

# **Policy Paper: For the right to affordable rental housing**

**[A summarised version]**

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## 10 key points

1. The issue of access to affordable rental housing in Greece is currently emerging as one of the most central social issues requiring immediate intervention.

2. The particular, historically shaped, traits of housing and housing policy in Greece are often used as an excuse for the fact that there hasn't been a deeper and more essential relevant debate or policies focusing on the issue of rents. It seems like the issue of the rental housing sector and that of access to affordable rental housing remain "invisible".

3. The lack of public housing policy in Greece, unlike in other European countries, consists in the existence of zero social, public or non-profit affordable housing stock, the absence of a competent body assigned with handling all issues regarding housing policy and the absence of an institutional framework that would specify the constitutional imperative for the right to housing.

4. All the significant developments in the housing sector point to the fact that a large part of the population will depend on the private rental sector in order to obtain housing.

5. It is now clear that the policy of market liberalisation and the decrease in public investment in housing have led states to a dead end. EU recommendations and coordination efforts have intensified post-2020, and many European countries and cities are making significant public interventions to increase the supply of social and affordable housing.

6. In order for affordable rental housing policy to be effective and sustainable, public intervention needs to be activated on multiple fronts simultaneously, through a complex set of policies that would include

both direct and immediate measures, as well as medium-to-long-term policies to increase affordable housing, in the context of a comprehensive housing policy plan.

7. At an E.U. level, the need for rent control as a measure of direct intervention in rental markets with strong upward price trends is increasingly being reiterated.

8. The utilisation of the existing housing and vacant housing stock, owned by private individuals, social institutions and the wider public sector, potentially is a key pillar that could increase the supply of affordable social housing in the medium term.

9. At the same time, it is necessary to develop mechanisms, form alliances and partnerships, and equip state and municipal institutions in order to create, in the long run, a non-profit sector for social and affordable rental housing in Greece as well.

10. The increased citizens' awareness, the momentum of the public debate that is currently ongoing and communicated in the form of submissions of different policy proposals, the placement of housing right at the epicentre of the European Parliament's agenda and the availability of significant resources from the Recovery Fund as well as from other sources, are all opportunities that could be used in order to develop a comprehensive housing policy in Greece.

## Introduction

Since 2010, there has been a significant rise in real estate purchase and rental prices across Europe, with the main causes being the increase in speculative investment in real estate, the growing housing financialisation trends, the pressures due to tourist use of the existing housing stock, the decline in housing production during the recession and the limited role of public intervention. As a result, housing is emerging as a basic human need and an increasingly affected fundamental right, and, as such, it's turning into a crucial social and political stake for increasingly large segments of the population both in Greece as well as across Europe.

The present policy paper summarises the main points analysed in the more extended policy paper regarding the issue of access to Social and Affordable Rental Housing in Greece, which is currently emerging as one of the most crucial social issues requiring immediate intervention. Especially since the mid 2010's there has been a significant increase in the rental costs across the country, and this, combined with a rise in housing costs, stagnant low incomes and high levels of unemployment, as well as the degradation of the already inadequate social housing policies, makes this issue one of the most important ones that a large part of the population has to face.

**Our objective is for this policy paper to serve as a source of knowledge and to provide context for demands concerning the right to housing and the assertion of policies for the rental housing sector, thus aiming to activate political will as well as mobilise civil society.**

*At Eteron's website, there's an extended version of this paper (in Greek) available for anyone wishing to obtain a more in-depth overview of the particularities of the rental housing market in Greece, the most recent developments*

*that shape the framework within which the public debate on the issue is taking place and the relevant European efforts to address the problem as well as additional commentary on the policy proposals.*

## The rental sector in Greece

- Rental housing constitutes about 20.5% of the housing market nationwide, a percentage that is very close to the European average of 22.2%, while in large urban centres, this figure doubles.
- **79.2% (according to 2020 data) of tenants in Greece are overburdened by housing costs (the respective EU-27 average is 21.1%), compared to 19.90% of owner-occupiers.**
- Over the years, housing policy in Greece has had as its sole focus the indirect and direct support for access to low-cost owner-occupied housing. Policies relating to rental housing are limited to rent subsidisation, which was only implemented in 2019, and the minimum regulation of urban tenancies, while price controls have been abolished since the 1990s.
- In Greece, there is no social rental sector at all, i.e. housing owned by public, municipal and/or non-profit institutions, which is allocated according to specific criteria at below-market prices.
- Moreover, up until recently, there was no business activity set up when it came to rental housing and therefore, the owners of residential properties are mainly small landlords (natural persons) and overall rental property ownership is spatially and socially fragmented and dispersed.
- The supply of rental housing is limited, since it is a residual category depending on the production of new flats and the percentage of owner-occupation in new constructions.
- The main source of funding has been private capital, in the form of savings and sales of other assets or land swaps through the land-for-flats programme (a practice called “antiparochi”), while much less funds were made available through the financial sector and credit institutions, at least until the 1990s and in any case, at a significantly smaller percentage compared to international levels.
- The rental market has been described as partially commercialised because the assets are primarily used to cover the needs of the owners’ families and only secondarily for commercial purposes.
- The drop in real estate prices during the crisis, the shrinking of people’s incomes, household over-indebtedness and the increased cost of ownership are factors that have facilitated the recent shift of investment capitals towards residential properties, allowing for high resale values, along with the potential for higher returns from tourist exploitation of residential property through short-term leasing.

Public intervention in the rental sector balances between conflicting objectives related to the different interests of landlords and tenants, i.e. the conflict between the right to property ownership and the right to housing. On top of this, there is the contradiction between the perception of housing as an investment product and that of housing as an essential good. Thus, the public policy objectives become an even more complex goal, if we take into account the importance that investments in real estate (especially if it's foreign investment) and the income generated by the tourist exploitation of residential properties have for the Greek economy.

But is it possible to provide affordable rental housing within the context of the free market exclusively through activity driven by private (i.e. the owners', investors' and/or entrepreneurs') interests? The increased price trends, the excessive burdens that tenants have to bear, the deterioration of living conditions for a large part of the population and the limited supply of rental housing in many areas where there is demand, indicate the opposite.

In Greece, given the absence of a comprehensive governance framework regarding housing policy, the limited institutional memory (both at a legislative, financing and administrative level) and the general transformation of the constructions' sector as well as the destabilisation of the mechanisms that could

grant access to affordable housing and were used in previous years, one realises that the implementation of a comprehensive, coherent and long-term policy seems to be rather difficult.

Some of the necessary conditions for this to change are ensuring continuous political support, aiming for long-term policy planning and targeting, and backing up any effort with sufficient resources on a regular (and secure) basis. The housing issue in Greece requires interventions and the current conjuncture provides opportunities, as the issue is re-emerging in the public debate with a degree of urgency from many different angles, while at the same time, there is now significant gained European experience and available resources that could be used in this direction.

At a European level, the narrow targeting of housing policy focusing only on the most vulnerable groups and the most extreme cases of homelessness, which had prevailed in the previous decades, is strongly questioned. What's needed now is for public intervention to act as a counterbalance to market pressures in order to ensure access to secure and affordable housing for the general population as a whole.

<b>Essential measures according to EU policy papers and other international resources*</b>	<b>Indicative proven practices</b>
A modern current approach to monitoring and rent stabilisation measures that includes exceptions and exemptions.	Netherlands, The Hague - <a href="#">Points system for rent setting</a> Spain, Barcelona - <a href="#">Rental housing reference values</a>
Mediation services and incentives for landlords who keep their properties in the existing long-term rental market housing stock.	Spain, Barcelona - <a href="#">Rental Housing Pool</a> , France, Social Real estate agencies ( <a href="#">Agence Immobilière à Vocation Sociale - AIVS</a> )
Increase of the social and affordable housing stock through incentives for investors.	France - <a href="#">Affordable rental scheme</a> , Various countries - <a href="#">Incentives for affordable housing combined with funding for energy efficiency upgrades in the existing housing stock</a>
Construction of new social and affordable rental housing with the involvement of non-profit organisations and institutions.	Austria - <a href="#">Limited profit housing association</a> , Spain, Barcelona - <a href="#">Partnerships between the Municipality and Housing associations</a>
Mitigation of the negative impact the real estate market has on housing.	Spain, Barcelona - <a href="#">Special Tourist Accommodation Plan (PEUAT)</a> , Austria, Vienna - <a href="#">Amendments of laws and regulations regarding housing construction</a>
Renovation and energy efficiency upgrade of buildings in order to tackle energy poverty and to decrease the amount of energy that households need to spend.	Italy - <a href="#">tax deductions up to 110% for upgrade costs</a> , Germany, Berlin - <a href="#">Tenants' awareness and participation raising in issues relevant to energy upgrades</a> . Spain, Bilbao - <a href="#">setting up of one-stop-shops in various neighbourhoods in order to provide advice and support to the neighbourhood communities regarding integrated energy renovations</a>
Better protection of vulnerable groups and tenants	Germany - <a href="#">tenants' Association Mieterbund / Mietervereine</a> , Sweden - <a href="#">Swedish Tenants' Union</a> , Austria, Vienna - <a href="#">Centre for Secure Housing</a> , Spain, Barcelona - <a href="#">Metropolitan Housing Observatory</a>

\*European policy papers and international resources that were used as inspiration and as information sources containing the components for an integrated housing policy:

[European Pillar of Social Rights \(2017\)](#)

[The Housing Partnership Action Plan \(2018\)](#)

[Urban agenda for the EU \(2019\)](#)

In order for a social and affordable housing policy to be effective and sustainable, it is necessary to activate simultaneous public interventions on several fronts, through a comprehensive set of actions including both direct intervention measures as well as long-term guidelines within the framework of an integrated policy plan.

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[Access to decent and affordable housing for all](#) (European Parliament resolution, 2021)  
[Ethical Renting: Mobilise the private rental market to provide social solutions in Europe](#) (Feantsa, 2018)  
[Affordable Rental Housing: Making It Part of Europe's Recovery](#) (IMF, 2021)  
[#Housing2030 Effective policies for affordable housing in the UNECE region](#) (UNECE & Housing 2030, 2021)  
[Rethinking rent control in Europe](#) (joint webinar by Housing Rights Watch and the Housing Solutions platform, 2021)  
[Directives for the containment of housing financialisation](#) (the Shift, 2022)

## **Suggestions of public interventions regarding rental housing in Greece**

In Greece too, the answer to the question “what should be done” must include simultaneous interventions in many directions and levels. Next, we shall list and assess some public intervention and policy directions in more detail, as we believe that they should be discussed and implemented within the Greek framework, as part of a broader comprehensive housing policy.

The proposed interventions have different implementation timeframes, but work complementarily and form a comprehensive grid of actions aiming at the gradual development of an integrated institutional framework, mechanisms and policy tools that would ensure affordable and secure/stable rental housing in Greece. Some are more immediately implementable and contestable, others, more long-term; overall, the interventions should form part of a single policy plan for rental housing, something that appears to be particularly urgent nowadays. Briefly those are:

### **1. Rent Subsidy**

- 1A. Improve accessibility to the subsidy and revise eligibility criteria
- 1B. Increase the subsidy amount and allow for differentiations in the case of more vulnerable groups
- 1C. Link rent subsidies to other social and affordable rental housing and transitional supported housing policies

### **2. Rent control**

- 2A. The State should apply a rent appreciation ban and impose caps on new leases based on benchmark prices

- 2B. A list of reasonable rental prices per region should be established

- 2C. The policy should provide for a differentiated approach towards landlords based on their characteristics

### **3. Mitigation of the negative impact the real estate market has on housing**

- 3A. Short-term leasing regulation
- 3B. Control of investments and financialisation trends in the housing sector

### **4. Social and affordable housing in the existing housing stock**

- 4A. An affordable housing mechanism/ body
- 4B. A mediation mechanism/body
- 4C. Incentives for the landlords/ property owners

### **5. Increasing the social and supported rental housing stock**

- 5A. Setup of a specially designated framework for property production and distribution by non-profit bodies of the public sector and of social and solidarity economy
- 5B. Promote Public-Private Partnerships and public, social or third sector partnerships

### **6. Tenants’ protection and empowerment**

- 6A. Set up tenant support services
- 6B. Better rental sector monitoring
- 6C. Establishment of a framework that would allow for tenants’ and landlords’ consultation and participation

# 1. Rent Subsidy

## What's the current situation?

Rent subsidy is a key tool of housing policy. It is classified as a demand-side tool that is granted on an individual basis, it can be implemented at national or local level and is directly applicable. In Greece, it was actually implemented as a horizontal measure for the first time in 2019, while, before that, the Workers' Housing Organisation (OEK) was granting a rent subsidy from 2000 to 2012 but only to its beneficiaries.

## What can be done?

### A- Improve accessibility to the subsidy:

a) the revenue prerequisites' bar needs to be revised in view of the overall cost of decent living which is currently increasing, b) the horizontal application with cross-checks on declared income and assets creates a number of inequalities.

### B- Increase the amount:

a) the amount of the subsidy is very low in relation to the current level of rents and should be increased in order to really alleviate the excessive burden on households' income, b) when designing the rent subsidy it would be useful to incorporate data on the differences in rent costs in different geographical areas, so that the subsidy reflects market prices.

### C- Link rent subsidies to other social and affordable rental housing and transitional supported housing policies:

it could for example be applied in a differentiated way for groups with additional support needs such as single-parent families, young people, etc.

If not applied in conjunction with other

measures to a) contain costs (rent control, incentives for small landlords, etc.), and b) increase the supply of social and affordable housing (support for municipal, social and cooperative housing bodies), rent subsidisation cannot be very efficient on its own in the long term, unless it is integrated into a more comprehensive housing plan, while at the same time it absorbs significant public resources.

## 2. Rent control

### What's the current situation?

Rent control refers to a number of interventions in the private rental housing market, aiming mainly to mitigate the overwhelming increase in rents. The three main intervention methods are: a) imposing a rent cap in all new leases, b) controlling rent increases for lease renewals and c) control yearly appreciation rates for active leases. In Greece such measures have been implemented on different occasions, when said measures were deemed necessary due to “emergency situations”.

### What can be done?

A- The present situation of runaway inflation and the cost of living constitute an excessive burden on households' living costs. Under such circumstances, **a rent appreciation ban and the imposition of caps on new leases based on benchmark prices (e.g. based on a study of average prices from the e-leasing platform of the Independent Authority for Public Revenue - IAPR)** could be immediate but temporary interventions to contain prices, with continuous monitoring to avoid creating two-speed markets.

B- At the same time, the methodology and indicators required for **the establishment of a list of reasonable rental prices per region** according to dwelling characteristics need to be defined.

C- In any case, it is necessary and also crucial **to differentiate the approach towards landlords based on a number of criteria: type (natural person or legal entity, small landlords or large investor/ companies), income (different terms for small landlords with financial difficulties and others for high-income owners), the scale of the rent-**

**al housing stock they manage and the type of activity/use (primary residence, short-term rentals, serviced tourist rentals/luxury homes, etc.).**

In the long term, the aim is **to establish a stable framework for monitoring and controlling the rental housing market.**

According to international experience of this measure's implementation, the way to find a balance between its positive and negative aspects is to provide for exceptions to its application (e.g. in Barcelona exceptions have been made in the case of recently renovated or newly built properties, while in Greece exceptions were also made for new constructions during the rent control period in the 1980s), and to complement this measure with incentives and measures to support investments in social and affordable housing (tax exemption, funding for the construction of new affordable housing buildings, etc.).

## 3. Real estate market control

### 3.1 Short-term leasing regulation

#### What's the current situation?

All across Europe, several cities and countries have implemented a series of highly specific measures for the regulation of short-term leases, in addition to taxing them, which is the main aspect of their regulation in Greece as per the current Law 4472/2017. According to Law 4472/2017, any property made available for short-term rental through a digital platform (for a period of less than one year) does not constitute “tourist accommodation” but a new type of “urban property lease”. Moreover, the current law provides for the possibility of issuing a Joint Ministerial Decision (JMD), which may impose additional specific restrictions, similar to those existing in various EU cities. However, no such Decision has been issued to date.

#### What can be done?

A. Issue the Joint Ministerial Decision provided for by Law 4472/2017, according to which **for reasons related to the protection of the right to housing, it is possible to define certain geographical areas where there's intense touristic activity and restricted or limited long-term rental housing stock, in which stricter (and differentiated) restrictions on the availability of properties available for short term leasing shall apply, with the necessary adjustments to the relevant directives** in terms of:

a) the number of properties that can be made available for short-term leasing per TIN (the current Law provides for 2 properties per TIN), b) the number of days each property can be leased per calendar year (currently:

each property can be leased for a maximum of 90 days per calendar year or, in the case of islands with less than 10,000 inhabitants, 60 days per calendar year - still it's obvious that this restriction hasn't prevented the displacement of tenants) and c) the distinction between companies and small landlords.

B. Adopt measures to help **regulate the coexistence between permanent residents and the tourists who use the apartments, in buildings where there is short term rental activity.**

C. Design and implement **positive incentives for landlords to keep their properties in the long-term rental market (e.g. tax reduction etc.).**

D. **Continuous monitoring of short-term leases and control of real estate uses in different regions of the country.**

E. The above regulations should be integrated into a more comprehensive strategic plan not only for affordable housing but also for **sustainable tourism**, in order to avoid the phenomenon of “overtourism” that is already affecting parts of the country.

## 3.2 Control of investments and financialisation trends in the housing sector

### What's the current situation?

The rental housing market in Greece is currently undergoing critical changes related to the ever increasing activity of smaller and larger investment funds in the residential sector. The Greek housing market is exposed to globalised market trends in multiple ways. In addition to setting boundaries for institutional investors and banks, the challenge is to develop tools that would protect residential real estate from speculative practices.

### What can be done?

#### A- Adoption of measures to limit speculative investments in the residential sector.

Common practices in this direction are: special urban planning conditions for the development of new residential areas, high taxation of capital gains in buy-to-sell cases as a disincentive for short-term returns and increased taxation of rental profits. Another suggestion is to set minimum time limits for resales of residential properties and to prohibit the use of certain properties as short-term rentals.

#### B- The policies for attracting foreign investment in residential real estate in Greece

(e.g. Invest in Greece, golden visa) **should be revised** and special conditions and regulations should be imposed. More specifically, alongside the restrictions on the use of the short-term leasing framework for business activity discussed in the previous section, the implementation of the Golden Visa programme, the operation of real estate brokerage companies managing small and larger foreign investment funds, the extension in REITs' activity to include residential properties, and the way in which Loan and Credit

Claims Management Companies operate, should be reviewed.

C- The aim is to **limit short-term and opportunistic, "casino-type" investments in the housing sector** and to create a secure framework for lower return investments (which have so far been a feature of the Greek housing market), as well as for a stable long-term return on capital, where smaller investors, the public sector and the social and solidarity economy can operate. Positive tax incentives for institutional and other investors may encourage a shift towards that type of investments.

D- A prerequisite for the implementation of all the above is the **establishment of a mechanism that would ensure transparency while monitoring the activity of the different investment funds.**

The collection of information regarding transfers of residential real estate, purchase and sale prices, the buyers' profiles, rental prices and the actual use of the housing stock, is essential information that allows for meaningful monitoring and control of such practices.

## 4. Social and affordable housing in the existing housing stock

### What's the current situation?

Given the large existing housing and building stock in Greek cities, it is crucial to develop tools that would facilitate the conversion of houses and/or whole buildings, regardless of whether they belong to the State or to private individuals/ companies or whether they are currently inhabited by tenants or are vacant, in order to increase the supply of affordable rental housing.

There is a small number of already existing housing schemes that are using private rental houses - in collaboration with small landlords - such as Housing and Labour for the homeless, programmes supporting refugees and asylum seekers (such as ESTIA, HELIOS and the hosting facilities for unaccompanied minors) and housing schemes for the psychosocial rehabilitation and social reintegration of long-term psychiatric inmates (PSYCHARCOS). Many of those services and their beneficiaries are houses in buildings owned by public institutions.

### What can be done?

All social and affordable rental housing properties can eventually be made available for use through the same supply mechanisms:

**A. An affordable housing mechanism/ body** that manages (owned and/or rented) properties and makes them available to beneficiaries at low or zero rental cost (e.g. the way the ESTIA programme currently operates). This mechanism is best suited for vulnerable groups with great difficulty in committing to a stable rental contract even with a very low rental cost.

**B. A mediation mechanism/body**, which mediates between landlords and potential tenants by setting the conditions, in a way that's similar to the Social Rental Agency model. In this case, the property is rented directly by the tenants.

Regarding both the mechanisms/ bodies described above, it is important to implement incentives for the landlords/ property owners (such as the repairs/ refurbishment and management of their property), in order to entice them to participate in the aforementioned model that includes rents that are below market averages. Also, an effort should be made to secure programme partnerships with large landlords such as the public sector, banks, foundations, the Church etc.

At the same time, in order to successfully acquire and make good use of the properties that would participate in the scheme, there needs to be administrative infrastructure, institutional tools and adequate scientific staffing of the bodies that would undertake said tasks. When it comes to public real estate in particular, the establishment of a cartographic public property registry that would facilitate mapping and using the available properties in the best possible way in order to cover the existing needs is still pending. Lastly, when it comes to vacant and unknown owner's property or property that the owners are unable to use, a framework is pending that would allow for the use of said properties by public bodies in terms that would benefit society collectively.

In order to secure monetary resources and ensure the financial sustainability of this policy, different sources of funding would need to be guaranteed, including subsidies granted for property upgrades and refurbishments (e.g. funds available via the Energy Saving at Home programme and the Recovery Fund for renovations), and additional measures should be taken, such as the creation of

a link between this policy and rent subsidies, the establishment of a guarantee mechanism from the public body to landlords/landladies (that would provide guarantees that the properties are in good condition, that the rent is paid, and that the properties are insured) and a specific framework of tax incentives (e.g. reduction of Uniform Real Estate Property Tax - ENFIA, exemption or reduction of rental income tax, etc.). In order for any public investment to be deemed as viable, it is necessary to define the maximum rental prices that landlords can receive and the commitments that they need to make towards the programme (e.g. a minimum amount of time during which their properties will participate in the scheme). Similarly, there should be a framework of provisions and commitments towards tenants.

Lastly, within such programmes, a range of services is developed in order to ensure the most efficient mediation between landlords and tenants, such as legal counselling and aid, in case of legal disputes, technical support, conflict resolution, interpreting, personalised support services for vulnerable groups, etc.

## 5. Increasing the social and supported rental housing stock

### What's the current situation?

Social rental housing is the part of the housing stock that is made available at below-market prices and is distributed according to a set of predetermined rules rather than via the usual market channels and mechanisms. Recognising housing as a “Social Service of General Interest” will enable the use of all the tools available in the EU to use resources and state aid to produce and provide social and affordable rental housing outside the context of market competition.

Examples from across the world have shown that policies based on Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), without the formulation of a specific framework, usually fail to provide low-cost housing as they are burdened by the high profit margins of contractors. At the same time, operating a weak/underperforming social or affordable rental housing sector in a context dominated by the free market when it comes to housing and rent, increases costs, excessively depresses its viability and makes any regulatory intervention difficult.

### What can be done?

**A- Setup a specially designated framework for property production and distribution by non-profit bodies of the public sector and of social and solidarity economy.** In most European countries, the production as well as the management of social and affordable rental housing is done by cooperatives, housing associations and social housing developers, operating within a special limited or no profit framework. Said framework may include limits on the amount of profit that the organisations can have or restrictions on the profits' redistribution, special rates for construction, social clauses for construction or service providing regarding social and affordable rental housing etc.

**B- Promote Public-Private Partnerships and public, social or third sector partnerships.** In this case, it'd be useful to use the particular traits and advantages of the Greek experience to the policy's advantage, namely, the limited activity of large construction and financial capital, the dispersion of ownership and micro-entrepreneurship, the existence of dormant resources owned by institutions which, under certain conditions, can operate according to social criteria (e.g. church, foundations).

**C- Reinforce the technical and administrative capacity of the public sector** in order for

it to be able to produce social and affordable rental housing.

D- Push for the **use of a combination of European resources**, favourable lending from the European Investment Bank (EIB) or the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB), alongside the creation of specific financing funds for social and affordable rental housing and support for the development of the ethical and cooperative financial sector.

## 6. Tenants' protection and empowerment

### What's the current situation?

In Greece, tenants have very little/weak representation while at the same time there is a lack of tools and mechanisms for monitoring, documentation and intervention in the rental housing sector.

### What can be done?

A- **Improve rental sector monitoring by establishing a "Housing Observatory"** that would record: renting costs and their fluctuations, the percentage of rental properties per neighbourhood (or/and per apartment building), the dwellings' condition, property transfers and landlord types, changes in property use as well as incidents of complaints, lawsuits and evictions. Furthermore, it is necessary to establish fair rent indicators (even if not mandatorily implemented by law, it would serve as a benchmark that could influence market demands).

B- **Set up tenant support services** to raise awareness and provide information on the rights and obligations of tenants and landlords, establish minimum suitability standards for rental housing as well as control

and assessment bodies/ mechanisms. Another step towards that direction would be the creation of platforms where tenants and landlords can participate in the formulation and assessment of the institutional framework and policy tools that concern them. Additionally, another significant step would be the establishment of the "Tenants' Ombudsman" institution as well as the development of a household support programme, run by the local authorities, to provide emergency and temporary financial and counselling support to households in financial distress due to difficult circumstances (e.g. unemployment, health problems, etc.).

## Epilogue

The increase in rents and the difficulty to access affordable rental housing are emerging as key dimensions of the broader housing crisis and the exacerbation of housing insecurity in Greece. Rental housing is currently very expensive for an ever increasing share of the population, especially when taking into account the stagnating low incomes and high unemployment rates, as well as the current surge in the price of a multitude of basic goods. In fact, it seems that this problem is not one from which we can recover easily or in the near future, but the situation will rather worsen and persist at least until a coherent and decisive public intervention is formulated and implemented.

**The conditions that are necessary in order to achieve effective public interventions in the rental housing sector do not pre-exist in any country.** They are created as a result of strong political will, which sets up all the necessary administrative structures and control mechanisms and ensures that they operate continuously and with stable and substantial funding. **Today, an important opportunity is presented in Greece's case,** as the issue is becoming increasingly present in the public discourse, since housing-related problems have intensified, with the country's political forces putting forward proposals, even at the level of political announcements, while there are also consolidated collective demands from tenants, landlords and other interested and/or involved parties.

Some of the intervention proposals put forward in this policy paper are more mature, easily implementable, actionable and immediately effective, while others require more elaboration and specificity, as well as more time and resources before they can be implemented, but still cannot be absent from a more comprehensive housing plan. Rent subsidy, for example, is an already existing measure that supports tenants, which not only can be continued, but also has the potential

to be extended in order to support a wider range of beneficiaries and to cover, besides rent, broader housing costs. On the other hand, controlling and regulating rent prices is a proposal that requires specialisation adjustments in specific measures and, above all, a decisive clash with perceptions and interests that favour the market's self-regulation. Obviously, this applies even more so to the proposal to control and regulate the real estate market in general, as well as investments and housing financialisation.

One of the most important proposals that is widely accepted is the proposal to use vacant and rented buildings and apartments, both public and privately owned, as social and affordable housing. The recent experience of refugee housing has provided the public administration bodies involved with valuable know-how in terms of the development of tools and mechanisms that use housing from the rental market, but also buildings owned by public institutions, for the operation of hostels or the use of vacant buildings through movements' solidarity practices. The mobilisation of various levels of administration, especially municipalities, the participation and self-activity of parts of society and the overall experience gained can contribute to the development of a long-term framework for housing.

**The present Policy Paper's essential stance is that the "invisible hand of the market" cannot keep rent prices low and thus ensure access to decent and affordable rental housing for all.** Public interventions cannot be limited to emergency measures available to specific social groups, i.e. to the most financially deprived. **What is needed is a systematic, continuous and adequately funded public support policy, designed in a way to address broad population groups.**

In the same direction, instead of fragmentary

measures, there is a need for a comprehensive set of public interventions in the housing sector, both immediate and long-term. These policies should be combined with public interventions in other sectors, such as tourism and the broad spectrum of what we call economic development. Finally, a key prerequisite for an effective intervention in the rental housing sector is the allocation of responsibilities and the cooperation between all levels of government (from central to local), as well as the involvement of all interested parties in the planning process.

The above does not constitute a comprehensive strategy or a programme position paper on rental housing. The proposals included here should be seen as the foundation for more detailed processing and specification, which is, by all means, the objective of the clash of ideas in the context of the public debate that is currently taking place in Greece. An objective that we hope will eventually evolve into a coherent effort for access to affordable and quality rental housing. **Having as a clear aim to activate political will as well as civil society, this Policy Paper is addressed to all interested parties, in order for them to participate in the relevant discussion, while trying to develop and implement concrete proposals.**

# **Research ON ETERON**