

# Draft Speech on Housing

Across Europe, the housing sector is facing a number of problems. Changing demographics, pressures on public finances, and the inability to provide an adequate supply of affordable homes, have all combined to create a situation where governments are increasingly unable to satisfy the housing needs of their citizens. At the same time, people are confronted with a range of wider challenges that must be addressed. These include making sure that properties are energy efficient, and that the communities that they reside in are safe and fulfilling places in which to live.

Housing co-operatives have a key role to play in addressing these issues. Although they operate under many different models, they share a single, defining trait; they are jointly owned and controlled by their members, according to the principle of 'one member, one vote'. This means that they are better placed to operate in the interests of their tenants, and of the wider public. Unlike private landlords and developers, they do not measure their success solely by their profit margins, and so can place a greater emphasis on social value. This means they can afford to offer housing at lower costs than the rest of the market.

What's more, their democratic management structures give tenants the opportunity to shape where they live through collective decision making. This allows them to be more responsive to issues that most concern residents, either within the properties themselves, or in the wider community in which they are situated. It also protects tenants from the exploitative practices of rogue landlords.

Co-operatives are already significant players in housing markets across Europe. The sector generates an annual income of 22 billion Euros, and provides homes to 9 million people across the European Union. In Austria, long term state support has allowed the sector to prosper, and today, it is the EU's number one country for mutual housing, with one in six people living in a property built or managed by a co-operative.

The inability of people to control the processes that shape their lives, and the crisis in affordable housing are two of the major challenges that European countries currently face. Housing co-operatives can help address both these issues, by offering an alternative to the market that is both affordable, and empowers ordinary citizens at the same time.

A progressive legislative agenda should therefore aim to support and extend social housing initiatives, both by providing increased financial support, and by insisting on a minimum of tenant control in the management structures of state funded housing projects.

## Questions

- Aside from changing government policy, what actions can progressives take to expand housing co-operatives at a grassroots level?
- What can be done to increase participation by tenants in privately owned housing initiatives?
- What can be done to draw attention to the benefit of co-operative housing amongst the general public?

