

# REPORT ON EXTRAORDINARY MEASURES IN HOUSING POLICY IN THE FACE OF THE COVID CRISIS19 (31/03/2020)

Cities and municipalities are making an enormous contribution in the current crisis situation. Here is an overview of specific housing response from Cities to address Covid-19 challenges.

*“Housing has become the front-line defense against the coronavirus. Home has rarely been more of a life or death situation.”* Leilani Farha, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing.

Cities were asked to come back with their measures in six different areas, please fill in the form if your City has not do it yet. We will elaborate an updated report by late April with all your feedbacks:

## **1. Urgent short-term measures in the public housing sector (For example, freezing of rents, extraordinary resources for the homeless, coexistence protocols for residents of public housing)**

### Suspension of evictions

In Italy, all evictions have been suspended until June 30 (art. 103 Law 18 of March 17, 2020).

Also in Portugal evictions are suspended under Law n°1-A / 2020 of March 19. It also suspends the reporting of leases.

All evictions have been suspended by Wiener Wohnen, the Vienna public housing company (220,000 homes).

In the Belgian region of Flanders, the government will ban evictions as a result of the COVID crisis19.

The Dutch national government ordered to freeze evictions in the housing corporation sector and announced financial aid for tenants in financial problems.

### Rent payment

Barcelona will stop collecting rent from tenants in the public park (IMHAB) and the homes managed by the Public Intermediary Rental Programme and Hàbitat 3 (organization integrated by third sector entities like NGOs mostly, supported by the Municipality working in this area and Housing First), as well as

commercial spaces owned by the public, until July. The monthly payments for April, May and June will be paid pro rata over the following 18 months. Likewise, the City Council will allocate € 3.5 million to lower the fees for family units that have suffered significant reductions in their income as a result of the COVID19 crisis.

The Barcelona Metropolitan Area (IMPSOL) and the Generalitat of Catalonia (regional level) are taking similar measures. Likewise at Lisbon City Council.

In the Spanish region of Navarra, all those family units or people who are beneficiaries of housing subsidies as of March 31, 2020, the subsidy percentage provided by the public administration in all cases will be increased to 75% between April 1st and as of June 30<sup>th</sup>. On average, it usually ranges between 25% or even 50%. A petition has been raised by the Regional Government of Navarra to rental housing to establish moratoriums or suspension of the rest of the rental price to these families. Additionally, the planned rental aids that go beyond the protected rent have been expanded, the program targeting youth, *EmanZipa*, originally planned for young people has changed its conditions eliminating the age requirement and extending it to "all people who have been unemployed as of the dictates of the State of Alarm ". Another program, known as *DAVID* targeting low income family households has also been significantly modified. Eliminating two requirements: been registered for two years and having children. To have access to it, those interested must "have registered before the decree established on March 14 now.

The New York public housing company -NYCHA- will also provide a rent reduction to households that have seen their income decrease by more than 5% (Rent Hardship Program).

Vienna public housing company -Wiener Wohnen- has asked tenants who may have trouble paying their rent to contact them to assess a deferred payment of rent. The City Council continues providing rental support subsidies as well as for "special situations". Businesses located on the ground floors of municipal buildings will also benefit from reduced rents.

Ljubljana and Gothenburg, on the other hand, have no plans at the moment to change the conditions of their rentals in the public park.

### Increase homeless accommodation

Ghent intends to use dwellings for tourist use as accommodation for the homeless, as well as other dwellings to guarantee the quarantine of this population.

In Bologna they have extended the hours of accommodation for homeless people.

In Vienna, the basic needs of homeless people are met in all-day emergency accommodation or in the adapted operation of the day centers. The homeless accommodation will operate 24 hours a day and will not be asked to leave during the day.

France is extending the period of validity of the places allocated to the winter period until the end of May and is mobilizing hotel rooms for the homeless population. Paris has mobilized 14 gyms to host them and has increased the food distribution service.

Barcelona has reached an agreement with the employers of the Apartur tourist apartments to allocate 200 tourist apartments to expand the accommodation capacity of social services or equipment for homeless people if needed. The use of pensions as an emergency housing alternative is also being negotiated and so far it seems a more efficient and economic alternative. Likewise, a 6,000m<sup>2</sup> pavilion in the Fira Fair Complex that will be managed by the Military Emergency Unit and the Red Cross has been set up to accommodate homeless or residentially vulnerable population.

### Action protocols

The New York public housing company -NYCHA- has generated a series of guides for its tenants and their workers on the impact of COVID.19 The Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) has also developed specific dissemination materials.

The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development has produced a guide for assisted housing managers in the United States, which, although it does not offer additional resources, does adapt its protocols to facilitate the response to COVID19 by landlords and tenants. California has released a similar guide for homeless home managers.

In Berlin, 6 municipal housing companies (some 310,000 units) will have to adapt their regulations to protect tenants who fall behind in rent payments as a result of the COVID crisis19.

The Vienna public housing company -Wiener Wohnen- has closed all community spaces, outdoors and indoors, and asks to keep the safety distance between its tenants. All maintenance services (...) have been minimized and priority is given to emergencies. Likewise, the company has provided a 24-hour contact telephone number for its tenants.

The Ljubljana Public Housing Fund has generated a protocol of action for the tenants of the public park (social distancing measures, hygiene measures, regime of use of common spaces).

### Housing Quality Certificate

In the Spanish region of Navarra, the certificate of habitability of the works of promotion and protected rehabilitation has been extended until December 2020.

## 2. Urgent short-term measures in the private housing sector

**(for example, freezing of rents, relief, moratoriums or tax exemptions, access to financing with low interest rates, new lines of aid and subsidies)**

### Suspension of evictions

The Mayor of Los Angeles has introduced a moratorium on evictions for non-payment on tenants who are unable to pay as a result of COVID19 impact. Tenants will have 6 months to pay off their debts once the moratorium period ends.

In New York State, the Governor has introduced a 90-day moratorium on evictions on homes and business rentals. In Germany, a law is being currently discussed in the same line, which would be applicable between April 1 and September 30 (possibly extendable until July 31), but which in any case would not exempt tenants from paying their ex-post debts. At the US Federal level, a 60-day moratorium on foreclosures and evictions stemming from the COVID crisis19 has also been approved for state-owned homeowners' mortgages.

The Flemish government is also preparing legislation to prohibit evictions and to provide alternative housing if the original home does not meet habitability conditions. A crisis fund will be established to help municipalities to implement this measure.

In Vienna, Limited Profit Housing Associations have suspended evictions and offer their residents support in the form of socially adequate deferrals and instalments.

Germany will ban evictions between April 1 and September 30. In France the anti-eviction moratorium of the winter period has been extended.

### Rent payment

The German government has announced that it will introduce measures to protect tenants who are unable to pay rent as a result of the COVID crisis19.

In Austria, the reduction, in whole or in part, of rents is being currently under debate.

### Mortgage payment

Belgium is going to facilitate the delay in the payment of the mortgages without additional costs until September 30, fruit of a pact between the Minister of Finance, the National Bank of Belgium and the financial sector.

In Portugal the payment of bank benefits related to housing is suspended, by virtue of Law n°1-A / 2020 of March 19.

In Austria, banks are going to offer to defer repaying loans to individuals and businesses thanks to tax benefits and access to low-interest financing.

### Mobilization of private housing

The Barcelona City Council has called on homeowners for tourist uses, who may see their activity reduced as a result of the pandemic, to incorporate them into the Barcelona Social Rental Program, to make these homes available to citizens at affordable prices.

In Ljubljana there is a substitution of tourist apartments for medium and long-term rentals, which can contribute to facilitating access to housing at least in the short term.

### Tax payment

Bologna City Council has reduced and postponed the payment of fees for garbage collection until September, both for public and private housing.

In Belgium, the government has introduced a personalized plan for the payment of income tax, which will allow it to be adapted to the needs of people affected by COVID19 without assuming additional interest or costs.

### Inspection

In Ghent, quality controls will not be carried out except in situations where health and safety are at risk.

In France, the Social Housing Control Agency (Ancols) has suspended controls on affordable housing managers (HLM).

In New York, inspections have also been suspended for homes that are part of the rental assistance program.

## **3. Medium-term structural measures (for example, in public and affordable housing policies)**

In California, the construction of affordable housing is allowed during the coronavirus crisis despite having stopped most of the productive activity.

Ghent and Bologna are discussing possible measures, but have not yet taken any.

Vienna is reaffirmed in its housing model, in which 45% of the park stock is social or affordable.

In the Spanish region of Navarre, in the absence of a legal definition of large housing holders, the housing rental companies of social housing that grant a default without interest in the payment of the rent, or proceed to the total or partial cancellation of the amounts to paid by the tenants, may receive a rental subsidy corresponding to the month or months in question from the government to be established.

#### **4. Community support or mediation measures for social housing tenants and for other vulnerable groups such as the elderly, people with functional diversity or single-parent homes**

##### Community support

Ghent have developed a platform and all social housing tenants will receive a brochure on how to use it.

Bologna, since March 10<sup>th</sup> set up a telephone monitoring system has been activated by the City Council, municipal agencies, voluntary associations and cooperatives, to offer support to 2,500 people over the age of 75, especially vulnerable to COVID19; in addition 6,000 older people are already being assisted by social services. They have also introduced a free delivery service for home purchases.

Vienna continues with the support service for tenants in the public park as well as an eviction prevention service for tenants in the private park.

Barcelona has reinforced the municipal telephone monitoring service with 13 new professionals to guarantee care for users, most of them elderly and dependent. Likewise, the *Vincles* service which promotes social relations for older people living alone (with 2,400 users) will incorporate a health channel with medical and nursing personnel to report on COVID19. The Government of Catalonia will advance the payment of rental aid to people over 65 and women victims of gender violence, among other vulnerable groups.

##### Unemployment

In Belgium people who are temporarily unemployed as a result of COVID19 will have an automatic exemption from paying water, gas and electricity bills for 1 month.

## **5. How to maintain the services that are already provided to tenants during the**

### **COVID 19 crisis?**

In Ghent, everything non-urgent has been postponed and calls are made to use digital channels in all possible cases.

Bologna, customer service hours have been extended to avoid the concentration of people and online services are provided. Food delivery service is also guaranteed for tenants who need it.

Vienna is also prioritizing the use of telephone or online communications, although it has reinforced the teams that offer services to tenants in the social housing park and continues to provide face-to-face services to those who need it.

Barcelona has also maintained all its services, prioritizing telematic assistance.

## **6. What level (s) of government are responsible for implementing these types**

### **of measures? (Local, regional, state or EU)**

Vienna highlights the significance of the exclusion of spending limits imposed by the European Union to face the effects of COVID19, the Maastricht criteria continue to limit the ability of European countries to implement large investment projects, including those on housing. Reference is made in this regard to the conclusions and recommendations of the EU Partnership on Housing.

Ljubljana calls for greater cohesion at State and European level.

Barcelona calls that in the European Union stimulus plan to include a line of investment in rental housing both public and private.