EUROPEAN RESPONSIBLE HOUSING STAKEHOLDER FORUM REPORT

This report aims at presenting the main recommendations of the European Responsible Housing Stakeholder Forum on the promotion and development of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and stakeholder engagement in the housing sector in Europe. These recommendations result from the Forum's activity in 2013 and 2014.

The European Responsible Housing Stakeholder Forum was set up as part of the European Responsible Housing Initiative (ERHIN). Led by DELPHIS (association gathering 26 non-profit social housing companies in France), Housing Europe (European federation for public, cooperative and social housing) and the International Union of Tenants (IUT), and co-funded by the European Commission, ERHIN aims at developing CSR in the public, cooperative and social housing sector in Europe.

Content

FORUM'S COMPOSITION AND ACTIVITY

- ## Forum's composition:

Chaired by the International Union of Tenants (IUT), the Forum gathered representatives of social and affordable housing stakeholders, including:

- *Tenants* through the IUT and four national members, i.e. Deutscher Mieterbund (Germany), Confédération Nationale du Logement (France), Lejernes Lands Organisation (Denmark), and Nederlandse Woonbond (Netherlands). While the IUT ensured tenants representativeness on supranational level, its members provided inputs and visions from different national contexts.
- The Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union (COFACE) representing the vision of families from its member countries – both on housing, non-discrimination and employment (reconciling work and family life) ;
- *Workers and employees* – represented by SOLIDAR, a European network of NGOs working, amongst other issues, on social inclusion, decent work and social justice;
- *Professionals of the property sector* – represented by RICS, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors;
- *Public authorities/ bodies* – the City of Vienna, as a EUROCITIES' member and the biggest social housing provider in the EU
- *Financing institutions* – the European Investment Bank (EIB)

- ## Forum's activity in 2013 and 2014:

Two high level meetings and two one-day working group meetings[1] were held between November 2013 and October 2014. They were hosted in regional, community or municipal representations, mentioned below:

- City of Vienna Liaison Office to the EU
- Hanse Office (Hamburg and Schleswig-Holstein Liaison Office to the EU)
- Brussels Office of the German speaking community in Belgium
- North Rhine-Westphalia Representation to the EU

The first High Level meeting aimed at introducing the Stakeholder forum members and exchanging views and expectations towards Responsible Housing and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), so as to set the frame for a common vision of CSR, as applied to the social housing sector, and to outline the main challenges and opportunities for the uptake and spread of CSR within the sector. In addition to the Forum members, the CEEP - the European Centre of Employers and Enterprises providing Public services, which developed its own CSR label -, the Council of Europe Bank and the Deutsche Bauindustrie also took part in this meeting, to share their view and experience on CSR. Ms Susan Bird also invited to present the European Commission's CSR definition and strategy.

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[1] For availability issues, the four working groups meetings planned were concentrated in two days.

The working group meetings focused on two different perspectives:
- a "political and institutional" perspective: defining a shared position and framework for CSR in the sector, so as to set and promote a common vision. This resulted in the European Declaration on Responsible Housing and the Responsible Housing CSR Code of Conduct;
- an "operational" perspective: identifying key criteria for CSR implementation, through the analysis of housing providers' concrete CSR practices (in the frame of the European Responsible Housing Awards).

The second High Level meeting was merged with ERHIN's final event on October 6, 2014, as an open meeting to officially endorse and present the key outcomes of the Stakeholder Forum. The final event on International Tenant's Day gathered 168 participants; housing providers, tenant unions, key-stakeholders from the European and international level as well as political representatives. Members of the stakeholder forum actively participated in panel debates and in the awards ceremony.

These physical meetings were complemented by **email exchanges and bilateral exchange**s between IUT, as the Chair, and other forum members.

A COMMON VISION OF CSR FOR THE HOUSING SECTOR

The Forum members agreed on a common definition of **Responsible housing**:
"Responsible housing" is a form of fair and ethical housing production and management which improves the economic and social conditions of local communities.

Housing providers' CSR contributes to responsible housing. But responsible housing can only be achieved through a joint involvement of all concerned stakeholders, including tenants/residents and their representatives, municipalities, public authorities, funding institutions, non-profit associations and third sector organisations, suppliers, etc.

• CSR Principles

Forum members agreed on the following principles on CSR in the housing sector:
- Social housing providers have a **particular responsibility toward society as a whole;**
- The responsibility is **not only in the product delivered, but also in the process behind it**;
- CSR should **be fully embedded in the organisation's strategy and daily practices**;
- CSR is about **ethics and creating shared value**;
- CSR entails **a shift from a self-centred approach to an open one**, which means trying to identify needs through the effective involvement of stakeholders; in the social housing sector this means **improving the way providers relate with stakeholders (and tenants in particular) and work with them**;
- CSR helps **improve the quality of relations and cooperation**, as it is based on **a voluntary commitment** and leads to the development of fairer contractual relations;
- CSR allows the involved parties to go **beyond the legal framework, in the common interest**.

- **Key issues and challenges in the housing sector**

Throughout the meetings' discussions, the following key CSR dimensions were identified: local social sustainability; environmental sustainability; economic sustainability and responsibility; governance and fair relations with stakeholders; responsible human resources management.

The Forum members provided detailed inputs on key issues and challenges, summarised below.

Key CSR dimensions	Key issues and challenges
Local social sustainability	- security of tenure (fair and safe tenancy agreements); - investment vs. speculation: investment in housing shall not be a speculation means; no sale of the public housing stock because of tight budgets - quality of housing stock and well-being; scarcity should not be abused of to provide substandard, unhealthy housing conditions; - need of a social rent law, protection against eviction - involvement in the community and collective spaces (scope not limited to housing provision); - cooperation with local authorities (mixed neighbourhoods to avoid segregation); - labour market; need for mobility of workers
Environmental sustainability	- green infrastructure and common green spaces; - housing costs guarantee (refurbishment costs passed on the rents shall not result in welfare losses for the tenants)
Economic sustainability and responsibility	- minimize housing costs; - enlarge the not for profit housing sector ; - sustainable long-term investment; - reinvestment of profits in the estates; - responsible procurement practice; - access to funding, through alternative funding and creating new funding sources; state aid rules shall not hamper investment in affordable not for profit housing; - supporting especially the local economy through partnerships, research and innovation, and through housing for employees and workers
Good governance and fair relations with stakeholders	- tenants participation and co-determination; - improving knowledge and information of tenants and stakeholders (training, advice); - accountability and demonstration of impact to society; - transparency of decisions; - quality of participation and engagement
Responsible human resources management	- training and lifelong learning opportunities; - better management skills for housing associations; - diversity and men/women equality; - reconciling work with family life; - opportunities for people with disabilities and older employees

These points formed the basis for the **European Declaration on Responsible Housing** and the **Responsible Housing CSR Code of Conduct**.

They also provided valuable inputs for **Housing Europe's Responsible Housing Roadmap for CSR development.**

- **Criteria for CSR implementation**

The Stakeholder Forum was the Jury of the first European Responsible Housing Awards, and, as such, agreed on key criteria for CSR implementation by housing providers.

The Forum first used five general criteria, in line with the priorities outlined in the Responsible Housing Roadmap for CSR development. These criteria highlight key conditions for CSR implementation:

- **Stakeholder dialogue and partnership**: involvement of stakeholders in CSR practice's design and implementation
- **Awareness-raising and leadership**: contribution to the understanding and promotion of CSR, responsible housing and sustainable development
- **Transparency and accountability** on commitments, actions and results
- **Well-defined operational implementation**, through the use and/or development of tools and processes, to enable replication over time;
- **Assessment of the shared value created** for the organisation and its stakeholders: impact assessment, to evaluate and demonstrate actual benefits and identify opportunities for improvement

In addition, other criteria were identified during the selection process:

- **Scale and durability :** CSR should aim at long-lasting changes and impacts, through large-scale and/or replicable projects and practices
- **Link with the company's core mission (i.e. housing):** CSR is about how the organisation fulfils its activities; it should therefore relates / contribute to its mission.
- **Answering real needs:** CSR practices and projects should aim to address identified, concrete needs and issues (observed by the organisation and/or expressed by its stakeholders).
- **Focus on neighbourhoods' and target groups' needs:** public, cooperative and social housing providers' primary impact is on tenants/residents and communities, which besides often face higher vulnerability. Their CSR should therefore focus first on these local needs and issues.

Concrete examples of CSR implementation have been gathered in the **Awards' handbook**, on the Responsible Housing website and the Responsible Housing Roadmap for CSR development.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Key recommendations for responsible housing policies**

- **Affordable housing for low and medium income households** creates the basis for inclusive communities.
- Public policies should provide incentives for **all forms of housing tenures**, as a precondition for the development of responsible housing policies.
- **Social and public housing is a key condition to fulfil Europe 2020's objectives** of poverty alleviation and social inclusion, therefore the existing stock should be safeguarded rather then sold. It is easier to develop CSR practices and responsible housing policies with housing providers that manage a significant number of dwellings, than with small, individual, and often non-professional landlords. There is **a rationale to support community-oriented projects** (e.g. playground building; green public spaces; training and employment schemes; community centres etc.) because they enhance the value of housing estates and districts' attractiveness by improving neighbourhoods and quality of life.

- **Key recommendations for CSR development**

- There is a clear **need of information and support for CSR implementation** and further development within the sector and in general as well.
- **Housing providers and tenants representatives should work together to facilitate tenants/residents involvement**. Tenants' empowerment is the first step towards increased participation and "residential democracy".
- **There is a need to better demonstrate the added value of CSR and investment in community and neighbourhood projects**. Demonstrating social impact is crucial for housing providers, especially in times of severe economic constraints. This would help raising funds from public and private actors as well as improving the providers' services for their current and future residents. **CSR does not only concern public, cooperative and social housing providers: it also – and perhaps mainly – needs to be promoted and developed in the for-profit sector**, where big companies should commit at least to some minimum standards.

- **Key recommendations for stakeholder dialogue and engagement**

Engagement of, and cooperation with stakeholders – tenants/residents, public authorities, suppliers, staff, local organisations, etc. – enhance CSR practices' relevance, results and efficiency. It enables to better identify needs and rely on existing expertise and resources.

Effective stakeholder involvement and cooperation requires certain conditions:
- **Opportunities, support and means for engagement/cooperation** should be provided by the housing provider.
- **Clear roles and responsibilities** of all involved parties should be defined and ideally formalised through agreements
- **Capacity building** (awareness-raising and training) **and adequate means and resources** should be provided to ensure that stakeholders have the capacity to get involved.

CONTINUATION OF THE EUROPEAN RESPONSIBLE HOUSING FORUM

The project's partners agreed on the need to continue the activities of the Forum after the end of the ERHIN project.

Building on the European Declaration, the Code of Conduct, the momentum and political support created by the International Tenants Day & Responsible Housing Conference, the **objective is to expand and develop the European Responsible Housing Initiative into a sustainable network and scheme**.

- **Proposed key goals for the European Responsible Housing Initiative:**

- **promote a common vision of housing and CSR** at European and national levels, based on a shared analysis of issues and challenges;

- **enable innovation and exchanges on practical solutions**, at European, national or local levels, through experience-sharing, experimentation, collection and dissemination of "good practices".

- **Proposed activities**

- **Promotion and monitoring of the European Declaration and Code of Conduct**: the first objective is to reach a "critical mass" in order to engage as many organisations as possible. To this end:
  - The partners will set up a process for reaching a high number of signatures and monitor follow up of the documents
  - Stakeholder Forum members will promote the documents in their respective networks
  - A monitoring meeting will be held towards the end of 2015, to discuss the uptake, spread and implementation of the European Declaration and Code of Conduct, and decide on future actions
  - The Forum intends to meet at least once a year

- **Conference**: a yearly/biennial conference will be organised to check the progress of responsible housing in Europe, showcase best practices in the housing sector and collect views from different stakeholders.

- European Responsible Housing Awards and Handbook

- **Online forum/ network:** establish for example a "LinkedIn Group" for interested organisations, to facilitate sharing of practices, dissemination of reports, position papers, etc.

- **Means / funding**

As a precondition, external funding shall be raised in order to carry on activities such as the Responsible Housing Awards, the yearly/biennial conference, and to produce relevant publications such as the handbook of CSR practices for the sector.

The Brussels Representation of the City of Vienna offers to host future meetings or events.

The project partners will explore funding opportunities (in particular from organisations supporting the Declaration).

The Forum Members

The International Union of Tenants (IUT), represented by Barbara Steenbergen: Since its foundation in 1926, the IUT has been dedicated at safeguarding tenants' rights, as well as promoting construction and access to affordable rental housing. IUT promotes secure tenure and tenants' rights, which is not the case in many countries.

Lejernes Landsorganisation i Danmark (LLO), represented by Helene Toxvaerd: LLO is the Danish tenants national organization, founded in 1966. LLO defends tenants' interest in relation to landlords, government agencies and politicians.

Deutscher Mieterbund (DMB), represented by Heike Zuhse: Deutscher Mieterbund is the roof organisation of 15 state and 322 regional tenants associations in Germany, with more than 500 counseling centers. About 3 million tenants are members of a tenant association under DMB's roof.

Nederlandse Woonbond, represented by Ronald Paping: the Nederlandse Woonbond is the Dutch national organisation of tenants, representing over 1.5 million households. The Woonbond organises tenants mainly through its 548 member organisations and the residents' committees associated by them. Apart from them, there are over 6.000 individual members. The Woonbond defends tenants' rights, availability and affordability of rental dwellings.

La **Confédération Nationale du Logement** (CNL), represented by Eddie Jacquemart: the CNL is one of the five national tenants associations in France. Gathering 70 000 members, it advocates for access to decent housing for all and increased residents' empowerment through local participatory democracy.

Vienna House, represented by Michaela Kauer: Vienna House is the official Brussels liaison office of the city of Vienna. Its main tasks are to secure a lively exchange of information between Vienna and the EU institutions and to push for the interests of the city in the Brussels arena, thus supporting the general European policy of the city. Its staff is representing Vienna in different city and region networks, welcomes study groups and organises a variety of events, be they political or cultural, in order to present Vienna as a partner for all issues related to social, inclusive, smart cities and to convey a positive image of Vienna in Brussels

The Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union (COFACE), represented by Agnes Uhereczky: gathering 57 member organisations, COFACE is a pluralistic organisation, at the heart of civil society, which aims at promoting family policy, solidarity between generations and the interests of children within the European Union. It advocates a policy of non-discrimination and of equal opportunities between persons and between family forms, and specifically supports policies aiming at equality between women and men.

SOLIDAR, represented by Conny Reuter: SOLIDAR is a European network of 60 NGOs working to advance social justice in Europe and worldwide. The network is brought together by its shared values of solidarity, equality and participation. SOLIDAR was founded in 1948 to encourage international cooperation between social aid organisations connected to the labour movement. SOLIDAR voices the concerns of its member organisations to the EU and international institutions by carrying out active lobbying, project management and coordination, policy monitoring and awareness-raising across its different policy areas.

RICS, represented by Sander Scheurwater: Confidence through professional standards - The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) promotes and enforces the highest professional qualifications and standards in the development and management of land, real estate, construction and infrastructure. Our name promises the consistent delivery of standards – bringing confidence to the markets we serve.

The European Investment Bank (EIB), represented by Els Sweeney: The EIB is the European Union's bank. It is the only bank owned by and representing the interests of the European Union Member States. As the largest multilateral borrower and lender by volume, it provides finance and expertise for sound and sustainable investment projects which contribute to furthering EU policy objectives.

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European Responsible Housing Initiative