaction in regard to substandard housing. A very positive and transferable point from the French system is the legal right of every individual to be housed. There is nothing similar in Denmark.

Latvia

After 1990 Latvia crossed a difficult period of transformations. Privatisation in housing was coupled with restitution of estates, nationalised before the Second World War and the society was shaken by the massive transition to market economy. Responsibility for housing was divided into two administrative levels – the State, represented by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and the State Housing Agency, responsible for the national policy and the implementation of all the support programmes, and the local governments, responsible for the assistance of these programmes with housing-related matters on their territory.

The housing situation in Latvia is self-evaluated as relatively difficult, with low quality housing conditions in general. Due to the considerable old housing stock only half of the buildings are supplied with central heating, bathrooms and hot water. The rural housing is mainly pre-war built. The owner-occupied buildings are mostly built after the Second World War; 87% of the stock is private, 9% is municipal (very low-quality), 2% is state-owned and 2% owned by cooperatives. Social housing is owned by the municipalities. Up to now, there is no developed private rental market in Latvia. Rents are pegged at a very low level, under a system dating from the Soviet era, so nobody is interested in becoming a private landlord/landlady. People on low incomes can rent from the municipalities. For the rest of the population, the only real option is to buy.

In Latvia there is no definition of substandard housing, but for rented accommodation there is a requirement that it should be "*fit for living in*", which is defined as being "residential space fit for living, fightable, healable, capable of providing long-term human shelter and accommodating households and compliant with building and health regulations. According to the public opinion housing is inadequate if it does not have a bathroom or a shower, if the roof is leaking and if the ceilings, floors and windows are in poor conditions. These physical features are similar to the evaluation of the housing quality in France.

Each building has to be registered in the State clusters. The register contains information about any changes in the building and its equipment. People are supposed to register any improvements that they make (like in Denmark). However, there are problems with updating the information, as many people have done building work unofficially. The State reacts only if complaints are received about the construction work.

The legal documents used as important in the fight against substandard housing are several: Law on renting of living space; Law on assistance in solving apartment-related problems, Law on social apartments and houses, Law on Social Utilities and social assistance. It is important to notice that in Latvia as in the majority of the ex-socialist countries after 1990 the restitution is connected to the substandard housing subjects. Under development is one significant act for the massive housing stock – the Law on maintenance of property, its main objective is the refurbishment of the blocks of flats.

In 1996 a "Concept Paper on Housing" was adopted which defines as priority "the advancement of access to good quality housing for all residents at a reasonable cost". Another key policy document is the "Joint Memorandum on Social Inclusion of Latvia (2003), which set on provision of adequate housing and some priorities and actions for assistance and support measures to vulnerable groups, as well as a "National Plan on health-environment" (1998); the "Concept Paper on Development of the Credit System for Housing Construction, Reconstruction and

Modernisation". To summarise: political decisions are on the way to build up a system of elements for the fight against substandard housing.

Financial policy and support systems for housing improvements, based on the State budget, began to be put in place in 2005. The municipalities receive subsidies for new buildings or for the renovation of existing buildings. From the end of 2007, support will also be available for the renovation of owner-occupied dwellings. The support will be aimed at promoting energy efficiency and a higher quality of life. For socially vulnerable groups, some social benefits are available for the payment of rents and utilities, as well as for the renovation of rented housing.

Some experience concerning the system, coordination and policy of the French National Plan against substandard housing have been found as possible for transferability. One of the major problems in Latvia is the aggressive behaviour of some groups of the population toward the housing environment. In this respect Latvian experts have been interested in the process of expropriation of housing under some conditions. They have problems with resituated housing and social housing but unfortunately in France there is no experience in the field of restitution.

Luxemburg

Luxemburg is a small but well organised country in economic and demographic expansion. The proportion of immigrants in the country is relatively high and the search for a cheap accommodation is strong (with potential of rented substandard housing). Responsibility for housing is shared among the Ministry of Housing, the local authorities/boroughs and – in the case of refugees – the Government Office for Foreigners.

The main objectives of the housing policy in Luxemburg are home buying. The housing policy is tending to push people into the private market, as the social rents are in many cases now higher than the market rates. There is a relative shortage of housing in Luxemburg, and prices are in explosion. Contrary to the situation in France, there are no cash grants to support tenants, but the rent is revised each year in line with the tenant's income. Over the past 20 years older stock has been bought up en masse and renovated, leading to the disappearance of lower-quality housing.

The housing stock is relatively new. The majority of dwellings are individual houses supplied with bathroom, toilet, running water and central heating. Although the great majority of Luxemburg's housing stock is assessed as decent quality, the possibility of unfit dwellings cannot be completely ruled out. But in Luxemburg there is a hesitation what kind of dwellings should be registered as substandard housing. Currently there is no definition of unfit housing. However due to the increase of the population and the immigration 11% of dwellings are evaluated by the occupants as overcrowded. However something similar to the French "sleep merchants" might possibly be developing, but there are no hard facts on this. Households living in inadequate housing in Luxemburg tend to be on low incomes or social assistance. Also, in addition to highly qualified, well-off immigrants, Luxemburg has a population of low-skilled migrants. Asylum-seekers and one-parent families also tend to face housing problems. So the profile is similar to that in other European countries.

There are required quality standards for rented accommodation, as regards health, facilities, fire precautions and sanitation. Another tool is the Rehabilitation Funds, which is aimed at renovating whole neighbourhoods. Since 1979, there were two such funding exercises. The 1979 regulations

defined the criteria of rent, of healthy accommodation concerning material aspects of the housing. A recent innovation is the Housing Logbook (Carnet de l'habitat), which gives owners the opportunity to have a subsidised check-up on a dwelling. This is wholly voluntary. It is too early to say if this scheme is working. For the renovation of buildings, the government provides grants to the owners. An important question is about the role of the media in making the public more aware of unfit housing, and so stimulating greater political action.

In terms of legislation, Luxembourg has tended to put the emphasis on property rights, but a number of provisions are nonetheless available for dealing with unfit housing. Legislation connected to unfit housing exists, but the problem is its implementation. The Local authorities have a duty to rehouse the occupants of a dwelling that is declared inadequate. Given the housing shortage, it is said that mayors are becoming rather reluctant to use these powers and are setting rather long deadlines for the improvement work.

A specific picture for people who are unable to afford housing is developing in Luxembourg: they move on to camp-sites (all nationalities are involved), where they live either in trailer vans or in small holiday chalets. The municipalities in which these people are living regard them as non-residents, so ad hoc cooperation between the housing and justice ministries and NGOs became necessary in order to give them some kind of residential status. A law is now being prepared which will enable people to register with a borough even if they are living in accommodations that are not officially recognised as housing.

According to the experts from Luxembourg the experience of France has a number of elements, which could be taken back and reflected upon. From their point of view the accent could be put on the political commitment of different structures during the process of treatment of substandard housing, also on the possible definition of substandard housing in respect to the geographical location as well as on the enlargement of the definition including the environmental criteria in the profile of the decrypted substandard housing. Special accent of interest and transferability is put to the methods of identification of substandard housing in France, the detailed check-up visits, the documents and the relation between the offer of public or social housing and the extent of substandard housing. While a national action plan on the French scale would be difficult to implement in a small country like Luxembourg, the experts see some possibly transferable elements that would merit further discussion, notably the methods of stimulation for the renovation of unfit dwellings.

Malta

Although Malta is a very small country it has three entities, which focus on housing: the Housing Authority, the Housing Construction and Maintenance Department and the Department of Social Housing. New legislation will merge these into one entity, as their roles are complementary. Malta deals with housing at the central government level. The Housing Authority, which falls within the responsibility of the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity, may be considered the leader when it comes to housing issues. It depicts a message in its mission statement, which states: "Decent housing strengthens communities and provides a better setting in which to raise our children".

Malta is densely populated. Land is scarce and extremely expensive. Housing in Malta is regarded in all dimensions, as it is one of the key means of promoting social inclusion. The

challenge is affordability. But affordability as prior issue is closely linked to the issue of adequacy. The Maltese authorities believe that, by addressing that issue, they are also indirectly tackling the problem of substandard housing. If families cannot afford better accommodation, substandard housing is more likely to persist. In Malta there are vacant properties: they are newly constructed and in a good state of repair, predominantly flats. But there are also old vacant buildings, bought as an investment. Some of these old areas are going through gentrification.

In Malta rent subsidies are available for privately owned properties. The recipients must be Maltese residents and priority is given to vulnerable groups, such as 18-21-year-olds leaving residential care. An applicant must already have reached an agreement to rent accommodation under some conditions. Subsidies for repairs and improvements to private rented properties of a certain age are also provided, in order to achieve a reasonable standard. Subsidised work may include repairs to dangerous structures, the replacement of older water and electricity installations, improvements to bathrooms, the laying of floor tiles, and repairs to drainage systems and external doors and apertures. Similar criteria hold for applicants for this subsidy.

The Maltese census gives details on substandard housing. It gathers data on living conditions, based on objective criteria like water, electricity, humidity and the general environment. Since housing is a fundamental right and because it cannot be seen in isolation from other sectors, the Maltese state is committed to improve standards and to have schemes that render housing more affordable.

In Malta there is no specific definition of substandard housing, although there are legal implications and criteria, which determine whether a house conforms to sanitary regulations. Inadequate housing is not necessarily substandard. However the French definition could be used to introduce a more precise understanding of substandard housing in Malta. There is no particular law, which deals directly with substandard housing.

The Housing Authority's role is to help with home ownership, rentals and substandard housing. It does this through eight different schemes targeting both owners and tenants. It promotes home ownership by facilitating affordability. The Housing Authority helps by providing affordable housing through shared ownership. Each year, it makes a number of houses available at affordable prices. It also helps to increase the rented stock through urban renewal projects. The focus is currently on the areas where a lot of accommodation will have to be demolished and rebuilt in order to make provision for the emergencies that often arise after heavy rainfall. Now they are resettled by people with social problems and low incomes. So they are now priority areas for urban regeneration.

The Maltese housing system focuses on other aspects apart from those relating to the physical aspects. These include social, cultural and economic dimensions, focusing upon the development of a national strategy that safeguards the individual and society comprehensively.

In terms of transferability, the following French tools might be used in the improvement of the Maltese local housing policy and operational actions: the continuous mapping process in France, as against Malta's reliance on the ten-yearly census, and the indicators checklist, which could be considered as ensuring objectivity, uniformity and comparability. Although Malta shares many of the French criteria, it does not have them set out clearly in a checklist. So the French experience could be of help to Malta in developing a similar list.

Romania

Romania is in a difficult situation regarding the sharing of responsibility between the central and the local level of public administration in the housing sector. The government holds a major part of the funding. However, the decision has to be local, and the local level is characterized by a lack of expertise and understanding. The responsibilities for housing on the central level are assumed by the Ministry of Housing. Cooperation exists between the ministries of health, social protection and housing. After decentralisation, many responsibilities were transferred to the local authorities, but they lack the competence and the needed operational experience. The intermediate level of government is not playing an important role at present. A link between the central government and the local authorities is missing.

In Romania there is no legal definition of substandard housing, nor specific legislation on the issue. However, there are a number of defined housing standards. Substandard can be defined by the Housing Law in terms of utilities, equipment and minimal service. In this respect a large part of the Romanian housing stock is substandard. Regarding the building codes, the sanitary norms and the safety measures, substandard housing is partially defined in various laws and norms. There is no direct definition of measures to be taken for a dwelling that not only does not meet any standards but is inhabited in an improper manner. The Housing Law 114/1996 defines briefly social housing and emergency housing but do not differentiate them in terms of usage or building norms. The minimum surface is defined in regards with European average and not with the local situation. In other words, this particular provision of the law acts as an obstacle for the development of a social housing stock in Romania by raising the standards beyond the needs of the inhabitants and of the economical strength of the fund providers.

The consequences of the lack of a legal framework and institutions for intervention are considerable. There are a lot of housing cases related to crisis or exposing inhabitants and other citizens to health and security risks (mental illness problems of the residents, structural instability of buildings, pests' infection, etc). Relatively little information is available about data in reality. The only real awareness of substandard housing is based on a journalistic, superficial approach. The little research that was done remained within academic circles. The issue is not on the public agenda and people prefer not to talk about it. Many people live in housing stock that was not built according to currently acceptable norms. Many others are in poor rural dwellings, informal settlements and historic buildings. About 80% of the Roma population, the largest community in Europe, lives in poverty, often in illegal housing conditions. Another group particularly at risk as far as housing conditions are concerned are elderly people in rural areas or in buildings in the historic centres. A great part of these buildings have been restituted after 1990. A number of people have been evicted following these retrocessions. A further fragile group are young people who grew up in orphanages and are now on their own. Immigration is low and is not much of a factor.

A reform of housing law is under way. The Ministry of Development, Public Works and Housing is currently working on an audit of the legislation and will be proposing some modifications. Rent control is likely to be a feature of the changes, but it is not yet known how it will be organised. Expropriation is possible, but there is a tendency to avoid it, as it might be perceived as an echo of the past. Observatories for collecting data on housing are now being improved. Some research activities are financed by the housing ministry in order to define checklists and methodologies to act.

In Romania there is no specific experience for fighting substandard housing as such, but there are housing policies measures and social protection measures that can bring a contribution to the prevention and the reduction of substandard housing. It can also be argued that some housing policy measures during the communist regime and after 1990 have had some negative effects on the housing stock weakening. For instance, the massive privatization of the collective housing units without clear rules about the management obligations of this stock or the forced sedentarisation of the Roma population in the '70s.

It is difficult to find similarities between France and Romania in the substandard housing matter, but the experience exchanged, in particular the checklist used in France, attracted attention. Romania first of all has to build up legal and institutional framework for social support in housing. A long-term work traced for the future.

EU Stakeholder organisations comments

Two European stakeholders took part in the Peer Review comments: EUROCITIES and FEANTSA.

According to EUROCITIES housing must be placed in a broad social, economic and cultural context. The development of sustainable communities requires an integrated approach. The development of sustainable cities raises an important question about diversity and reconciliation with social cohesion in the cities. The answer is access to good housing for all - that is a key factor. The cooperation of all levels of public administration (cities, regions, national governments and the European institutions) is also very important. The cities in particular must be empowered to play a strong role in this cooperation.

The French national action plan meets three important criteria in order to achieve good practice: relevance, effectiveness and efficiency. It gives an impression of decisiveness, energy and power, and of firm action that is placed in a long tradition, but with new instruments and choices. The transferability of good practice depends on the framework conditions in other countries and the perception, by local and national experts, of the possibilities of fitting them in. In Europe, there are two important framework conditions in housing policy. First, there is the composition of the housing stock – i.e. the proportion of social rental, private rental and owner-occupied houses. For instance, a large social rental sector permits other forms of intervention than those described in the French case, through agreements with social housing associations. Second, the division of responsibilities and financial means between central, regional and local government will also have an important effect on transferability. However, there must be sufficient financial, legal and organisational means available to the cities, so that they can exercise such leadership.

Converting substandard housing is about more than bricks and mortar. It needs an integrated approach to social issues, living conditions, education, employment and health raises the structural effectiveness of the combat against substandard housing is also very important. The housing market itself contains a mechanism for adjusting substandard housing. It is called “gentrification”. An area-specific approach is a good way of achieving integrated action.

According to FEANTSA unfit or dangerous housing can arise serious problems both for tenants and for owner-occupiers. This can be linked to the ageing of the housing stock, but it also raises issues of longer-term counselling for the poorer and more vulnerable households who are or wish to become home owners but who do not have the means to maintain their housing properly in the long term.

FEANTSA considers that the French local authorities are pursuing a very ambitious policy, based on a broad definition of substandard housing. So this policy can be applied to a wide range of situations, including those in the European typology of exclusion linked to housing, and notably precarious and inadequate housing (FEANTSA). As regards implementation, the question of responsibility is important, as is the setting of priorities. The responsibilities are distributed in a rather complex way, but they rest mainly with the mayors and the préfets. But apparently, not all of the actors have the same degree of political will or this will depend on how much information they have and what means are at their disposal. At a time of decentralisation, it might be wondered if priority-setting by the State would permit a more homogeneous application of policy nationwide.

Transferability depends on the national context. FEANTSA believes that the commitment to combating substandard housing certainly makes it possible to improve the living standards of the worst-off members of society. The approach to identifying situations is a very interesting one, and might certainly be used elsewhere.

5. Discussion of the transferability. Conclusions and lessons learnt

The exchange of experience on strategies and practice for fighting substandard housing revealed a number of conclusions and lessons.

Definition of Substandard Housing and Housing Standards

Clarifying the concept of substandard housing was one of the basic issues in the Peer Review. The meaning of the term is understood and used with various nuances in different countries. Few countries have worked out an exact definition, though the kind of policy that will be pursued depends on the specification of this definition: on how the substandard dwellings are identified, what measures will be taken against them, who will carry out control, and account for those measures, what are the inhabitants, etc. The definition is connected with the debate as to whether it is necessary to establish certain housing standards, and whether some common European standard can be set, in terms of indicators and parameters. Several main questions were highlighted in the discussion.

The first question was connected with the relation between the physical and the social contents of the term substandard housing. To what degree are security, hygiene and healthy conditions sufficient characteristics of housing for defining it as *decent (worthy)* and what characteristics of the environment and the inhabitants must be included in this evaluation. The participants in the meeting expressed preference for the experience of countries that have expanded the meaning of substandard housing so as to include both physical and social characteristics.

The second question was related to the scope of the concept: whether it referred only to the interior and characteristics of a dwelling or also to the influence of the environment beyond it, to the building, its immediate and neighbouring space, the neighbourhood, the urban planning, etc. Approval went to the experience of countries which were working both for improving the urban environment and the housing in that environment.

The third issue was related to the need for introducing indicators for the standard of the housing environment: should there be minimal standards for housing conditions and how to determine if a home is adequate for habitation? Most countries support the idea of developing such indicators. There can be a harmonization of these indicators at the European level, but not of the specific parameters of the indicators. Traditions, culture and criteria are different in different countries. The proposal was made to establish criteria for “acceptable/non-acceptable housing”, that would be defined in each country.

The fourth question referred to **property and the inhabitants**: when may society expropriates substandard housing that is personal property and what measures may be taken to protect neighbouring inhabitants from dangerous edifices and from risk situations? There were mixed responses “for” and “against”, but opinions were categorical concerning the need for a preventive policy for maintaining housing. In countries where expropriation is possible, such measures are in fact rarely resorted to, but their very possibility has a strong preventive effect and is assessed to be a positive legal tool.

Housing policy and political commitment

Making political decisions for fighting substandard housing was assessed as the first and most important step. Without it there can be no fighting substandard housing. In many cases social movements, the training of political cadres at various levels, and the activity of NGOs are of decisive importance for political commitment. In the case of some countries, a political decision is taken but not being implemented. In some countries technical parameters of housing have taken the place of the human, social parameters of the environment. These two kinds of parameters may overlap, but they do not coincide, so the substitution of one for the other was found unacceptable.

Legislative tools

A second essential step is to provide legislative tools for fighting substandard housing. Here again, there is a confusion between technical norms regarding design and construction, and the social requirements regarding the housing environment. In order to achieve results in the fight against substandard housing, legislative documents must always be linked with documents on

fighting social inequality, fighting social exclusion and promoting social inclusion and social cohesion. The introduction of such “mixed” legal provisions is a complicated task and must be considered as a multi-layered structure based on the existing laws to which amendments are made, but also based on new laws; all of these together should function as a legislative package.

The experience of countries is quite varied. There are still no common European rules, but the results display the advantages and shortcomings of each legislative system. Several leading principles have emerged: protection of occupiers from the intense commercialization of substandard housing when renting and during the refurbishing of dwellings; a limited use of the measure of demolishing homes and buildings; incentives for up keeping of the housing environment; strengthening the rights of the institutional structure in fighting substandard housing; creating incentive tools for refurbishing and maintenance of the environment, for preserving the occupiers in the same residence after the refurbishing, for introducing rules to encourage social mix and introducing legislative measures against social segregation.

Institutional arrangement and division of responsibilities

A third critical factor consists in the institutional arrangement of the process of fighting substandard housing. The main load is usually borne by the vertical territorial structure. But it is also very useful to create horizontal specialized structures (expert units, agencies, NGOs, etc.). In countries where the central government entirely delegates its rights to local government, the results of the fight against substandard housing are meagre and the situation can be defined as a withdrawal of central government from its responsibilities to solve the housing problems. Strongly centralized government decisions also prove unsuccessful when local governments do not work closely with the central for implementing political decisions.

Institutional networks are quite important for organising and coordinating of the process, for distributing responsibilities and monitoring, for gathering and distributing financial resources. The creation of a coordination centre for fighting substandard housing was acknowledged important; the tasks of this centre could be carried out by a unit of central government, by a specialized agency, or by other specialized institutions. It was pointed out that the matter is very complicated and multi-faceted, several ministries usually are involved, it concerns the whole territorial structure of a country and many other institutions, it links the activity of various experts, and success in such activity could not be achieved without specialized coordination.

Funding

The fourth important step in fighting substandard housing is funding. The struggle against substandard housing is an expensive activity, and if we were to rely only on the efforts of the home owners, the desired results would hardly be achieved. There are different funding practices in different countries. The conclusion was that the State must play a crucial role in gathering and distributing resources for fighting substandard housing, in using tax concessions, various forms of incentives, differentiated assistance of households to supplement the needed resources provided by the owners. There is a variety of practices in use, and some of them can be applied even in countries with low living standards.

Registration and checklist for substandard housing

A very important element is the experience in identifying substandard housing. According to the adopted indicators and standards, various approaches have been applied: analysis of urbanized territory; studying real estate prices; studying the data on the revenues of the population, data on sickness of inhabitants, data on employment and unemployment, on immigration pockets, etc. Site visits, inspections of housing, mapping are considered to be effective measures, as are the establishment of parameters according to special schemas of indicators for classifying sites.

The sites described and classified in this way may be proposed for inclusion in planned renewal programmes. The practice in some countries is to issue specialized 'passports' of residential buildings, in which current changes in the environment are periodically inscribed and thus the conditions of these sites is surveyed so that preventive measures can be taken if necessary. In other countries such information data and passports are required when renting the dwelling itself. Permission for renting is not given when the adopted standards are not met.

Orders, monitoring and penalties

After identifying a substandard housing, in most countries the authorities issue an order that the dwelling be set in conformity with standard parameters. But not all owners undertake action to fulfil the order. When such orders are issued they are mandatory; only in a limited number of cases does the document merely register the situation or express the desirability of such measures. The order is accompanied by actions for its execution and for monitoring. In some cases the order is not implemented due to negligence or because the management of the process has been interrupted. The participants admitted that monitoring was exceptionally important; without it the whole process becomes useless. Punitive measures are almost always carried out, but the aim is to prevent the need for them and to put more action in the prevention stage.

Training

Training in how to conduct the fight against substandard housing is offered at several points. The first is in connection with decision making, managerial and political. The second occasion is in identifying and registering substandard housing: here training is both for the specialized teams and for the inhabitants concerned, whether they are owners or tenants. It was pointed out at the meeting that certain owners and tenants (especially immigrants) were lacking the necessary knowledge to maintain the property and to adequately use the capacity of the housing environment. It is particularly important to provide aid in the choice of the most appropriate kind of refurbishing. The training for the occupiers after the refurbishing of the dwelling and the environment also proved important, but few countries can boast of having such experience.

Owner-occupiers, protection, rents

Measures for preserving social variety in neighbourhoods after reconstruction of housing, for maintaining the social mix and keeping the population in their place of residence contribute to

avoid ghettoization. A significant issue is that of preserving the rent level from before the refurbishing, proposing programmes for combined funding of substandard housing refurbishing, and renting them as social housing or at special rent levels. Experience was shared in connection with correcting the social homogeneity in pockets of urban poverty and of immigrants by means of renting for households of other, higher social strata.

Conclusions and lessons learnt

Facilitating the transfer of key components of the experience of the host country as a model and successful results from the participating countries are the most ambitious goals of the Peer Review. Differences in policy, in governance, resources constraints, traditions and cultural particularities, economic developments and comprehensive housing strategies highlight the need for the transfer of effective approaches and policies from one country to another in the fight against substandard housing.

Among the key aspects of the French policy that might be transferable to other countries and lessons learnt were:

- The starting point is **political willingness** to combat housing exclusion and precisely the substandard housing.
- There is a clear concern to **improve housing conditions throughout the EU**. However, national conditions, systems and starting points vary considerably.
- France's emphasis on the **preliminary mapping** of substandard housing was generally admired. Some peer countries felt that it could usefully be built into their own practice. One of the things really impressive in the French action plan is the detection phase – the moment when the attempt is made to identify whether substandard housing is present.
- The Danish system of **administrative registers** containing detailed information on all dwellings that is constantly updated (changes or renovations have to be notified by the owner) attracted attention.
- A **full legal toolkit** is needed to tackle substandard housing. In France, some existing laws were upgraded, and after that some additional ones were brought in to complete the legal toolkit for the ambitious but successful French programme. Naturally, the legal provisions then have to be implemented in practice. This is not always the case in some countries.
- A small set of **basic housing standards** is useful. However, these will vary from one country to another in line with differences in income levels and culture.
- The French policy contains a number of provisions aimed at supporting tenants that in the short term can be negatively affected by measures against substandard housing that could inspire other Member States (e.g. legal provisions aimed at safeguarding the tenant's interests in her/his contractual relationship with the landlady/landlord, the provision of temporary accommodation, suspension of rent

payments, counselling ...). If this kind of measures is to be fully effective it needs to be supported by the provision of adequate resources.

- **Public sector housing** has an important role to play in improving housing quality. While home ownership may be desirable in itself, it does not necessarily guarantee that owner-occupiers can afford to maintain the housing stock in good condition. This is particularly the case in the less prosperous EU countries.
- **EU partnerships to combat substandard housing.** During the Peer Review, the idea of establishing a European network on the substandard housing issue was discussed.
- As the present seminar concentrated on tackling the existing problem of substandard housing, a future meeting might focus on **prevention**.
- **Housing issues should be mainstreamed into social inclusion policy**, at the national and European levels. Housing is relevant to all social inclusion topics. Within the **EU social inclusion strategy**, housing could be a subject for special focus during one year.
- **Social inclusion concerns** should always be taken into consideration when decisions are made on housing policy issues.
- There is a need for tools to evaluate the economic, social and health effects of **public policy interventions on housing**. This is particularly the case for public subsidies paid to the private sector or private individuals. For example, subsidising the building work needed to enable elderly people to stay on for longer in their own homes can be expensive, but it produces savings elsewhere. **Evaluation tools** could usefully be developed at the European level.
- A good **social mix** in housing is vital. Ghettos, whether on the basis of income, class or ethnicity, are to be avoided. One policy tool for promoting a good mix is to ensure a wide geographical distribution of social housing.
- For environmental reasons, **sustainable housing** is now part of EU policy. It should be promoted at the national and local levels, but this involves human factors as well as technical ones.
- In many EU Member States a policy shift from demolition and new building to **housing remediation**, where possible (and it is not always possible), has taken place. This is for social reasons as well as economic ones. Europe's urban communities have developed over hundreds or even thousands of years. Preserving local identities and solidarities can lower crime rates, reduce isolation and promote social inclusion.

6. References

- The Lisbon European Council – an agenda of economic and social renewal for Europe: contribution to the special European Council in Lisbon, 23-24th March 2000, Brussels.
- The Lisbon Review 2006: Measuring Europe's Progress in Reform.
- Peer Review 2004, Spain, Asturias: "Municipal Programme of Shanty Towns Eradication in Avilés".
- Peer Review 2004, London, 5-7 September: "The Street Homeless".
- Peer Review 2005, Copenhagen, 26-27 April, "Preventing and Tackling homelessness"
- Peer Review 2006, Oslo, 5-7 September: "National Strategy to Prevent and Tackle Homelessness".
- European Housing Statistics (2004).
- Eurostat (2006).
- Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion (2007), EC – DGESAE0, unit E2.
- National Action Plan against Substandard Housing: French Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (Pôle National de lutte contre l'habitat indigne): Host country report, September 2007, Paris.
- Publications et travaux ou relatifs au plan d'action de lutte contre l'habitat indigne en France:
Tous les documents cités sont disponibles sur le site Internet:
<http://www2.logement.gouv.fr/actu/habitatindigne/default.htm>
- La politique de lutte contre l'habitat indigne: bilan 2004 et bilan 2005 avec cartes.
- Espaces/ DGUHC N°20 - Février 2004.
- La politique de lutte contre l'habitat indigne ; une enquête de terrain, lettre des études / DGUHC n° 34.
- Statements and Comments papers by Belgium, Denmark, Latvia, Luxemburg, Malta, Romania.
- Stakeholders Comments papers by Eurocities and FEANTSA.
- European Commission – Department of Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities: Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2007.

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/spsi/docs/social_inclusion/2006/joint_report_en.pdf.

- European Commission: Peer Review for Social Inclusion: <http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net/peer-reviews/2005/preventing-and-tackling-homelessness>
- Material deprivation in the EU: Statistics in focus: Population and Social Conditions, 21/2005. http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-NK-05-021/EN/KS-NK-05-021-EN.PDF
- Housing situation in Europe: CECODHAS report "Housing Europe 2007".