

Housing

Cooperatives can provide affordable homes

What is the Issue?

- Across Europe, governments are increasingly facing large scale problems as their populations find it difficult to obtain access to quality, affordable housing
- Demographic changes have led to smaller households, and pressures on public finances, coupled with struggles ensuring that the private sector provides an adequate supply of inexpensive homes, have meant that governments have been unable to satisfy the housing needs of their citizens
- At the same time, existing housing stock faces problems of its own, as action is required to make homes more efficient and sustainable to maintain, and improve conditions of the areas in which they reside

Why is this a problem?

- Unless steps are taken to alleviate the considerable pressures on housing, not only will many people, particularly from younger generations, find access to quality homes elusive, but the challenges that a lack of quality housing brings will only become more acute
- Steps need to be taken to improve access to good, environmentally friendly housing which does not place unbearable strains on tenant's personal finances

How can a Cooperative approach help?

- Housing cooperatives represent a path to more affordable and sustainable homes that empower residents by giving them the power to control decisions over where they live
- There are a diverse range of cooperative models across Europe, but they are united by their emphasis on joint ownership and democratic decision making by their tenants on the principles of one member, one vote
- This means that they operate not just to the benefit of their membership, but to the general public as well
- Their interest in the needs of people over profit maximisation is a cooperative principle that is of relevance to the housing market, as it allows them to offer a viable sourcing of affordable homes to those who would otherwise struggle to obtain it, as well as improving communities along the way
- Because of this, cooperatives have a key role to play in resolving the housing problems that exist across Europe
- Indeed, the cooperative housing sector already supplies more than 9 million Europeans with homes
- In Austria, as a result of the long-term support that the government has provided to the sector, they provide housing to 1 in 6 people
- In Sweden, extreme housing shortages led to the growth of cooperatives with the help of HSB Riksförbund, an organisation founded by a large number of small, locally based tenant organisations, which provides management services to the groups under its umbrella, as well as helping to maintain close ties between the numerous independent organisations in the sector, which is now the second largest in Europe

