

Thank you for inviting me to speak at this conference, and thank you to all of my colleagues for letting us understand different perspectives on the issue of housing.

I will talk a bit about the situation in Sweden, with a particular focus on the city of Malmö where I am a member of the city council. The issue of housing policy is one of the “hottest” issues on the agenda right now, and my party, Vänsterpartiet/The Left party are struggling to convey residence as a human right.

Sweden is a very rich country, yet we have an increasing problem with homelessness and lack of affordable housing in many regions. Income inequality is relatively low in Sweden compared to the OECD average, but a rapid rise from the 1990s calls for new efforts to redefine and re-conquer equality once again. From the 1990s, top incomes have grown strongly, mainly as a result of increasing capital gains, lowered taxes for the richest and a redistribution of the Swedish welfare system. A redistribution that has struck hard on the working class, leaving many families in economic struggle and dependent on the minimum welfare benefits they're offered.

The difference in housing conditions between the rich and the poor is high in Sweden. We don't apply “social housing”, instead we have public housing “allmännyttan”. Municipalities have a responsibility to supply homes for everyone living there. In Malmö the average time on the waiting list for a rental apartment is about 3,5 years, in Stockholm it's about 8-12 years. The municipality-owned public housing has a responsibility to host everyone, regardless of your source of income, not making a difference between wage or welfare benefits. However, there is a large proportion of housing being owned by private companies, that pick and choose who will get to live in their apartments, premiering people with regular, relatively high wage.

Some municipalities take on a larger responsibility than others to build away the lack of housing. In Malmö for example, the social democratic and liberal ruling parties take great pride in the fact that a lot of housing actually are being built, but they do not take the responsibility of making sure people can afford to live there.

Malmö is a city marked by social and residential segregation, every third child is living in poverty and new numbers show that there is a large increase of homelessness among children - an increase of 26% since last year. The ruling parties in Malmö have embraced a neoliberal logic of the market - for example they wish to premiere people with steady income moving to Malmö by giving them priority in the municipal housing queue - but the market won't solve the lack of affordable housing nor does it care about homeless children.

The ability of finding a home you could actually afford has become a question of class, it is the size of your wallet and being well-connected in society that determines said ability. Discrimination and racism leads to more people being excluded from the right to housing. Three of four homeless individuals in Malmö have no social issues, other than the lack of residence. They don't have the means to live in the apartments offered in the housing market. The main reason for the issues of today is simply the lack of housing, mainly the lack of rental apartments with reasonable rent.

Vänsterpartiet/The Left Party considers the responsibility for the housing shortage must be borne jointly. In order to get more municipalities to take their responsibility and build the public, rental housing necessary, we want to:

- Insert a binding regional building plan that specifies how many rental units need to be built in a region. This is then distributed to the municipalities in the region. Thus, all municipalities in a region have the opportunity to take responsibility for the housing shortage.
- Give municipalities financial support to achieve the construction plan and build the rental apartments allocated to them: Raise and improve the investment support. Give more building bonus to the municipalities that build rental apartments.
- Give the state the right to impose on municipalities to build leaseholds according to the regional construction plan and introduce sanctions against those who wont.
- In Malmö we want the municipality to compete on more favorable terms by introducing a municipal construction company, making sure the much needed public housing is actually being built.

Another main issue right now is the question of how rents are set. Today they are negotiated by the Tenants Association (Hyresgästföreningen) and the private and public housing companies. The landlord can thus not put the rent unilaterally but must negotiate with the Tenants association.

The principal is equal rent for the same kind of apartment and the rent should be based on the utility value, that is, the standard and quality found in the apartment, the property and the area. Now, however, the Social Democratic Government wants to change this model, which is controlled by the parties, and give all power to the property owners and reduce the tenants' influence, by introducing market rents.

This would lead to heavily increased rents for everyone, since there would be no system of negotiation protecting the tenants against unreasonable rent increases.

Vänsterpartiet / The Left Party is the only party denying this model change. We see the risk of market rents leading to the development of social housing, even more segregation, lower purchasing power and increasing expenses for state and municipality in the form of housing allowance. The landlords would increase their profit, but for many young people it would be impossible to leave the family home, many families would not be able to afford staying in their home and it would be impossible for the homeless to ever get an apartment. We would not see an increase of rental apartments, though.

Everyone has the right to live in a good home to a reasonable price. Housing is a social right and it is up to the society to make sure that more tenancies are being built. The state needs to take more responsibility of financing this, and the municipalities need to take responsibility of providing affordable housing. Only through state and municipal housing and construction companies we can realise a housing policy where everyone is entitled to a home.