

### **Transparency International Anti-Corruption Helpdesk Answer**

Housing policy: corruption risks and potential safeguards

Author: Kaunain Rahman, tihelpdesk@transparency.org

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Housing policy is in essence "the quantitative and qualitative provision of housing space" (BBSR 2022). As such, it encompasses a range of government actions from legislation to specific programmes that have an impact on housing supply, availability, and quality. There is a spectrum of housing policy instruments, from stimulative polices such as public sector housing construction and subsidies, to restrictive measures to regulate housing markets such as land use planning and fiscal controls (Shucksmith and Sturzaker 2012).

Bribery, conflict of interest, favouritism in allocation of housing, and procurement fraud, among others, tend to be the main corruption risks affecting housing policies. Mitigation measures for these range from establishing a detailed code of ethics, conducting regular audits, effective monitoring and the establishment of accessible grievance mechanisms.



## Query

Please provide details on corruption risks and safeguards in relation to housing policies.

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### Background

Housing policy is, in essence, "the quantitative and qualitative provision of housing space" (BBSR 2022). It focuses on how to make housing more accessible, affordable, and available to people from different social groups. While the core ideas behind housing policy remain universal, individual policies vary depending on factors such as countries' "historical evolution, local market structures, national regulatory framework, and funding policy measures" (BBSR 2022). For instance, while all European Union (EU) member states have established housing policies within their own domestic settings, "policies [between states] differ considerably" (BBSR 2022).

There is a spectrum of housing policy tools that can be deployed by governments to regulate housing markets, from "stimulating" on one end to "restrictive" on the other. The primary objective of strategies designed to stimulate residential building is to increase the supply of housing, in particular dwellings that are available at lower prices. This type of policy can cover the following instruments (Kholodilin 2022):

## Main points

- Housing policy refers to a range of government actions that typically seek to provide affordable and accessible housing to citizens.
- Corruption can distort the intended impact of housing policies, so that stated beneficiaries of government policies are not able to secure their human right to adequate housing.
- In many countries, social housing is a crucial pillar of housing policy, to provide adequate housing to those unable to afford market rates.
- This paper provides a tabular overview of key integrity risks in the four distinct phases in the provision of social housing (land acquisition; construction; allocation and managing contracts).
  - State aid in the form of construction subsidies and low or zero-interest loans
- State credit guarantees
- Tax and charge reductions (especially land stamp duty)

 Provision of land for construction of new housing stock at lower costs or long-term leasing

Restrictive tools of housing policy, on the other hand, can include instruments such as (Kholodilin 2022):

- Protection of tenants from eviction
- Rent control
- Housing rationing
- Tax treatment of homeownership
- Land use regulations
- · Banking regulations
- Environmental policies

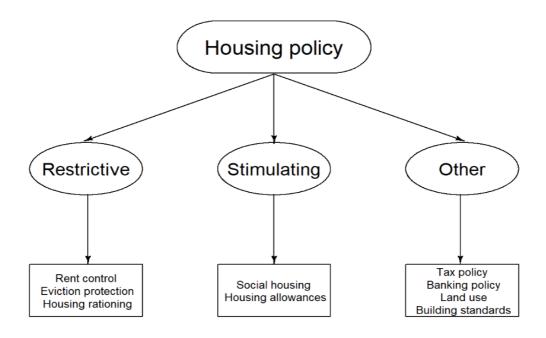


Figure 1: Housing policy tools: wide and narrow sense. Source: Kholodilin (2022)

Most EU member states utilise a combination of "housing subsidies, homeowner and homebuyer instruments, subsidised housing, and rent regulation" (BBSR 2021). In the provision of housing, the state can deploy a range of operational models. For instance, housing stock may be commissioned and constructed directly by governmental agencies, or indirectly by State Owned Enterprises (SOEs), Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), and through contracting to private players.

Moreover, decision making and responsibilities with regards to housing policies can be distributed across the national, regional and local levels (Krapp et al. 2020: 22-25).

The core objective of housing policy typically hinges on the delivery of affordable and accessible housing. To this end, there can be a number of actions or phases involved in operationalising housing policy. For instance, the common phases in the development of social housing are depicted in the infographic below (figure 2):

Process	Land Acquisition	Design & Approval	Construction	Occupancy	Management	Maintenance	Sale or renovation
Actions	Land acquisition	Site design Plan preparation Consultation Statutory planning process	Costing Tendering Site preparation Construction Certification	Marketing and allocation of available dwellings Fault fixing	Tenancy and asset management Support services, community linkages, place making	Accumulate reserves, sinking to fund Maintain and replace dwellings	Active asset management and update needs analysis
Expenditure and Income	Management costs, Market feasibility/ sensitivity analysis Loan repayments	Management costs Planning approval Financial and Real estate services fees Loan repayments	Management costs Construction costs Loan repayments Certification fees	Management costs Provision for repairs Loan repayments Tenant rents Operating subsidy Service fees	Management costs Provision for minor and major repairs Tenant rents Service fees Operating subsidies	Management costs and fees Provision for minor and major repairs Tenant rents Service fees Operating subsidies	Management costs and fees Real estate and sales costs Provision for minor repairs Tenant rents and services Operating subsidies Proceeds from sales
Financing (if required)	Development (construction) finance		Construction finance	Operational finance Refinancing development finance with lower cost long term bond finance		Sinking fund, surplus equity, receipts from sales and development finance	

Figure 2: Common phases in the development of social housing. Source: Lawson et al. (2018: 21)

### Corruption and housing policy

Corruption can have a significant impact on housing policy and result in the intended recipients not fully benefitting from policies intended to support them. For instance, there are reported cases in the US state of Washington in which affordable housing units are not actually allocated to low-income residents, but rather to affluent non-resident owners who sublet the apartments for profit (Ingalls 2018). This speaks to the need for robust oversight and means testing during the distribution of affordable social housing to tenants.

Other aspects of housing policy can also be affected by corruption. In Hawaii, for example, public officials were charged in a corruption scheme related to affordable housing. They had received bribes and kickbacks from developers in exchange for approving housing projects that allowed the developers to "fraudulently obtain at least [US] \$10,980,000 worth of land and excess affordable housing credits (AHCs)" (U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Hawaii 2022).

Corruption in the real estate sector affects affordable housing as a whole. For example, money laundering schemes that artificially inflate the sale price of property (often via opaque channels) in an attempt to "integrate ill-gotten gains in the legal economy" have knock-on effects in the real estate market, distorting prices and making housing unaffordable for common citizens (GIZ 2020). This phenomenon has been observed in European cities including Berlin and London (Penke 2020; GIZ 2020; Konotey-Ahulu 2020).

In recent years, with increasing housing prices, the main focus of housing policy in Europe has been on the provision of affordable housing. For instance, in the EU, house prices went up by 30.2% and rent prices increased by 14.8% in the last ten years (Housing Europe 2021: 19).

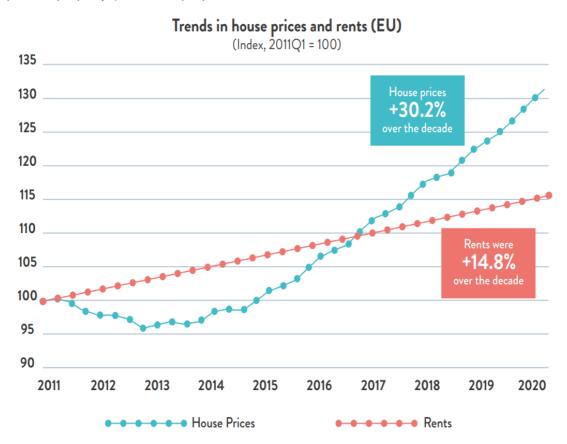


Figure 3: Trends in house prices and rents (EU). Source: Housing Europe (2021: 19).

"Unmet housing needs" across Europe are set to grow (Housing Europe 2021: 19). As a result, "the sector has been striving to keep supplying new housing whilst also renovating the existing stock" (Housing Europe 2021: 22). In such a context, this paper focuses on potential corruption risks in the

provision of social housing. Social housing can be defined as "residential rental accommodation provided at sub-market prices that is targeted and allocated according to specific rules, such as identified need or waiting lists" (OECD 2020: 3).

It is known as social or subsidised housing (Australia, Canada, Germany and the United Kingdom), public housing (Australia, United States), council housing (United Kingdom) or general housing (Denmark), among others (OECD 2020: 3)

COUNTRY	TOTAL PRESENT UNMET HOUSING NEED	OF WHICH: TOTAL UNMET SOCIAL & AFFORDABLE HOUSING NEED	AVERAGE ANNUAL DELIVERY (2017-2019) New homes New social housing	MAIN ISSUES DRIVING UNMET NEED
ENGLAND	Around <b>3.5 million</b> households have some form of unmet housing need	Around <b>1.6 million</b>	169,000	Insufficient supply     High volume of young people still living with their parents     Strong population growth
GERMANY	Roughly 1 million homes	At least <b>225,000</b> units	288,000	Strong population growth     Insufficient supply     'Secular shrinkage' of the social housing sector
IRELAND	At least <b>165,000</b>	At least <b>80,000</b>	17,800 7,500	Consistent shortfall in new construction compared to underlying need High volume of young people still living with their parents Insufficient supply of new social housing
LUXEMBOURG	Difficult to estimate due to high volume of cross- border workers - <b>35,000</b> - unit shortfall in recent years	Difficult to estimate due to high volume of cross-border workers – <b>c.6,000</b> on official waiting lists	4,050	Strong population & economic growth     Insufficient new supply
NETHERLANDS	331,000	At least <b>110,000</b>	67,000 20,135	Strong population growth     Insufficient supply
SLOVENIA	No reliable estimates available	Around <b>10,000</b>	3,165	Insufficient supply in urban areas     Internal migration related to economic pull factors (i.e. rural to urban)

Figure 4: Housing Europe estimates of unmet housing needs, based on information obtained from 'The State of Housing in Europe' questionnaire, November 2020- January 2021. Source: Housing Europe (2021: 20).

## Overview of integrity risks in the provision of social housing

The following section discusses the relevant processes, actors, corruption risks and potential safeguards/standards across the four main elements of supplying housing: land acquisition, the construction of new housing, distribution systems and the management of contractual relationships with beneficiaries.

The information presented here is meant to be illustrative and not exhaustive.

## Land acquisition

Relevant process	Relevant actors	Potential corruption risks	Relevant standards/safeguards
Selecting land to acquire (GAO 2019)	Landowners, as well as nationally specific public authorities. In Germany, for instance, national, regional and local bodies play a role in housing policy, but local municipalities are tasked with land use planning (Krapp et al. 2020: 25; Crook 2018: 8-12)	Undue influence; Conflict of interest;	Ensure the capacity and accountability of local and regional governments (UN Human Rights Council 2020: 15). See the Guidelines for the Implementation of the Right to Adequate Housing (2020), particularly Guideline 3 "Ensure meaningful participation in the design, implementation and monitoring of housing policies and decisions."  Identify and properly manage conflict of interest (IBAC 2022). See: Corruption risks in the social housing sector (2022)  Development and use of land use handbook for housing programmes (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government 2020). See: Public Land for Housing Programme 2015 – 2020 (2020)  Land use planning needs to balance public and private interests

			(OECD 2017: 4). See: The Governance of Land Use (2017).
Land surveys to mark, measure and plan (Karmakar 2022)	Land surveyors (public officials or private contractors); Land Economist/Estate Manager; Architects/other Related Professionals (Dudek 2022; Morgan, Kwofie and Afranie 2013: 10)	Undue influence; Fraudulent land assessments	Independent audits of land surveyors, and public reviews of draft, approved and actual compensation plans by independent committees (Wheatland 2016: 7). See:  Corruption risks and mitigation measures in land administration (2016)
Environmental Impact Assessment – (EIA) (World Bank 2020)	Public authorities responsible for assessments (Lead Agency); third party contractors (including lawyers, scientists, engineers); intended beneficiaries (REMA n.d.: 2; Middleton 2021)	Bribery; Extortion; Kickbacks; Fraudulent/ manipulated data collection and presentation	Improving the following (Williams and Dupuy 2016: 13,14):  - technical training of private EIA experts and provide them with specific anticorruption training; - accountability and sanctions regime for EIAs - enhancing public information provision - sanctions of experts for submissions of consistently poor EIAs - appeal systems and grievance mechanisms  See: Deciding over nature: Corruption and environmental impact assessments (2016)
Property appraisal and just negotiation	Purchasing authority; land seller; valuation officials	Bribes, extortion, kickbacks to either undervalue land (for the benefit of	Ensuring fair land estimations (Eurostat-OECD 2015). See:

of purchase price (GSA n.d.: 6)		developers) or overvalue land (for officials to gain extra from the deal)	Eurostat-OECD compilation guide on land estimation (2015)
Purchasing land from landowner (GAO 2019)	Purchasing authority; land seller; banks;	Embezzlement of public housing funds during sale;	Implementing an integrity framework for managing all public investments, which includes measures for identifying and mitigating corruption risks as well as strengthening monitoring and control (OECD 2016a). See: Integrity Framework for Public Infrastructure (2016).

Construction of new housing

Relevant process	Relevant actors	Potential corruption risks	Relevant standards/safeguards
Developing a Request for Proposals (RFP) and selecting a developer (Housing Toolbox 2022)	Housing authority; developers	Collusion; bid-rigging; undue influence; bribery; conflict of interest; favouritism; favours during procurement processes, including gifts, benefits and hospitality.	Putting into practice guidance on procurement for housing projects, based on the core elements of (OECD 2016b):  - Integrity - Transparency - Stakeholder participation - Accessibility - E-procurement - Oversight and control  See: Preventing Corruption in Public Procurement (2016)  Guidelines for participation in housing construction by the municipal housing companies (2017-2020)

			Procurement Handbook for Public Housing Agencies (2007)  Review into the risks of fraud and corruption in local government procurement (2020)  Tools to reduce private sector engagement in grand corruption during the award of public contracts (2013)  In the case of Public-Private Partnerships, guidelines on partner selection need to be adhered to. Moreover, there is a need to have a clear division of roles and responsibilities against the backdrop of a robust regulatory framework (UN Habitat 2011). See: Public-Private Partnership in Housing and Urban Development (2011).
Designing and planning* (Design Council 2018)  *This can precede the selection of developers in certain cases  This stage includes determining percentage/criteria and thresholds for "social housing"	Architects; engineers; developers; relevant housing authorities	Over-estimation of required materials; inflation of construction costs; Undue influence in setting social housing thresholds.	Transparent planning and purchase. Audit mechanisms to check for cost estimations (Brady et al. 2018; Eisenberg et al. 2012).  See: Improving transparency in construction management: a visual planning and control model (2018)  Retrofit Audits and Cost Estimates: A Look at Quality and Consistency (2012)  A new deal for social housing: how design makes the difference (Design Council 2018)

within housing developments.			Social Housing Design Guideline (Queensland Government 2021)
Permits for construction	Nationally specific building, power, water licensing authorities; Developers	Facilitation payments; gift giving; bribery	Having a neutral mechanism for resolving disputes when it comes to licensing, confidential corruption reporting mechanisms, and application of internal anti-bribery project control measures (The Constructor n.d.; Sohail and Cavill 2008).  See: Good practices in preventing corruption in planning and zoning at the local level (2017)  Accountability to Prevent Corruption in Construction Projects (2008)
Construction	Construction workers; developers; suppliers	Embezzlement of funds; inflation of material purchase prices; non-compliance with building standards	Ensure anti-corruption protocols are being followed through the construction process (i.e., increasing supply chain visibility, controls on payment of contractor's claims, providing anti-corruption training to key decision makers; regular audits and inspections to check on compliance with building codes etc.) (CHAS 2022; CIOB 2022; UNDP 2018).  See: Corruption in Construction: How to Tackle This Industry-Wide Problem (2022)  Anti-corruption & anti-bribery standards, systems and strategies

	for optimising engineering projects delivery (2019)
	Social Housing (2018).

Stage of service delivery	Key stakeholders	Examples	
Project selection	Public clients     Private clients	<ul> <li>Corruption can negatively affect the selection of projects. For example, corruption can divert resources away from social sectors and toward major infrastructure projects.</li> <li>Corruption may also encourage the selection of uneconomical projects because of opportunities for financial kickbacks and political patronage.</li> </ul>	
Planning stages	Public clients     Private clients     Financiers     Legal advisors	<ul> <li>Project used as vote winners/opportunities for personal gain not on basis of priority/availability of financial resources.</li> <li>Planning in favor of high value infrastructure (white elephant projects) and against the interest of the poor.</li> <li>Project requirements may be overstated or tailored to fit one specific bidder.</li> </ul>	
Inspection stages	<ul> <li>Regulatory authorities</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Weak oversight and supervision mechanisms have been created that would prevent detection of fraud and corruption.</li> <li>Kickbacks can be given to persuade inspectors to turn a blind eye to slow implementation of projects, unfulfilled contract requirements, and other instances of malpractice.</li> </ul>	
Design	Design consultants     Public clients     Private clients	<ul> <li>Corrupt selection of consultants for feasibility studies, preparation of specifications/bio documents.</li> <li>Overdesigned and overpriced projects to increase potential corrupt earnings during implementation.</li> <li>Bribe for favorable environmental impact assessment/planning proposal/approval.</li> <li>Project design has been manipulated to benefit particular suppliers, consultants, contractors, and other private parties.</li> <li>The timing of the project has been altered to suit vested interests.</li> </ul>	
Bid and contract signing stage	Contractors     Subcontractors     Suppliers	<ul> <li>Political parties levy large rents on international businesses in return for government contracts.</li> <li>Officials take percentages on government contracts.</li> <li>Officials receive excessive "hospitality" from government contractors and benefits in kind.</li> <li>Kickbacks for construction and supply contracts.</li> <li>Lack of competitive/inequitable contract practices.</li> <li>Inappropriate bidding procedures; excessively short bidding time or insufficient or inadequate advertising of tender.</li> <li>Corrupt practice on the part of bidders (e.g., unjustified complaints, misleading bids, etc.).</li> <li>Collusion among firms or between public officials and bidders.</li> <li>Bid rigging in construction contracts can be facilitated by corrupt project managers and quantity surveyors (people who are supposed to be policing contracts and making sure the clients get value for money).</li> <li>Compensation payments included in the tender price: when two firms collude, and one prices itself out of one of the jobs and receives a compensation payment from the other as a reward.</li> <li>Cash-plus contracts enable unscrupulous firms to inflate the value of the contract</li> <li>The entrance fee, for example, a public authority agrees to give a private company the contract, provided that the company pays a fee. The company that pays the highest entrance fee wins the concession.</li> </ul>	
Construction	Contractors     Subcontractors     Suppliers	<ul> <li>Changing subcontract party after receiving bribes.</li> <li>Cutting corners, ignoring rules, bypassing procedures.</li> <li>Payment for equipment, materials or services which were not supplied.</li> <li>The provision of equipment or goods of lower than specified quality (typical examples include lesser cement or steel reinforcements).</li> <li>Concealing substandard work.</li> <li>Bribe the relevant official to certify that the work was done according to specification.</li> <li>Nonimplementation.</li> <li>Unjustified complaints from contractors as a way to obtain unjustified contract price increases.</li> <li>Duplication of payments, alteration of invoices, lack of supporting records, ineligible payments, overbilling, misuse of funds (i.e. for purposes other than those aligned to project needs), misappropriation of discounts from suppliers/contractors, unauthorized payments, etc.</li> <li>Unauthorized use of project property.</li> <li>Theft of materials, equipment, or services.</li> <li>Entrepreneurs and brokers that exist as "fixers" facilitating relations between government and business players and negotiate the various administrative and legal steps.</li> </ul>	

Figure 5: Corruption risks across the construction phase. Source: The Constructor (2022).

# Distribution of housing to beneficiaries

Relevant process	Relevant actors	Potential corruption risks	Relevant standards/safeguards
Eligibility assessment	Beneficiaries; depending on the context: national, region or local governmental departments may be responsible for determining eligibility for social housing. In United Kingdom, for example, it is done by Local Councils (Gov.uk 2022)	Petty bribery to be deemed eligible, conflict of interest in determining eligibility, discrimination against vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities, women (especially single women), migrants etc.	Addressing discrimination and ensuring equality (UN Human Rights Council 2020). See Guidelines (8, 9, 10) for the Implementation of the Right to Adequate Housing (2020)  Having and adhering to code of ethics for housing professionals, including highlighting relevant principles and self-evaluation questions (Wellhouse 2018). See: Code of Ethics for Housing Professionals (2018).  Declaration of conflict of interests by employees upon assessing a friend/relative's case (IBAC 2022). See: Corruption risks in the social housing sector (2022).  Grievance mechanisms that are accessible to groups at risk of discrimination (GIZ 2018). See: Managing grievances effectively: How do I proceed? (2018).
Ranking applications (priority list, wait list, lottery) to allocate housing	Housing authorities; Beneficiaries	Favouritism in the waiting list system; bribery to jump places in the waiting list; conflict of interest	Clear and transparent criteria for allocating people to social housing, including transparency and openness of waiting lists, criteria, status of candidates, different options and costs (Treanor 2015; UNDP 2018). See:

	Housing policies in Europe (2015) and Social Housing (2018).
	Develop and maintain a register of all the social housing held and rented out. Consider introducing eregisters.

# Managing contractual relationships with beneficiaries

Relevant process	Relevant actors	Potential corruption risks	Relevant standards/safeguards
Establishment of contracts (i.e., rental contracts with tenants)	Housing authorities; Beneficiaries	Tenancy fraud; favouritism; allocation to ineligible candidates; unlawful occupations; rent collection fraud; unauthorised subletting;	Regular checks to determine unlawful occupations, robust internal controls to detect corruption by staff, consistent application of audits and training, etc. (National Fraud Authority (2010). See: The Guide to tackling housing tenancy fraud.  Regular rotation of officials involved in contracting processes (UNDP 2018). See: Social Housing (2018).
Maintenance	Housing authorities; Maintenance contractors; beneficiaries	Maintenance fraud through poor reconstruction in exchange of bribes/ kickbacks; Bribes to overlook violations during inspections; overburdening vulnerable tenants with utility bills that they are unable to pay	Accessible grievance mechanisms and ombudsman procedures. See: Regulator of Social Housing, and Housing Ombudsman Service: factsheet (2022).  Ensure rigorous controls in maintenance/reconstruction approval processes, including the use of external expertise as required (UNDP 2018). See: Social Housing (2018).

	Investments in energy efficient infrastructure and utilities that reduce burdens on beneficiaries (European Construction Sector Observatory 2019: 38, 67). See: Housing affordability and
	sustainability in the EU (2019)

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Transparency International International Secretariat Alt-Moabit 96 10559 Berlin Germany

Phone: +49 - 30 - 34 38 200 Fax: +49 - 30 - 34 70 39 12

tihelpdesk@transparency.org www.transparency.org

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