



LEGAL WORKSHOP: FIGHTING SLUM LANDLORDS IN THE EU

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Unfit Housing and Slum Landlords in Europe

LEARNING FROM DIFFERENT LEGISLATIONS TO
PROTECT VULNERABLE TENANTS

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Methodology of the Study

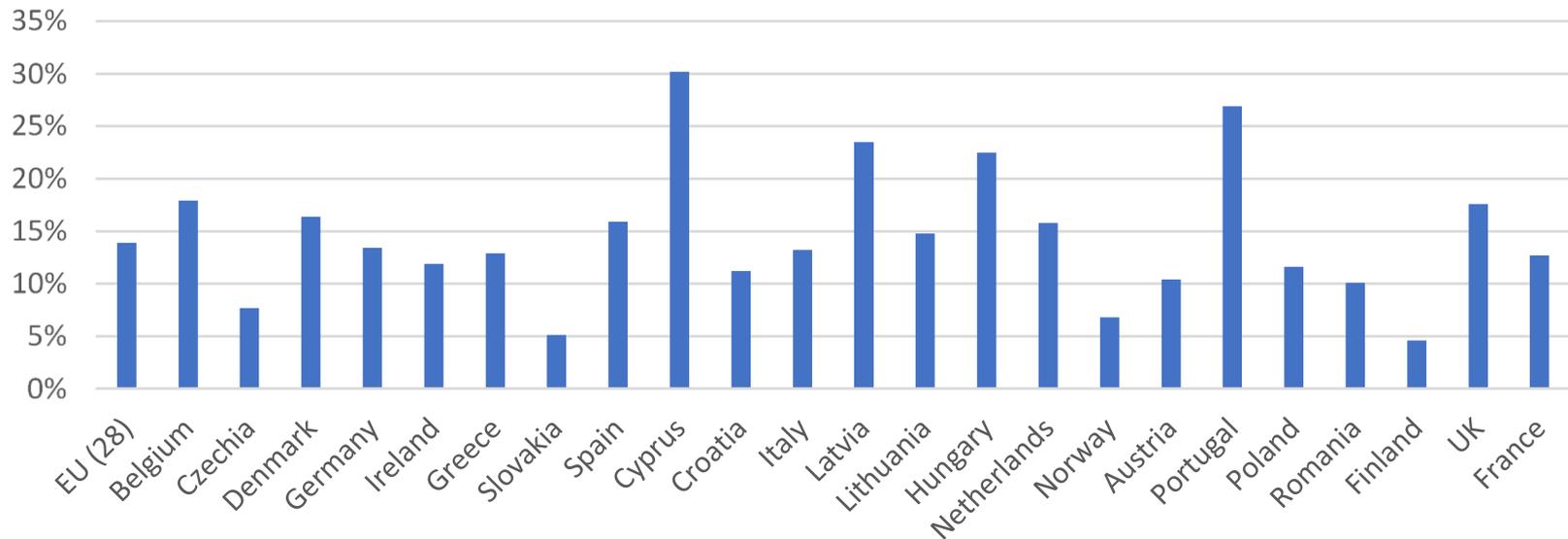
- Housing Rights Watch correspondents and wider FEANTSA network
 - In house job
- Information provided by them + desk research
- From 3 countries to 10 countries
- The element of “habitability” essential to the definition of “adequate housing”
- Unfit housing > tenancy law/ activity of slum landlords > criminal law
- Focus on stronger legislation to fight slum landlords (France, Belgium, The Netherlands, Ireland)
- Preliminary conclusions
- Recommendations EU MS & EU
 - “Renovation Wave”

Introduction

- **Private rented sector**, crucial element to provide accessible accommodation to households in Europe.
- Homes have been the centre of our lives during **the pandemic**
- For thousands, inadequate housing and cramped conditions have made **lockdown** unbearable.
- **Substandard housing issues** persist across Europe in the last decades.
(Overview of Housing Exclusion)
- In 2018 Cyprus, **Portugal**, Latvia and **Hungary** had the highest percentage of households living in substandard dwellings.
- **Housing deprivation** (EU SILC): house with a leaking roof, damp walls, floors or foundation or rot in window frames or floor.

Households living in severe housing deprivation

Population % living in a dwelling with a leaking roof, damp walls, floors or foundations or rot in window frames or floors - 2018



Slum landlords: concept

- “Slum landlords” or “rogue landlords”, also known as "*marchands de sommeil*" (literally: “sleep merchants”) in French-speaking countries.
- **Unscrupulous landlords taking advantage of a strained housing market to exploit the most vulnerable and who fail to fulfil their obligations to keep dwellings fit for human habitation.**
- Definition by Michel Vols and Alex Belloir: slum landlords exploit tenants, discriminate, rent substandard housing, use property for illegal activities and evade taxes.
- Main goal: look at legislations that could be seen as good practices to tackle slum landlords and specific examples.

Preliminary Conclusions

- Unsafe and unhealthy housing is a problem in the private rental sector
- Existing regulations intended to protect tenants in many countries don't work.
- The private rented sector rely mainly on the regulation of the relationship between landlord and tenant (tenancy law/ agreements).
- Rental housing quality regulations rely on tenants reporting problems
 - power dynamics in the tenant/landlord relationship make it difficult
- Need for broader regulatory intervention to address the deficiencies of the contractual approach.

Preliminary Conclusions

- Vulnerable households at the ‘lower end’ of the private rented sector suffer the activity of unscrupulous landlords (Whether slum landlords, marchands du sommeil or “Exploitative rental housing and institutionalised accommodation” in Hungary)
- Big public concern as building have collapsed, big fires in France, Belgium, in UK “Grenfell tower”, for instance.
- The introduction of criminal/ administrative penalties is incipient and not widespread in Europe.
- Challenges in relation to reporting the activity of slum landlords and coordination of the actors involved remain an important issue.

Recommendations EU

- Recognise housing exclusion and housing quality as critical social issues in the EU. The **European Pillar of Social Rights** recognises this issue in Principle 19 on Housing and assistance for the homeless. EU policies must counter poor housing conditions and provide funding for the improvement of these buildings.
- Address substandard housing in the policies established to deliver the energy transition to mitigate climate change. The European Commission's "**Renovation Wave strategy**" has the goal of improving the energy performance and resource efficiency of buildings.
- **Consumer law must be brought into consideration** in issues associated with this regulatory framework. Empowering consumers and effectively protecting their safety and economic interests have become essential goals of EU policy and should be taken into account regarding vulnerable tenants in relation to their rented housing.