

Social Housing in Serbia and Europe: From its Beginning to the Present Day

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Social Housing – From a social need to an Urban Planning Category

Housing is more than just a roof over one's head..

Housing is a fundamental human need, but also a matter of public interest, social security and quality of life.

Housing encompasses more than the physical dwelling unit – it represents the spatial, economic, social and functional framework of the everyday lives of individuals and households.

Etymologically, the term social housing derives from the Latin word **socialis** (meaning social, communal, or relating to society and relationships between people) and the verb **to reside** (meaning to provide a place to live).

From this perspective, social housing may be understood **as any form of collective housing** or communal living, including multi-family housing, student dormitories, accommodation for single persons, military barracks, and similar facilities.

The Sustainable Urban Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia until 2030 defines social housing as publicly owned housing intended for rental and allocated to socially vulnerable households that are unable to meet their housing needs on the market.

How Did Social Housing Emerge?

19th Century – Industrialisation and Urbanisation

- Rapid urban growth led to overcrowding, poor sanitary conditions, inadequate infrastructure and rising housing costs.
- Housing was exclusively a private matter and became an area of public intervention.
- Housing cooperatives and non-profit organisations began to emerge, while governments started providing land, loans, subsidies, tax incentives and infrastructure.



Development of Social Housing in Europe

From Individual Buildings to Organised Housing Systems.

At the beginning of the 20th century, various models of public and non-profit housing development emerged.

A particularly significant example is “Red Vienna”, where approximately 60,000 housing units had been built by 1930.

Towards the end of the 20th century, housing policies shifted towards more market-oriented

Social housing increasingly came to be regarded as an integral part of urban planning and an instrument of housing and social policy, rather than merely housing construction for low-income populations.



Social and Socially Owned Housing in Serbia

Post-war Period – The State as a Key Actor in Housing Development

A system of publicly financed and subsidised housing construction was developed.

The state assumed multiple roles in the housing sector:

Planner + Investor + Financier + Owner + Manager

The Turning Point of the 1990s – Privatisation of the Housing Stock

From Socially Owned Housing to Predominantly Private Ownership.

- Privatisation led to the almost complete disappearance of the former socially owned housing stock.
- Today, the public housing stock is extremely limited, while certain publicly owned buildings remain unused or require substantial investment.
- The current Law on Housing and Building Maintenance introduces the concept of housing support.
  The focus shifts from the construction of housing units alone to enabling households to meet their housing needs in a sustainable manner.

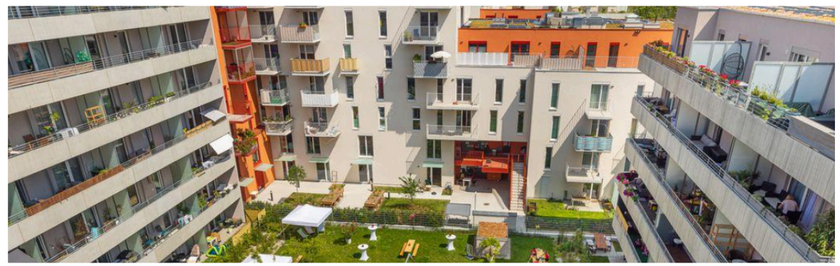


THREE CONCEPTS THAT SHOULD BE DISTINGUISHED

Criterion	Social Housing	Affordable Housing	Public Housing
Primary purpose	Meeting the housing needs of target groups	Reducing housing costs relative to income	Providing housing through the public sector
Beneficiaries	Primarily low-income households and vulnerable groups	Broader population: low- and middle-income households	Individuals meeting publicly established eligibility criteria
Price	Generally below market rates	May be below market rates	Generally subsidised
Ownership	Public, non-profit, cooperative or other	Public or private	Primarily national or local government
Allocation	Based on housing needs and eligibility criteria	May be market-based or targeted	Based on public eligibility criteria
Tenure	Rental is common but not the only possible form	Rental or ownership	Primarily rental
Public subsidies	Common	Possible but not essential	Generally a defining characteristic
Social function	Central	May be present	Central
Relationship with the market	Alternative or corrective mechanism to the market	Adapting market housing to household affordability	Public sector as a direct participant

These three concepts are not synonymous but overlap. Social housing is primarily a category of social policy, whereas affordable housing is defined by the economic accessibility of housing.

Potential Directions for Housing Development in Serbia



Financial Support for Households

- Financial assistance to help cover housing costs.

Activation of Existing Publicly Owned Buildings

- Vacant hotels, accommodation facilities for single persons, unused military barracks and other buildings.

Development of a Sustainable Public Housing Stock

- Construction of housing units whose rental revenues could finance new housing development and the maintenance of existing housing stock.

Improving the Quality of Housing Construction

- Better housing layouts and unit mix, higher comfort standards and improved construction quality control.

It is no longer enough for housing to be “affordable”; it must also be spatially integrated and functionally adequate.

Social housing is no longer viewed merely as housing for low-income populations, but as an instrument of inclusive urban development.

Social housing is becoming an integral part of the urban fabric and an instrument for achieving spatial, social and economic sustainability.



Thank you!

