

Ukraine's housing recovery forum – rebuilding a place to call home

Ukraine's Housing Recovery Forum on 15 February 2023 in the Netherlands brought together an audience of some 400 participants, live and online, including several ENHR members. Its aim was helping to define the contours of future housing and land policies needed to rebuild and reconstruct the housing stock and the built environment as a result of the war.

Housing stock tenure characteristics

The Ukraine housing regime after 1989 resulted in a homeownership housing society as a result of mass give away of houses and apartments, as was the case in many other East-European countries. Later on many others bought a house, even if it was not a suitable house. As a result, the social housing stock is heavily underdeveloped and hardly any social housing production has been taking place in the last decades and only a small private rental market exists.

“As a result of this situation the social housing and private rental stock are hardly options for refugee housing and are for sure no long-term option”, says UN International Organisation for Migration representative and Affordable Housing Program coordinator for Ukraine, Konrad Clos. Not many refugees can afford to buy a new house. All over Ukraine affordability problems rise for many households, not only for displaced persons. Many lost their jobs and savings have been used, according to Anastasia Bobrova from CEDOS. Banks don't provide loans these days.

Then there is the poor quality of the housing stock in general, especially the energy savings quality. As Krzysztof Gieruski of the European Commission Support Group for Ukraine states, Ukraine homes consume three time more energy compared to elsewhere in Europe. Huge energy subsidies were available for households but no renovation funds were installed to prevent this huge consumption. Although housing support focused mainly on homeowners even for them maintenance remained an unresolved problem.



Photo Julie Lawson presenting during the forum.

No comprehensive housing system

Over 320,000 houses have been destroyed or damaged as a result of the war, according to government figures dating from January 2023.

According to Ukraine New Housing Policy members Oleksandr Anisimov and Galyna Sukhomud local governments are not equipped for proper planning and land policy. Planning tools for redevelopment are outdated. Planning documents are not in place. On top of this they are lacking capacity to implement any planning for housing.

A comprehensive housing system (different forms of tenure, distinguish different groups with different needs, support for the most vulnerable households) does not exist. There is only a limited number of housing policy instruments available for rental, cooperative and social housing and only on a national level. Social economic data are lacking. As a result, housing needs are not reflected in any planning.

Possible solutions

How to solve the problem of rehousing owners and renters? Deputy minister for Communities, Territories and Infrastructure Development Oleksandra Azarkhina gave an overview of solutions that are being developed. Different compensation schemes for households have been installed. People can already send proof of damages using the government Diia app and apply for a voucher for buying a new home anywhere in Ukraine or for investments in new construction. 50 million dollar of arrested Russian capital in Ukraine will be used for this and also to attract investors. However, it has not been decided yet how to deal with totally destroyed cities. Based on his experience with affordable housing production before the war, Konrad Clos (Affordable Housing Program coordinator for Ukraine as part of the UN International Organisation for Migration), states that municipalities are not prepared to work with international organisations. There is a shortage of civil servants specialised in housing matters. Expertise from abroad is needed.

Next to that several presenters stress the need for municipal housing companies. These could provide non-profit rental housing. A social housing fund could finance this development and governments could step away from the all-encompassing focus on home ownership. Even better, an integral policy should ensure housing diversity, public space and social and public facilities. “We also need this policy as a basis for securing donor investments. We need to show we are able to invest properly”, says Anisimov.

Gieruski remains positive: “Lots of reforms have already been taking place before the war with help of the EU. Legislative frameworks have been set up, houses have been renovated, a process that’s continuing right now. People are even returning to their newly renovated houses.”

Housing needs are not reflected in any planning

Responding to the calls

“We need to act now as the losses of houses are huge” and “Rebuilding right now, not after the war”. How can ENHR follow-up these calls by Deputy minister Azarkhina and New Housing Policy’s Galyna Sukhomud and contribute to the reconstruction and improvement of the Ukraine housing stock and the repair of energy, water and heating supply facilities? Obviously this would be by supporting in research on household needs, data delivery, data interpretation, pointing out evidence-based best practices in renovation and reconstruction elsewhere in Europe, to name just a few actions. In short, on all fronts ENHR Working Groups are active: from collaborative housing to welfare policy and in supporting the Working Group (in progress) Crises, Conflict and Recovery.

Although a diversified team of presenters was present at the forum, much will also depend on the construction sector and building industry. Unfortunately, this sector was missing. Ukraine will be in long-term need of materials, equipment and a qualified workforce, all of which are much in demand in Europe as well.

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Draft Ukraine recovery plan (July 2022): https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-11/Draft%20Recovery%20Plan_construction-urban%20planning-modernization%20Ukraine.pdf
www.unun.nu

www.newhousingpolicy.com.ua/

Symposium slides and presentations: [Symposium: Ukraine’s housing recovery forum - rebuilding a place to call home | PBL Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving](#)