



How to Improve Tenants' Living conditions through Organizing?

Tenants' Initiative in Prague
Prague 2022

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What This Manual Is About and Who Should Use It

We wrote this manual for all tenants.

Use this manual if you experience injustices as a tenant, if your rent increases too quickly, or if you are fed up with the insecurity connected to life in tenancy.

We want to show you how to get stronger together through organizing or, put differently, solving problems collectively. The manual includes practical advice as well as examples of good practice and demands—a direction you can follow when aiming for more secure and better housing.

Why Did We Write This Manual?

Rents are increasing in the Czech Republic and around the whole world. We pay so much rent that very little is left for a dignified life.

Politicians propose solutions, but they are never enough. Again and again, we hear the same axiom: “If we build more, everything will be fine” (if you’re interested in why this argument is insufficient, continue to the section “Myths About Tenancy”). At the same time, politicians speak about how the living conditions of tenants are worsening, and not just financially. Legal protections are weak, especially in a case of short-term agreements. We live in constant insecurity, and one day we will probably have to leave our homes.

Tenants’ movements elsewhere in the world demonstrate that **it makes sense to rise up against injustice**. Organized tenants negotiate rents, demand more legal protection, and call for putting an end to housing speculation. They demand more municipal flats and affordable housing instead of luxury complexes.

We decided to establish the Tenants’ Initiative and write this manual for these reasons. We are students and workers, married and single, parents and child-free—all of us are concerned with our living conditions. We have experience with activism, organizing, and political work. We want to continue this with those who also refuse to observe injustice and will stand up against it. This struggle is not easy, and we ourselves are learning a lot. But we’ve decided we want to

change our living and housing conditions together, provide mutual aid, and all the while, never forget to catch up for a few beers.

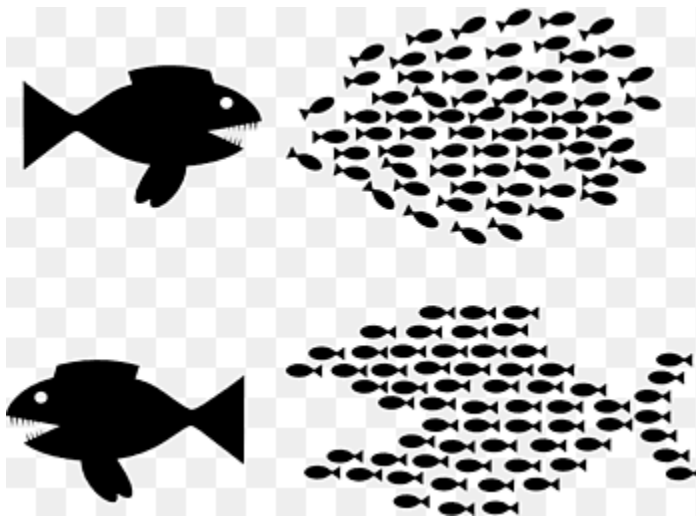
If you are interested in how you can change your housing situation, please continue reading!

Organizing: Together, We Are Stronger

The means we use to improve the living conditions of tenants is *organizing*. But what does this word mean?

Organizing is based on the experience of united people who empower each other and become able to change the conditions of their lives. **When ordinary people encounter problems and injustices in their lives, they are usually in a weaker position.** They do not have that as much money as landlords, and they do not have the power of political parties. They typically don't have contacts with the media where they can publicize their experience. It is understandable why they feel lonely and fall into despair.

However, another type of power is accessible to those lacking fat bank accounts or friends in high places. This power lies in the number of people who suffer from the same problems and are willing to unite for their common interest. This power can challenge the power of politicians, developers, or enterprises speculating on housing



This is illustrated more clearly in this picture of a single big fish and a school of fish. How do we reach the point where the school becomes organized and can hunt the big fish? It isn't rocket science. There are rules and experience we can look to. However, when we think about the picture a bit more, we can figure out that the key is the firmness of relationships and coordination between the small fish. **Organizing is about creating these relationships, deepening and transforming them into collective action.** In the coming paragraphs, we explore methods and means of organizing that can help us reach our goals.

We will now let ourselves wander away from theory for a while

Imagine that you have been living for many years in an apartment building in Žižkov, a neighborhood in Prague. You like your big, bright apartment, even if it has yet to be reconstructed, and it is, at times, hard to communicate with the landlord. Now, however, the intercom system is broken at the building entrance. It's a small thing, but it makes you angry. Like with more serious problems, the landlord does not want to fix it. And this is in spite of having recently raised the rent again. How should you act in this situation?

*Before you try to solve any problem regarding rent, it is wise to consult the law—it's not as hard as it sounds (check the section "Legal Advice"). **It also might be an excellent opportunity to start meeting and organizing other tenants.** Again, we emphasize that together it is easier to challenge forces that seem more powerful than us.*

One-on-One Conversation

One-on-one, causal conversation is at the foundation of organizing and is really important. And here's why.

Establishing a relationship. To build strong relationships, we must take the first step and overcome anonymity. Emails and flyers are not enough; **it is necessary to speak to people.** Only by talking can we organize a neighborhood community or a tenants' initiative.

Listening and exploring a problem. Knowledge is power, and this is true of organizing. It is necessary to know the problems of those we wish to organize so we can agree on common issues. Conversation helps us become familiar with the relationships between people and the tenants who have lived in the building longest. It also helps us meet other tenants. We can only learn these things through talking with neighbors.

Overcoming fear and apathy. Fear and apathy are often the biggest obstacles for people to fight for their interests. Overcoming these is an often long and arduous process. Thankfully, it is much more easily done with others through personal conversation. We must not be afraid to talk about fears with others, attach the necessary importance to them, and think together about ways to avoid them.

One-on-one conversation is natural and informal but also focused and prepared. Therefore, preparation for this conversation is essential to its outcome.

Before advising you on how to prepare for a one-on-one conversation, let's return to the broken intercom. A lawyer from a legal aid non-profit told us that repairing the intercom system outside the main door of a building (not inside your flat) is the landlord's responsibility. However, in your experience, communication with the landlord is not that good. Moreover, the intercom is more or less the last thing in the house that you are concerned with.

You decide to research the overall situation in the building and do some door-knocking. Some of your neighbors aren't interested in speaking, and some are okay with the broken intercom because they are scared to talk to the landlord. However, door-knocking has an upside. In many cases, the neighbors' rejections are polite. Moreover, seven of your fellow tenants promised you to meet and to think about the problem together!

One-on-One: Get Ready

What do I know already? Before you venture out into the “field” (the organizing jargon for the place you are organizing in, e.g., neighborhood, district, block of flats), make sure to get a few things straight. Do you know how many flats are in the building? What do you know about other people in the building and their problems? And a crucial question: Does a landlord live in your building?

The story of you and us. To involve other tenants, you need to explain why you are talking to them and what the plan is. In other words, you need a story. A good idea for starting is to speak about your motivations—why are you getting involved? What are your problems and motivations? Your story does not have to be a grand epic; a few easily understandable sentences are enough. Then, when there are more of you, and your neighbors become involved, you can construct a story together with them: who you are, what your plans are, what your achievements are, etc.

Questions. One-on-one conversation is based on questions that you have to formulate in advance. You can ask, for example:

- What is it like to be a tenant in this flat/building? Do you like it?
- Have you also experienced problem “X”? For example, the malfunctioning intercom system.
- How easy is it for you to pay rent?
- Is there something you would like to improve?

You could also think of additional questions:

- What are the exact problems/issues you are dealing with in your tenancy here?
- Why do you think it is useless to get involved?

Box: Thanks to privatization, the Czech Republic has a diverse structure of small private landlords and a majority of the population who are flat owners. Compared to other Western states, the rental market is not dominated by institutional landlords in the Czech Republic. In Prague approx. 70% of flats are lived in by their owners (80% country-wide).

Your landlord probably owns “only” one or two buildings or maybe just a few flats. It is important to remember this when you are door-knocking—do not forget to ask whether a tenant has the same landlord or whether s/he is the flat's owner.

You now have an idea of what a one-on-one conversation looks like between tenants. But before you start, we have a few more recommendations to make your conversation successful.

Speak less, listen more! Some organizing manuals say that a one-on-one conversation consists of 80% listening and 20% speaking. You won't convince someone through tedious stories of your own experiences. Instead, you must make space for a person to talk and share their experiences; you can then base future communication on what you have learned about this person.

Getting contact information. Contact information is key to inviting a person to later meetings. Ask for a phone number which, as opposed to email, allows you to enter a conversation—this applies even to neighbors who live in the same building as you.

Anger might be a strong ally. We will inevitably find common problems during these conversations. Do not be scared to acknowledge these and transform them into hope. Transforming anger into hope affirms an organizing method as a solution to problems and a specific plan for common action.

To the box: Trade union organizer Jane McAlevey proposes a useful seven-step technique for one-on-one conversation. We do not have to follow all seven steps, but this technique helps keep in mind the goal of the conversation and its important steps.

<i>Introductions & Framing the Conversation</i>	Explain who you are and why you are speaking to the tenant.
<i>Issues and Agitation</i>	Ask about the problems that tenants live through. Explore their issues and make it clear that these problems are important and valuable. There is space here to verbalize anger.
<i>Vision</i>	Explain why the problem is happening and the strategy to solve it.
<i>Urgency</i>	Emphasize why you and other tenants have to act now. It might be connected to a situation: rent increase, new landlord, or inflation.
<i>Call the Action</i>	Call the action is formulated clearly and directly. Would they like to join us? Would they like to do something about the problem? If possible, demonstrate two alternatives: Would they like to join us? Or are they comfortable with everyone paying more monthly to the landlords? Do not be afraid to wait through uncomfortable silence.
<i>Inoculation</i>	Collective action might lead to a landlord's counteraction or meet other obstacles. It is essential that you do not give up when you face problems and that you are prepared for them. This is why it is

	important to draw attention to possible negative outcomes and collectively create an antidote that increases immunity when faced with challenging situations
<i>Follow-up</i>	The conversation must have a specific follow-up: Will you see them again at the meeting? A phone number is the most important. Call the next day and confirm what has been agreed on.

Meetings

A few tenants promised they would come to the first meeting. An excellent place to meet would be an unused kočárkárna (bike room, drying room, etc.) in your building or a nearby cafe.

How should the first meeting be prepared? Meetings are spaces where individual conversations transform into a collective decision-making process. The first meeting is critical, so do not underestimate the preparations! Don't get upset if just a few people show up; only rarely do all those who promised come. But every person counts.

Place, time, space. Think of a time that would be suitable for the majority of people. Find a nice place, place chairs in a circle, and prepare all the materials you might need (e.g., flipcharts).

Meeting others. Throughout the meeting, as well as during one-on-one conversations, it is important to build relationships. Do short introductions at the beginning, going around the circle. If there are a lot of people at the meeting, make smaller circles so everyone has space to speak and get to know each other better.

During the meeting. In cases when no one is leading the meeting (the "leader" is also called a facilitator or moderator) and communication has no clear rules, people might get frustrated. The task of the facilitator is to stay on topic and on time during the meeting. It is important to limit those who are very active and to motivate those who are silent. Draw boundaries for the former and encourage the latter. It is helpful to summarize the outcomes of the discussion during its stages. Do not forget to ask someone to make notes and highlight decisions and tasks.

Agenda. It is useful to prepare the agenda of the meeting beforehand. In the best-case scenario, this is based on the information received during the one-on-one conversations. The program must be flexible and open to the needs of those in attendance—it is important to find a balance between openness and structure.

It is also important to maintain this balance after the initial introductions—when further steps are being discussed. These additional steps for action must be thought through beforehand but should also be flexible and open.

Before the meeting, think about the tasks that participants will be given after the meeting. Even small tasks work well to keep people interested in the initiative (e.g., prepare points for future discussion, call legal support, create leaflets, etc.).

Further communication. If you do not have contacts for all attendees, remember to ask for them. Agree on a communication channel (email, WhatsApp group, closed group on social networks, etc.). Remember to announce the date for the next meeting and agree on who will prepare it. The agenda could be sent with a reminder for the upcoming meeting.

When the work is done, go have fun. Don't make a meeting too long—it's better to leave some items of discussion for next time than it is to overwhelm participants with endless discussion. The maximum length of a meeting should be an hour and a half. Don't be afraid to take a break. The guests can get a whiff of fresh air during the break and informally talk and share experiences they don't find suitable for sharing in the big circle.

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Now we know how to organize a meeting. But the meeting is held so goals may be reached together. To do so, we need **strategies** and **tactics**. What do these terms mean?

Strategies and Tactics

Before we start working, it's necessary to make clear what our goals are, how we will achieve them, and with whom. This will ensure our activities are not chaotic and ineffective. Good preparation will help us achieve our ambitious but realistic goals.

The tool called **COPSAM** is used to create and think-through campaigns. This tool might seem too complex at first glance; however, it's still helpful to go through each step. Each letter in the name refers to a specific step in campaign thinking.

C = Context

The first step is to understand the context of the situation. In this step we ask questions like "What problems do we want to solve?"; "Who is responsible for these problems?"; "Who presents an obstacle to their solution?"; "What are the solutions to the problems?" "Has anyone tried to solve them in the past?"; "Were they successful?"; "What mistakes were made?"

Instead of the previously discussed intercom, here we can imagine something bigger, for example, a campaign for a rent freeze during the fuel crisis.

In this phase you would like to know everything about those who can have the same interests as you, as well as whether someone has an experience solving this problem in the past, etc.

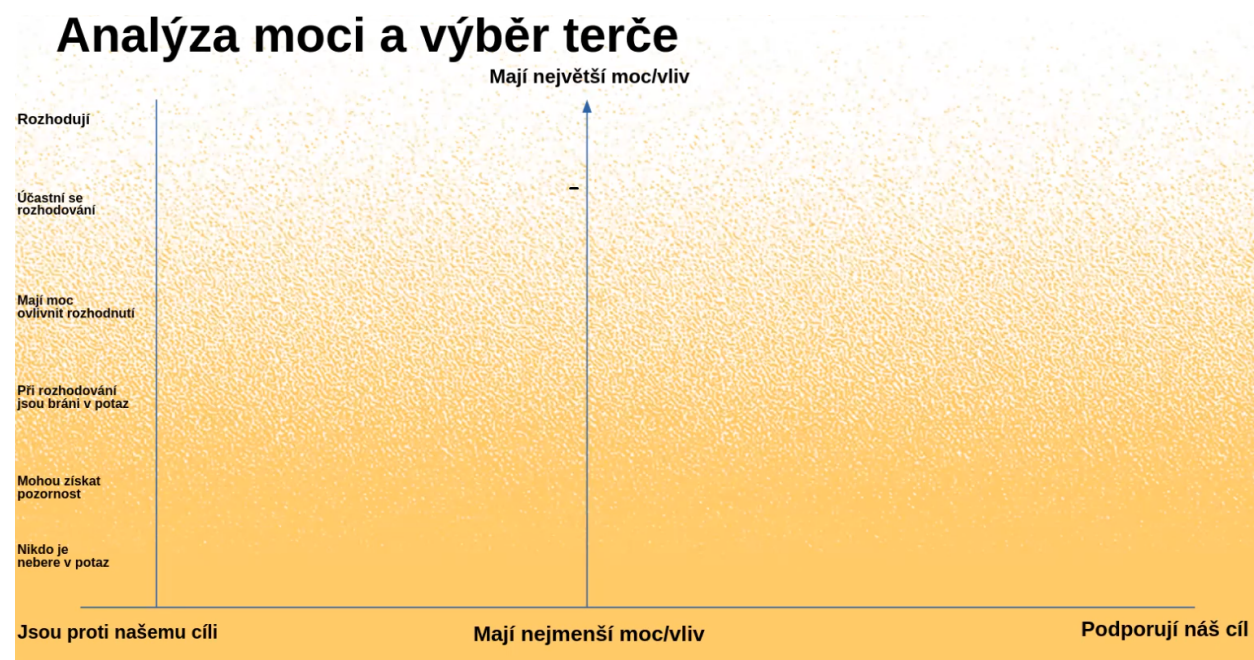
O = Objectives

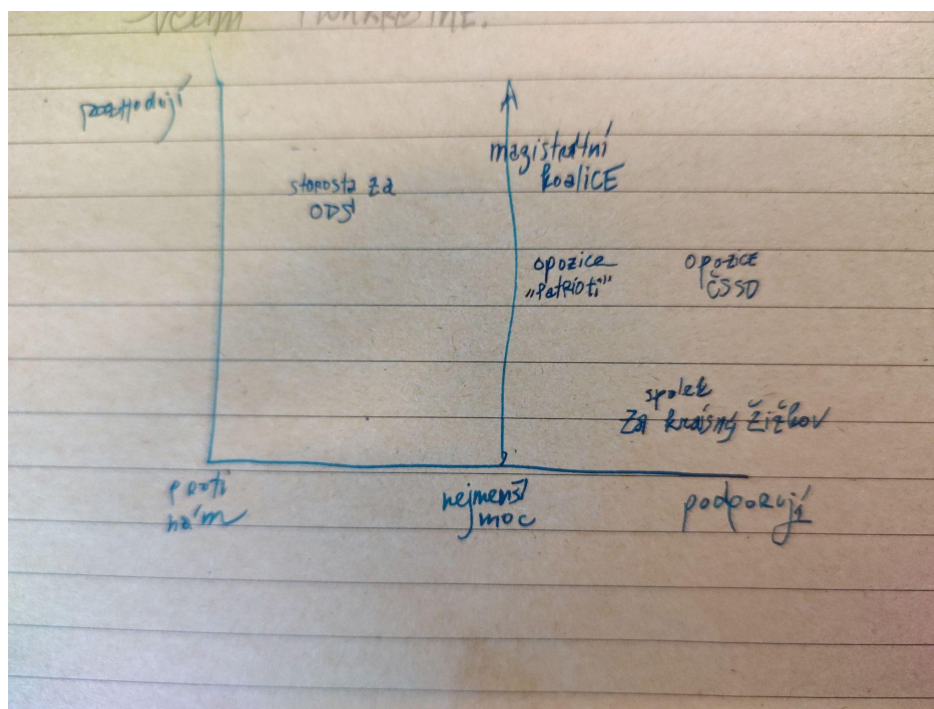
Every campaign must have a goal. It is crucial to set achievable and ambitious goals, which are also measurable—this way, you can sometimes check whether you have already reached them or if you are going in the right direction. You can set several goals; for example, in the struggle for a rent freeze, you could also demand the building be insulated, a landlord's obligation. The goals might be separated into short, mid-term, and long-term goals.

Box: What are the possible goals? In Berlin, for example, tenants decided they would no longer endure the attitude of the large company Deutsche Wohnen. Their campaign called for a referendum on expropriating companies owning more than three thousand flats.

P = Power analysis

Now that we have a basic understanding of the situation, we must remember who has power and who can be a campaign ally. The process is easy: we use a “graph” that must be prepared on a campaign-per-campaign basis and add different actors (like people, organizations or others) to it.





Here we can see the graph of an association that fights against predatory development

The more an actor disagrees, the more to the left they are, and vice-versa. The vertical axis, on the contrary, demonstrates the actor's power—the higher they are, the more powerful their decisions.

After marking all the actors on the graph, the upper left side will contain our enemies, such as developers and some politicians. On the bottom right, we will likely find ourselves and our allies. We must take our time and think now: How can we bring the actors above us to our side? Who does it not make sense to negotiate with because they are powerless? These thoughts bring us to the point of thinking about strategy.

S = Strategy

Strategy clarifies the steps that lead us to our goal. We can imagine it is like climbing up a mountain. There are many different paths, but we are searching for the one which will be the most comfortable. The abovementioned rent freeze during a fuel crisis is an example of a good strategic goal. Organizing to reach a certain number of people is also a strategy. Likewise, you could focus on putting pressure on

politicians, the goal being to push for a legal solution. It is also possible to bring media attention to the problematic attitude of a landlord. Moreover, it is always possible to combine different strategies. What is essential is to have a strategy.

Box: Speaking about a good strategy, let's return to the example of the Deutsche Wohnen expropriation. It was necessary to organize a lot of tenants into the movement to make a referendum on flat expropriation successful. At the very beginning, the strategy might have been to solve everyday problems, but it allowed a lot of people to get involved. In the end, the many people involved were able to decide on larger issues, such as flat expropriation.

A = Activities

Now we can think about visible activities. **Activities and tactics are concrete manifestations of a campaign and strategy.** Typically, these are petitions, protests, and demonstrations but also working and policy papers, meetings, one-on-one conversations, referendums, and direct actions. **We'll introduce several of these activities in the following chapter.** But before that, it is necessary to point out a serious mistake: many movements start with tactics and actions instead of thinking about strategy.

What's the problem with that? Recall the example of rent increases. If we were to decide on a specific tactic (a demonstration in the square) instead of thinking deeply about strategy, we would probably lose. After a great demonstration, most of our allies would lose their motivation to continue because they won't understand how to do so. Single activities such as demonstrations might seem useful, but great goals need a focused and thought-through effort.

M = Monitoring

Throughout a campaign, it's necessary to evaluate single steps and take the time to go through goals, making sure we are on the right path. It is also important to return to the power analysis and examine the movement of single actors on the graph. We might also want to evaluate the influence of the campaign on their positions. Campaign thinking, thus, is a circle of action and reflection.

Most importantly, remember to make activities enjoyable. Use humor, bring cakes to meetings, and include cultural activities. Do not forget to celebrate successes. These might be small things, even the very fact that we are acting with others. These moments of unification

are important and empowering—do not take them for granted. Appreciate them!

Action repertoire

The first meeting in the kočárkárna (bike room, drying room, etc.) with other tenants was a success. From the seven people who promised to come, six attended. This is bearing in mind that this was only the second time you had seen them in your life. After getting to know each other, you shared the hardships of living with rent. It turned out the broken intercom was just the tip of the iceberg. Other tenants do not have a lot of time, but you managed to write down all the malfunctions in your flats, arrange the next meeting, and agree to visit the legal service individually.

Almost twice as many people came to the second meeting. You did not have time to do door-knocking in the building. However, one neighbor who seems quite popular among the tenants and has lived in the house the longest invited his friends and acquaintances, which changed things.

The tenants discussed important things at this meeting. From the legal services, you now know that almost half of the malfunctions are the landlord's responsibility. Moreover, he ignores all calls to fix the problems. This is why you've decided to think about strategy. From the lawyers, you know that the law is on your side. The first step would be to speak to the owner and try to negotiate collectively. You agreed to discuss the details of these tactics at the third meeting.

Box: Organic leaders. There is a popular person influencing others in every environment. Having these people on our side is key to persuading others. Often, these people are not those who are the loudest but the ones who are the most trustworthy because they have lived in a place for a long time. They are brave and able to stand up for the common interest. When having conversations, ask about these people, find out who they are, and involve them in our activities.

We have already demonstrated that a careful analysis of a situation must come before every action. This is also true for specific activities that are part of our strategy—in the end, these lead us to our goals. So what should we consider at this stage?

Consider whether a specific activity fits well with the general strategy, whether there are enough resources, and what the possible risks are. The last point is especially important. If you defend your rights actively, you put yourself at risk. For example, you could create controversy among your neighbors or make a landlord so angry they will not prolong your contract. In the case of a public demonstration, a conflict with the security services might occur. Understanding the risks, however, must not make you passive—discuss them and think about how to minimize them.

Now let's look at **examples of tactics**, starting with the "softest" ones. Of course, a peaceful agreement is always the best option. But if that does not work, more expressive means can be tried.

Negotiation. This might seem banal, but sometimes it is enough to ask a landlord to fix the problem. Does the landlord want to increase your rent? Tell them that you cannot pay more. Does your flat have a leak? Ask a landlord to fix it. Is your landlord arrogant? Tell them that you have dignity and demand a respectful attitude.

Box: A tenant called Julie from Vinohrady in Prague had problems with income at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Together with her flatmate, she contacted the landlord and asked for a rent decrease. After explaining the situation, the landlord decreased the rent by 3000 Czech crowns.

Petition letter. You don't feel like having a personal conversation with your landlord, or you think that a personal meeting is impossible? Write an email or a letter to the landlord. The letter might be signed by more people (or more letters come from different addresses). In this case, the demand looks especially persuasive.

Negative campaign. A bigger negative campaign is useful against institutional landlords (companies) who refuse to negotiate with you and, at the same time, for whom reputation is important.

There are different possibilities when creating a negative campaign. For example, you could contact a journalist and ask them to write an article describing the landlord's attitude. Another option is to organize happenings in front of the landlord's office and inform people passing by about the landlord's negative behavior. It is also helpful to contact journalists before an action and send photos of the event after.

Pressure tactics in front of a landlord's or management company's office. Actions in front of a landlord's office do not have to be a part of a negative campaign, they could also be a direct non-violent confrontation with a landlord. During these, pressure is put on the landlord to start negotiations about the issues you consider unjust. If you want to avoid contact with the security service of your city, notify the city hall about the event.

Protest. The goal of protest is to draw attention to the problem and demand a solution. Compared with an action, which requires just a small number of people, a demonstration needs a large crowd to be mobilized. This is important for receiving media attention, but remember to make a press release! Notifying the city hall beforehand is also a good idea.

Box: Some families living a hostel in Ústí and Labem were facing eviction because the landlord was not taking care of the hostel. The families had no place to go; mothers with

children would end up in shelters, while fathers would face sleeping on the streets. The families contacted friends from other cities for help, and together they decided on the symbolic occupation of the hostel. The occupation was combined with demonstrations. The tenants made a press release, thanks to which local and national media covered the protests. After some time, another local landlord contacted the families with a proposition to accommodate them.

Rent strike—not paying rent. We are familiar with trade union strikes. The goal of these strikes is to endanger the employer's profits and pressure them to meet the workers' demands.

Rent strikes have a similar logic: tenants refuse to pay rent. These are rare in the Czech environment as they are on the edge of legality here. Even so, it is worth knowing about them.

A basic rule of the rent strike is that it must be done by the vast majority of tenants who share the same landlord. In a trade union environment, we use the term "supermajority"; the number of people considered to be enough to strike. Usually, this is approximately 75% of all people. So, for example, if a landlord has twenty flats in your house, eighteen of the flats must go on strike.

Of all the tactics mentioned before, this is the most radical. Importantly, the landlord must actually feel the possibility of losing profits—this is why we work with a supermajority. We also advise you to be in contact with lawyers and mobilize the wider public, for example, via demonstrations and articles in the media.

Box: During the First World War, [tenants in Glasgow](#) faced rapid rent increases and eviction. They started a rent strike led by the Glasgow Women's Housing Association. Women did not let the debt collectors come into their homes and threw flour and trash on them. The strikes spread all over the state. The tenants finally won a rent freeze at pre-war levels, and the local municipalities were obliged to build housing for the working class. This was the birth of social housing in the UK.

What's next?

Let's go back to our broken intercom example. At the third tenants' meeting, you discussed possible responses to the landlord's arrogance. In the end, you found a solution. All the tenants signed a letter that again lists the deficiencies and malfunctions in the apartments, demanding they be fixed immediately. You also discussed an option advised to you by the lawyers. In the case of two apartments in such bad condition they are virtually unusable, the tenants could stop paying rent and hand it over temporarily to a notary.

Soon after you send the letter, you see that the landlord is making a concession and starts repairing things previously ignored.

You enjoy a functional intercom and new friendships with fellow tenants. At the same time, the landlord sent you a draft of the new lease agreement. You are still unsatisfied with the unreasonably high rent. Still, unlike the landlords of your acquaintances, your landlord did not dare increase the rent this time.

You won a small victory, but at the same time, everyone involved feels empowered and ready to negotiate even better living conditions together.

Box: Dealing with failures

We have provided an example with a happy ending in our guide. However, failure is a common outcome, and we must be prepared for it. Why? We know from experience that our efforts can seem hopeless for a long time, and situations take a long time to change. Every failure contains important lessons for the future. Therefore, it is vital to consider a possible negative outcome and not be discouraged were it to come about!

We have just looked at the theory of organizing and examples of how it can improve tenants' lives.

Of course, the best way to understand organizing theory is to apply it in practice. Before you start, though, we have some straightforward legal advice that might prove helpful. After, we'll debunk a few myths about rental housing that we often hear in our practice.

The first piece of advice was already mentioned in the Introduction—**let's organize together**. We are the **Tenants' Initiative in Prague**, and we have experience organizing. The initiative is a Prague-wide platform for tenants, including an English-speaking working group.

We organize public meetings where we tell our stories, teach tenants' rights, and strive to improve our lives.

What do we want to achieve?

We have several goals, and some of them are indeed long-term. We advocate for a ban on changing short-term contracts. The amount of rent should be set fairly—for example, according to price maps like those used in Germany. We also demand the taxation of empty apartments and the regulation of Airbnb. Moreover, tenants should not bear the burden of increased energy costs caused by poor renovations. Finally, cities and the state should start supporting non-profit forms of housing.

We have more systemic goals on our agenda—ending housing discrimination and mandatory municipal apartments in new developments. In addition to demands for systemic changes, we want to create a network of tenants who supports each other in the event of injustice.

If you are interested in our bold plans and would like to participate in our public meetings, visit our webpage, iniciativanajemniku.cz, or contact us via email ahoj@iniciativanajemniku.cz. We are active mainly in Prague; however, do not hesitate to contact us if you live elsewhere!

Legal Advice

Among other reasons, we discuss organizing in this manual because a tenant's legal position is weak in the Czech Republic, despite the fact that housing is a basic human right according to [Czech](#), [European](#), and [international](#) legal norms.

So. Let's have a look together at the most necessary information for us all to know:

The most important topic for tenants is **rent increases**. The majority of the tenants' agreements today are short-term—often only for a year. For these agreements, there are no regulations about rent increases between contracts (e.g., a landlord can increase the rent as they wish after

a year-long agreement finishes, and a new contract must be signed). This differs from an indefinite agreement where the regulation is a maximum 20% increase over three years. **Therefore, it is very important to keep an agreement indefinite if you have it! Sometimes, landlords cheat and propose changing an indefinite to a short-term agreement, e.g., when a tenant is asked to change flats due to reconstruction and thus sign a new agreement.**

Very few tenants have indefinite agreements. This is why the tenants' movement must focus on building collective power that applies pressure to demand a **ban on re-occurring (or chained) short-term agreements**. Individual solutions are never enough; however, you, as an individual tenant, can try to negotiate a long-term agreement after your first year in a flat, which might be considered a "trial."

It is also important to know about the housing subsidy. By no means is this stigmatizing. On the contrary—for many households, it is the only way of dealing with the housing crisis. If you spend more than 30% of your income (in Prague 35%) on housing, you are eligible to receive a subsidy. Find out more on the website of the [Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs](#).

If you are solving more banal questions connected to tenancy, you can consult accessible sources:

One example is a [pamphlet from the Ombudsman's Office](#) with information about deposits, eviction notices, and official approval of building use. Another example is the [government regulation on repairs](#), a short text stating how responsibility is shared between a landlord and a tenant regarding repairs and maintenance.

In all cases, you can address the **Tenant's Association of the Czech Republic (SON), which provides free legal advice**. You can [contact](#) it by [phone](#), in [advisory centers](#), or via email (info@son.cz). In addition, free legal advice for pensioners is possible in [Iuridicum Remedium](#).

It is always a good idea to address SON and get a consultation. Do not be afraid to ask about small things (e.g., if you can have animals in your flat) and essential things (e.g., the obligation to return a deposit). It is important to have all communication with a landlord in email or another written format. Remember, there is always a collective way of solving tenancy problems—meet your neighbors and get organized!

Myths about Rental Housing

During your discussions with the neighbors or even while reading the news, you will probably encounter myths about rental housing.

Therefore, it is good to be prepared to dispel them. Below are a few as well as some ideas to disprove them and put them to bed.

“Rent is a temporal solution.”

Private ownership is overwhelming in Prague, but almost two million people still live in rental units. We also can expect this number to grow. The share of municipal housing is relatively small. Most flats are privatized, and mortgages are getting less and less accessible. At the same time, the number of flats treated as capital investments is growing rapidly; thus, more and more, we will see institutional landlords with large amounts of capital and power over the market renting out flats in order to maximize returns.

Put simply, this tendency shows that rent is not temporal. On the contrary, there are going to be more and more tenants moving forward. Under the current conditions, where rent prices are growing twice as fast as salaries, we can expect many tenants will endure hardships. This is why we must make the conditions for rental housing better—for those who will never be able to buy a flat and even for those for whom it actually is a temporal solution.

“The housing crisis can be solved by building more.”

This free trade fundamentalism is probably the most popular saying when it comes to housing. We hear it every day in mass media, from developers, from right-wing economists, from the banks—all of them push the mantra “build, build, build” all over the world.

These actors are interested in the valorization of their properties. Usually, they argue that it is just common sense and the law of supply and demand. If there were more flats, they would be cheaper—just like *rohliks*, the famous Czech baguet you can buy for a few crowns in every supermarket. However, many experts are not satisfied with this explanation.

The first problem lies in the fact that housing is not bread, it has different qualities. *Rohliks* will go bad if not eaten quickly. Flats, on the other hand, get more and more valuable in the growing cities.

We can take rohliks with us, and they usually cost the same everywhere. But the price of a flat depends on where it is. A flat in Prague could easily be three times more expensive than in Ostrava and five times cheaper than in New York. The price also can be higher if a park is nearby instead of an auto salon. It is obvious that a flat and a rohlik are two very different things. More to the point, it is just not possible to buy rohliks as an investment. To buy a house and leave it empty or put it on Airbnb is, on the contrary, a common thing. We will explain later in the text what investment housing means.

Another problem with supply and demand in terms of housing is that it misses important details. On the supply side, we are not proposing everyone have the same housing (like rohliks). Commercial, expensive housing is being added to the existing market alongside municipal housing and older apartments with lower prices. When discussing housing accessibility, we must emphasize the difference between building thousands of expensive investment flats and building social housing with lower rent prices.

Another problem is on the demand side. Returning to investment flats, with the exception of people who need housing, more and more investors use housing to save their money. The prices of real estate have been growing as much as 10% year on year, making housing one of the best investments to be had. It is better than gold and even some financial instruments. It even pays to leave a flat empty, while others use investment flats as short-term rentals with services like Airbnb. New flats like this will not help solve the housing crisis. Developers in Prague confess that the share of investment flats recently comprised up to 50% of new developments. The Czech National Bank has also spoken about a real estate bubble, overpricing housing by around 25%. This is caused by, among other things, prevailing demand from investors buying property instead of residents.

Other factors such as rent regulations, tax policies, the social politics of the state, privatization, urbanization, and the global financial market influence on the price of rent. **In other words: this is not only about how many flats we build but also about what kind of flats we build and how and to whom we rent these flats.** The solutions might be non-profit, accessible housing, speculation limits, and better tenants' protection. **Housing is not a consumer good—it is a basic human need. In this regard, housing is closer to health care or education, which are understood as universal rights in our societies.**

*Box¹: One of the reasons why flats are so expensive is the **financialization of housing**. What does that mean? We can understand financialization as a process during which our lives become increasingly intertwined with the financial markets. Finance penetrates every little moment of our daily lives and the important decisions we make: we use debit cards to pay, our children are taught financial literacy, inflation makes us think about investing, etc.*

Many of us experience the financial world as an intermediary between us and our homes (e.g., mortgages). However, the connection between housing and the financial market is deeper than that. Housing has become a stable investment not only for individuals, but different kinds of funds, which implies different, far-reaching outcomes.

If we were to speak about a specific example where several people stopped being able to pay their mortgages. Their property would be bought by a private investment company, which would then rent these flats aiming for the highest possible profits.

We can continue in this vein too. Many flats built today are objects of financial speculation, and new flats remain empty. Tenants in Ostrava, on the other hand, receive automatically-generated eviction notes from a gigantic managing company. In short, financialization means our house becomes an investment, which creates insecurity and exploitation.

“Tenants are unreliable. This is why landlords propose short-term agreements.”

This statement is connected to the idea that, in the Czech Republic, it is very hard to evict a tenant, and thus, short-term agreements are required. However, using this argument against unlimited agreements is nonsense. If a tenant does not pay, a landlord must appeal to a court in the same manner, regardless of whether it is a short-term or an unlimited agreement. The court process is indeed slow. However, this cannot be a reason for agreements to be only for one year or even less. While it may be the case that a small number do not pay, the majority of tenants do, and even they are pushed into insecurity because of these short-term agreements.

“If you do not have money, move out.”

Sometimes, we hear this rather arrogant argument stating that the city is only for those who can afford it.

¹This is a summary of a text by Eliška and Jakuba Černý and Tomáš Hoření Samec: “Financionalizace bydlení. Když se z domova stává investice” [Financialization of housing. When a house becomes an investment]

This “advice” is asocial and nonsensical. More and more people are having problems with housing—as we write this text, one-fifth of all households have [problems with payments](#). [According to Vít Lesák](#), head of the Platform for Social Housing, this situation affects “teachers, nurses in hospitals, public transport drivers, and others. If all of them move out, the city will collapse. The service infrastructure in the city would function on a very low level.”

Contacts and Other Sources

We would be happy to hear from you. Please contact us via email ahoj@iniciativanajemniku.cz, and check out our website, iniciativanajemniku.cz or [Facebook](#).

Our initiative is connected to the platform Re-set. You can find more information about its campaigns on social networks if you search for *Re-set: platforma pro sociálně-ekologickou transformaci* [*Re-set: Platform for socio-ecological transformation*] or visit the website re-set.cz

If you want to know more about the issues covered in this manual, you can consult the following texts, books, and podcasts:

In Czech:

A methodology of organizing, summarized by [Jakub Ort](#).
About financialization of the Czech rental market: [Eliška a Jakub Černí](#).

An introductory text about the housing crisis in A2larm: [Jakub Nakládal a Apolena Rychlíková](#).

We explained the financialization of housing based on a text by Eliška and Jakub Černý and Tomáš Hoření Samec *Financializace bydlení. Když se z domova stává investice* [*Financializaion of housing. When a house becomes an investment*], which you can find in the book *Za hranice kapitalismu* [*Beyond capital*]

[Nová dohoda: Program sociálně-ekonomické transformace pro Českou republiku](#) [A new deal for the Czech Republic: a program for socio-economic transformation] also speaks about housing. Find out more about housing, energy, and other things.

In English:

A manual [Making Social Changes in Local Communities](#)

Jane McAlevey's book *No Shortcuts: Organizing for Power in the New Gilded Age*

Hegemony How-To from Jonathan Smucker

More reasons behind the housing crisis: [In Defense of Housing](#)

The recent movie [Push](#) explaining why we cannot afford housing any longer.

This manual was prepared by the members of the Tenants' Initiative in summer 2022. We express gratitude to Tadeáš Polák for the illustration and to Jakub Ort, Jakub Nakládal, and Marek Čaňek for their comments.

Please tack this to Top of Lower Sash of Window.

Glasgow Labour Party Housing Association

RENT STRIKE
AGAINST INCREASES

WE ARE
NOT REMOVING