

CHARACTERISTIC OF HOUSING FUND IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

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Abstract

In the publication analyses differences of the housing fund in the countries of European Union and its statistic problems that prevent establishing a unified accounting system in all member states. Historical aspects of the formation of the housing fund in the country and level of its comfort as well as its availability are also described in this publication.

Changes of the housing fund are slow in numbers and quality. Although various countries build many thousands of dwellings annually, the new buildings constitute only a few percent of the existing housing fund. The quality of dwellings changes gradually and not all new buildings differ fundamentally from the existing ones. However, the data show that new houses in general have more dwelling space in terms of square meters than the existing dwellings. So from this point of view the quality of dwellings is improving.

The aim of this publication is to compare the formation process, scope and accounting of the housing fund in the member states of EU and to examine its improvement and accessibility. The monographic descriptive method has been employed to describe the existing situation and the graphic method as well as the method of analysis and synthesis have been used to compare the data and indicators.

The study concludes that each group of countries is characterised by its own division of the housing fund according their level of utilities. These data can be used to estimate the need to support the renovation of dwellings in order to improve living conditions.

Key words: dwelling, housing fund, room, utility, equipment of dwelling, dwelling units

Introduction

The European Union (hereinafter - EU) is an economic and political union including 27 countries with a different level of economic development, number of population and geographical position as well as with different household traditions.

Data on the housing fund in the EU are collected by Eurostat, the statistical office of the EU, that receives them from the EU member states. Each member state according to its particular nature sets its own scope of the housing fund and the forms of its accounting. As a result not all the data available are comparable to each other and in several areas the data are even not available.

The changes of the housing fund are related to events in national and global economy. This can lead to increase or decrease of the housing fund. In the period of growth of the economic development there can be seen an active construction of new dwellings and renovation or reconstruction of the existing homes creating new apartments. Simultaneously, certain steps are taken to improve the energy efficiency of the buildings built in the past. As a result, the amount of housing fund as well as its availability increase and its quality improves. These activities include also demolition of morally and physically obsolete dwellings, which in turn reduces the amount of the housing fund. Similarly, reduction of the housing fund is made by damage done during natural disasters (storms, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods, etc.) or human activities (fires, acts of terrorism, war, etc.).

Discussion and results

A dwelling is a room or a suite complex of several rooms and its accessories in a permanent building or structurally separate part that has been built, rebuilt, converted, etc. and is intended for private habitation. The dwelling should have a separate access to a street or to a common space within the building (staircase, passage, gallery, etc.). Detached rooms for habitation to be used as part of the dwelling should be considered as a part thereof. It may thus be made of separate buildings within the same enclosure, provided they are clearly intended for habitation by the same private household (a room or rooms above a detached garage, occupied by servants or other members of the household). A vacant dwelling is an accommodation available for sale or a newly erected dwelling, which is not yet occupied on the date of the survey.

In Latvia a dwelling is a private single-family house or apartment in a residential or non-residential building. A dwelling consists of one or several rooms and auxiliary premises. Auxiliary premises are kitchens, corridors, toilets, bathrooms, closets. In some countries mobile dwellings (Austria, Germany,

Latvia, etc.), barracks, and dwellings without a kitchen (Sweden, Austria, Germany, Denmark, Finland, etc.) are not considered dwellings. In Belgium, France, Luxembourg, Poland and Spain a dwelling may be a mobile dwelling (a ship or a caravan), too. Types of accommodation in the housing fund of EU countries are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Types of accommodation included in dwelling s

No	State name	Summer or winter homes	Second homes	Collective homes	Hotels	Caravans	Ships	Vacant dwelling	Non-permanent habitation
1	Austria	+	+	-	-	-	-	+	-
2	Belgium	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	+
3	Bulgaria*								
4	Cyprus	+	+	+	-	-	-	+	-
5	Czech Republic	-	+	-	-	-	-	+	+
6	Denmark	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-
7	Estonia	+	+	-	-	-	-	+	-
8	Finland	-	+	-	-	-	-	+	+
9	France	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	-
10	Germany	+	+	-	-	-	-	+	-
11	Greece	+	+	-	-	-	-	+	+
12	Hungary	+	+	-	-	-	-	+	-
13	Ireland	+	+	-	-	+	-	+	+
14	Italy	+	+	-	-	-	-	+	-
15	Latvia	+	-	-	-	-	-	+	-
16	Lithuania	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	+
17	Luxembourg	-	-	+	+	+	+	-	-
18	Malta	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	+
19	Netherlands	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-
20	Poland	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
21	Portugal	+	+	-	-	-	-	+	+
22	Romania	+	+	-	-	-	-	+	+
23	Slovak Republic	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-
24	Slovenia	+	+	-	-	-	-	+	-
25	Spain	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-
26	Sweden	-	+	+	-	-	-	+	-
27	United Kingdom	+	+	-	-	-	-	+	-

(*) -No data; (+) –Yes; (-) - No

Source: National statistical institutes

Eurostat identifies dwellings as buildings that are used entirely or primarily as residences, including any associated structures, such as garages, and all permanent fixtures customarily installed in residences. Movable structures, such as caravans, used as principal residences of households are included (Ministry of the Interior..., 2010).

In order to compare the housing fund between EU member states, we include residential houses and apartments, not taking into consideration whether they are occupied or not. The term "dwelling" is understood as a building that is basically used as a residential house. The housing fund does not include temporary structures or subsidiary buildings (garages, barns, shed, etc.), as well as mobile homes (trailers, tents, boats, etc.).

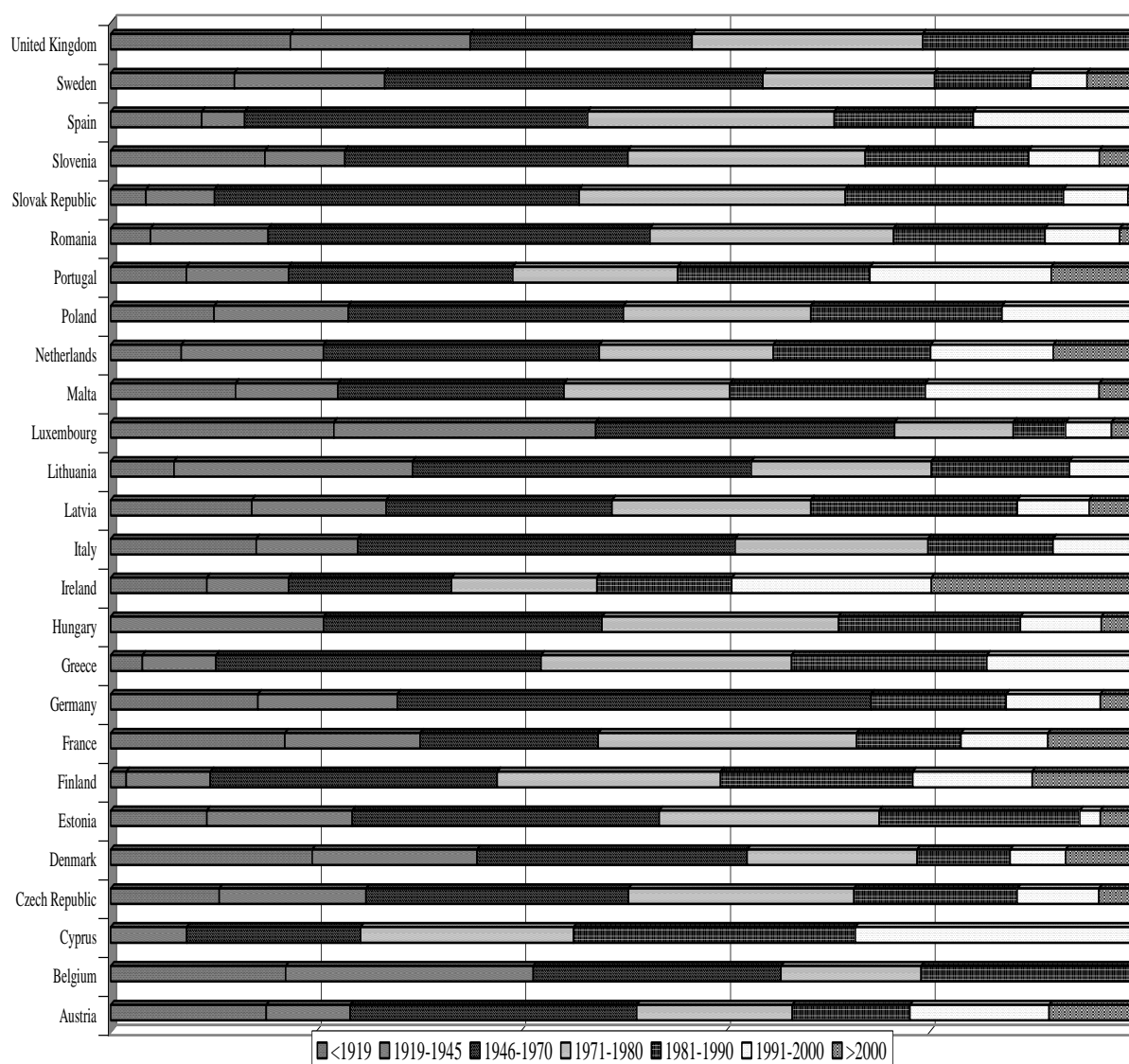
Almost all EU member states suffered during World War II and in some cities the housing fund was completely destroyed therefore especially in the post-war period an active construction of housing fund took place. As it is shown in the study "Housing Statistics in the European Union 2010",

compiled by the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, within the period of time between 1946 and 1970 the greatest number of dwellings was built in Germany – 46.3% of the existing housing fund and in Romania – 37.3% of the existing housing fund. In other EU member states the proportion of houses built during this period of time varies from 15.9% in Ireland to 37% in Sweden. In Latvia during this period there have been built 22.1% of the existing housing fund while in Lithuania - 33.1% and in Estonia – 30.0%. This can be explained by the fact that in Latvia there was still a relatively high number (13.8%) of buildings older than hundred years. In Lithuania had remained 6.2% and in Estonia – 9.4% of buildings older than hundred years. The percentage of preserved buildings that were built a hundred or more years ago in some other countries is the following - Luxembourg (21.8%), Denmark (19.7%), France and the United Kingdom (17%). The lowest number of ancient buildings is in the Czech Republic (3.4%) and Romania (3.9%). The division of the housing fund by its age is illustrated in Figure 1. Taking into account the different historical experience in certain countries, there is no unified information available about the amount of the housing fund for the past hundred years. There is even no unified information available about the amount of the housing fund built in the last ten years and its proportion in EU member states (Bulgaria, Belgium, Italy, Cyprus, Greece, Lithuania, Poland, Spain, and the United Kingdom).

As it has already been mentioned before, a dwelling can be an individual house as well as an apartment in a residential or in a non-residential building. Hence, all the dwelling houses can be divided into two groups by the number of apartments – a single family (private) house and multi-family (apartment) house. Comparing dwellings between the EU member states on this criterion, the largest proportion of private houses is in Denmark (65%) and the Netherlands (58%), but apartment houses are mostly inhabited in the Baltic States - Latvia (75%), Lithuania (68%) and Estonia (63%) (Ministry of the Interior ..., 2010). This kind of distribution in the dwellings is a result of the national policies implemented in this area. In Denmark and the Netherlands there have always existed the ownership rights on dwellings and they devolve from one generation to the next. Whereas, in the Baltic States only single family (private) houses could be a private property and many of which were demolished at the beginning of the process of collectivisation in the countryside and construction of new dwelling estates in the cities. In other EU countries the number of private houses and apartment houses is approximately the same (50%:50%).

According to the data of the EU study on the area of the housing fund per 1 000 inhabitants the best situation with dwelling space is in Spain (544 m²), Finland (531 m²) and Denmark (500 m²). In the Baltic countries the best situation is in Estonia (485 m²), while in Latvia (462 m²) it. It has to be mentioned that it is higher than the average area per 1,000 inhabitants in EU (452 m²). Partially the growth of the dwelling space can be explained by the decrease of population and the construction of new dwellings, as well as the conversion of non-residential buildings into apartments. The smallest dwelling space per 1,000 inhabitants is in Slovakia (326 m²) and Poland (345 m²) (Ministry of the Interior ..., 2010).

Each dwelling consists of one or more living rooms and auxiliary premises (a kitchen, a hallway, a lobby, a bathroom, a toilet, etc.). Eurostat has defined that the room is a space in a dwelling enclosed by walls, reaching from the floor to the ceiling or roof, and is large enough to hold a bed for an adult (four square meters as a minimum) and at least two meters high in respect of the major area of the ceiling. Depending on its use, rooms can be divided into bedrooms, dining rooms, living rooms, servants' rooms, kitchens and other separate spaces intended for dwelling. A common term defines that a room can be considered an area of more than 4 m². However, evaluating all the room definitions in EU countries, it appears that only several countries have set such a limit of dwelling space (Austria, Cyprus, Hungary, Luxembourg, and Portugal). In other countries limited area is significantly higher – 6 m² in Sweden, and 7 m² in Finland, while in Slovakia even 8 m² (Ministry of the Interior ..., 2010).



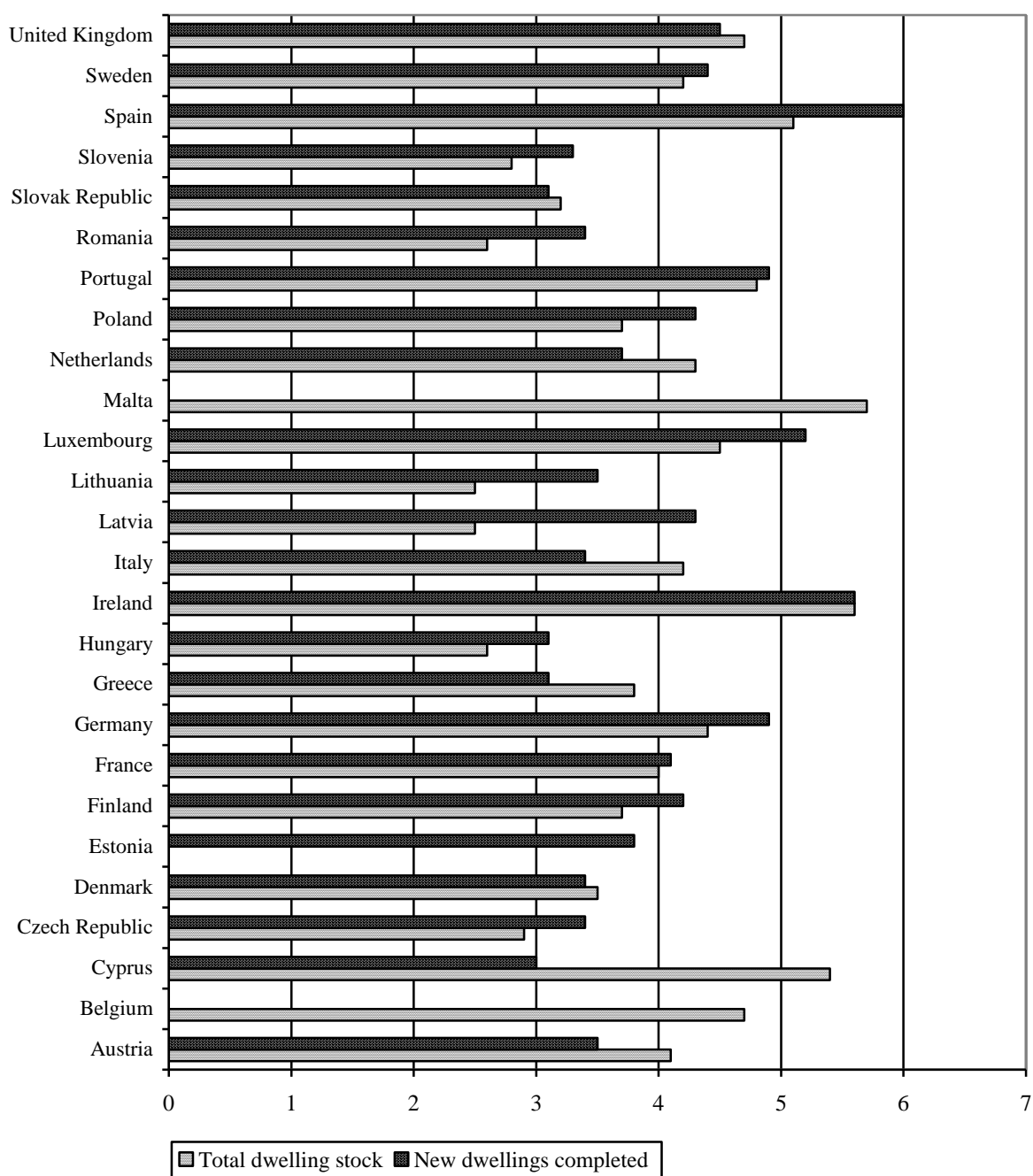
Source: National statistical institutes

Fig.1. Breakdown of housing fund according its period of use

In Latvia there is no limit on the room space. It can be explained by the fact that in private houses built until the 1990 there was already enforced a total area restriction in dwellings. State and local authorities built multi-apartment houses for families with insufficient resources for their own individual houses to provide a maximum number of families with small area apartments. The average number of rooms per dwelling and in newly erected buildings is depicted in Figure 2.

Analyzing the data in Figure 2 it can be concluded that the largest growth in the average number of rooms in a dwelling is in those countries where historically it has been relatively small. In Latvia it has increased from 2.5 to 4.3 and in Lithuania – from 2.5 to 3.5 rooms per dwelling. A similar tendency can be seen also in other former Soviet bloc countries – accordingly, in Romania from 2.6 to 3.4 and in Slovenia from 2.8 to 3.3 rooms per dwelling. The growth of the average number of rooms in a dwelling was a response of inhabitants to previously existing constraints on the dwelling space. With the increase in the construction of dwellings it was possible to choose houses with an unlimited number of rooms taking account only the financial resources available. In the long term it is of course related to additional expenditures required to sustain them. Interesting is the fact that in several EU countries the number of rooms in newly erected buildings has decreased. Thus in Austria this decrease is from 4.1 to 3.5 rooms, in Italy from 4.2 to 3.4 and these numbers have gone down in the

Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Cyprus as well. In this case the main reason for this decrease may have been economic factors caused by the enlargement of EU and international migration.

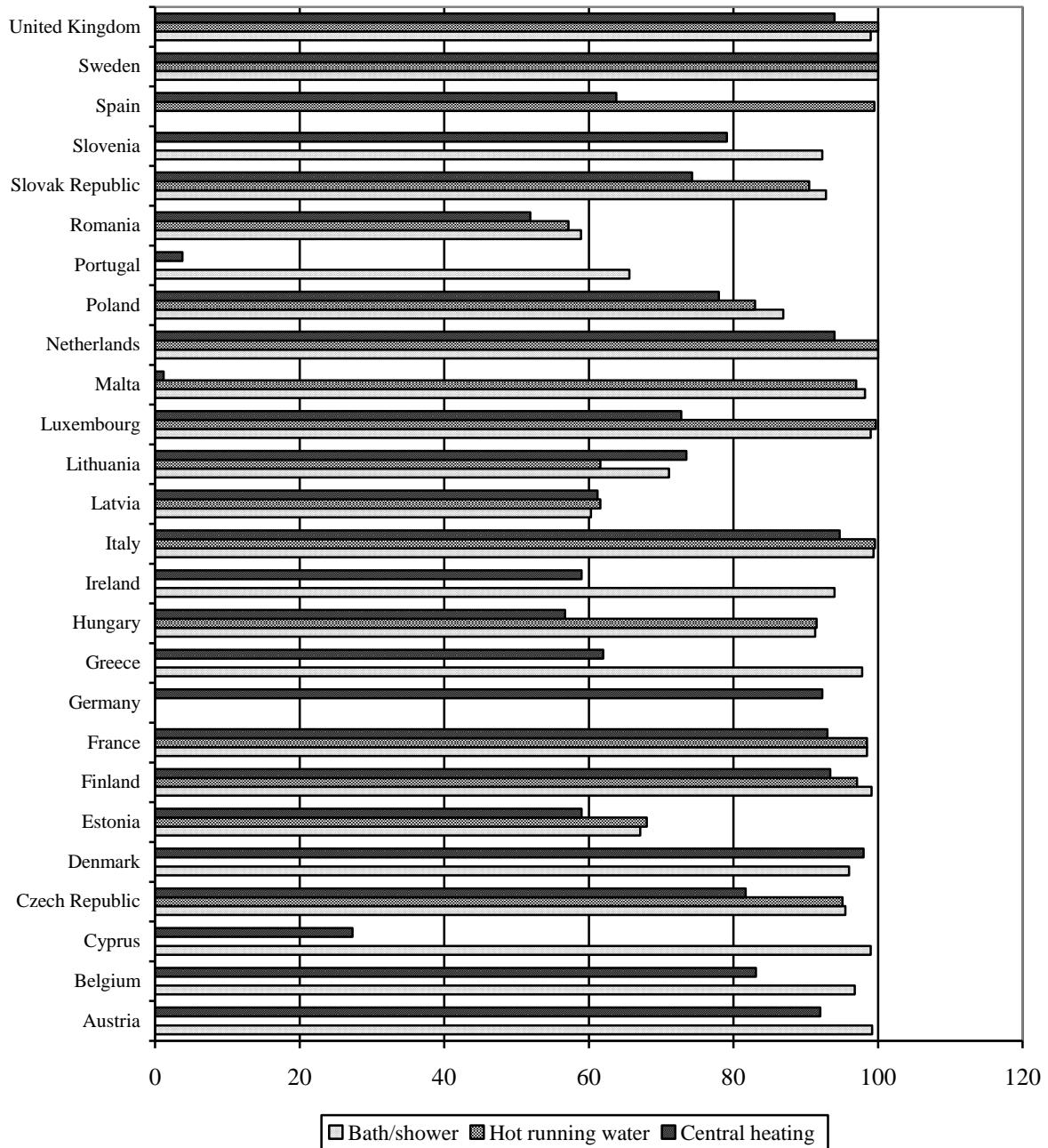


Source: National statistical institutes

Fig.2. Average number of rooms per dwelling and per new dwelling

The newly built houses are provided with electricity, water supply and a heating system taking into consideration the principles of energy efficiency. In dwellings that have been built earlier the level of amenities is different and it does not refer only to rural areas, but also to the historical districts in larger cities. Most often they are provided with a central cold water connection and less often with a hot water supply. The centralised heat supply was the most acute problem in Latvia because the residential houses were cut off from the centralised system when the collective farms and state enterprise were liquidated or transformed into private property. At this point it was already the

owners' problem to ensure the heating of the house. The level of amenities in dwellings in EU member states is shown in Figure 3.



Source: National statistical institutes

Fig.3 Proportion of comfortable dwellings

Comparing amenities of dwellings in EU countries the least comfortable dwellings are in Romania, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. Only 58.9% of households in Romania are provided with a bath or a shower, but in Latvia they make up 60.3%, in Estonia - 67.1% and in Lithuania - 71.1% of households. In assessing these numbers we have to keep in mind that historically each farm in Latvia had a bathhouse, which provided similar services as a bath or a shower in our dwellings nowadays. Self-evidently, a similar situation in EU member states is observed with hot water supply. The lowest rate of houses that are equipped with hot water supply is in Romania (57.2%), Latvia and Lithuania - 61.6% and Estonia 68% (Ministry of the Interior ..., 2010).

Conclusions

1. The housing fund in EU member states is affected by the geographic situation of the country as well as its socio-political and cultural experience.
2. In older EU countries with long-term stable economic and political situation the level of amenities and their availability in the dwellings is higher than in the new EU member states.
3. In the new EU member states the dwelling space of apartments in newly erected buildings and the average number of rooms in dwellings is increasing while in older EU countries the opposite tendencies are observed.

Proposals

For improvement of housing fund it is necessary:

1. to establish in all EU countries a unified accounting classification of the housing fund by its way of use – the main (primary) and additional (secondary) dwelling;
2. to draft and develop a national programme providing increase in the level of house amenities and promoting their availability and to raise EU funding for its realisation.

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Резюме

АНИТА СИДЕЛЬСКА. ХАРАКТЕРИСТИКА ЖИЛОГО ФОНДА СТРАН ЕВРОПЕЙСКОГО СОЮЗА

В статье анализируются и научно обоснованы особенности создания и учёта жилого фонда стран Европейского Союза, отмечены различия жилого фонда старых стран Европейского Союза и поступивших после 2004 года, в том числе страны Прибалтики. Всесторонне оценен процесс определения единицы жилища, проведен анализ тенденций увеличения объема жилой площади в домах новой застройки и его распределение в разных странах.

В статье также анализированы теоретические и практические аспекты повышения благоустроенности жилых домов и также достигнутые результаты. Анализован средний размер жилой площади на тысячу жителей и практические действия государства стран Европейского Союза в решении проблем малозащищенных слоев населения.

Жилой фонд, жилая комната, благоустроенность жилого фонда, единица жилища

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