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Threefold increase in housing allocations

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The number of rented houses allocated by the government increased threefold in the three months before the election, from a mere 32 in the first three months of 2007 to 106 in the first three months of 2008.

The sharpest increase was registered in Valletta and Cospicua.

In the capital city the number of allocated dwellings shot up from just four in the first three months of 2007 to 25 in the corresponding period in 2008.

In the same period the number of allocated dwellings in Cospicua increased from 11 in 2007 to 36 in 2008: an increase of almost 230%. A further 203 dwellings were allocated through the shared ownership scheme, mainly in Pembroke and Mtarfa. But the relevant statistics for 2007 are not yet available. A spokesperson for the Ministry of Social policy attributed the drastic increase in the number of houses allocated before the election to a greater availability of housing units after a number of abusive tenants who were not even living in the homes rented to them by the government were evicted.

“This resulted in an increase in vacant dwellings which we could distribute to those in need,” the Ministry spokesperson explained.

According to the same spokesperson the eviction of the abusive tenants was a direct result of the fusion of the Housing Authority and the Department for Social Housing.

The same spokesperson also justified the sharp increase in the allocation of houses in Cospicua claiming that an unspecified number of people had been relocated from a block which had been demolished.

In February sister newspaper Illum had revealed that Charmaine Gerada – a PN councillor in Senglea and canvasser to Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi – had advised the Social Housing Department on how to allocate 22 dwellings in Cottonera.

Minister Dolores Cristina justified Gerada’s role claiming that she was very familiar with social problems in Cottonera.

While the number of houses allocated by the social housing department experienced a threefold increase before the election, no such increase was noted in the number of people given an invalidity pension.

Actually, these decreased from 206 in the first three months of 2007, to 144 in the three months of 2008.

This decrease came in the wake of a police investigation leading to the arraignment of PN activist Saverin Sinagra and Thomas Woods who was fired from his post in former Health Minister Louis Deguara's secretariat soon afterwards.

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