

Factsheet – Policies and trends for inclusive housing for refugee migrants in Austria, Germany and Sweden

Introduction

This factsheet summarizes facts and policy developments in Austria, Germany and Sweden regarding housing inclusion for refugees, after the “summer of migration” in 2015. The factsheet is part of the project “Inclusive Housing” (JPI Urban Europe, 2021) which aims to discuss and compare the nations’ challenges with housing for refugees. The project partners from Austria, Germany and Sweden share their insights and learn from specific local challenges and approaches. In close cooperation with relevant stakeholders, the consortium will elaborate recommendations regarding future housing policies and practices to enhance the housing situation and access to housing in the core for refugees but also for other disadvantaged groups in the context of urban migration.

Migration and Asylum – Policies and Trends in Austria, Germany and Sweden

This section characterizes the historic development of each nations’ migration regimes. The section also includes a summary of what impacts the so-called ‘summer of migration’ 2015 had on the nations’ migration regimes.

Austria has been a country of transit and destination since 1945. Refugee flows repeated due to various historic events, such as the “Prague Spring” or the wars in Ex-Yugoslavia. As numbers of refugees rose in the 1990s, however, the Austrian Asylum law, that has so far been liberal, started to become more restrictive (Rutz, 2018, p. 23). While Austria started to accept its role as an immigration country, the topic of “profitable migration” found its way into Austrian politics (cf. Perchinig, 2010). Starting with 1992, various amendments sharpened the Aliens and the Asylum Law (cf. Messinger, 2013, p. 378). Among other developments, a specific Asylum department was firstly built, the Dublin procedure (cf. European Commission, 2020) was incorporated, and the Asylum procedure was regulated in detail (cf. Rutz 2018).

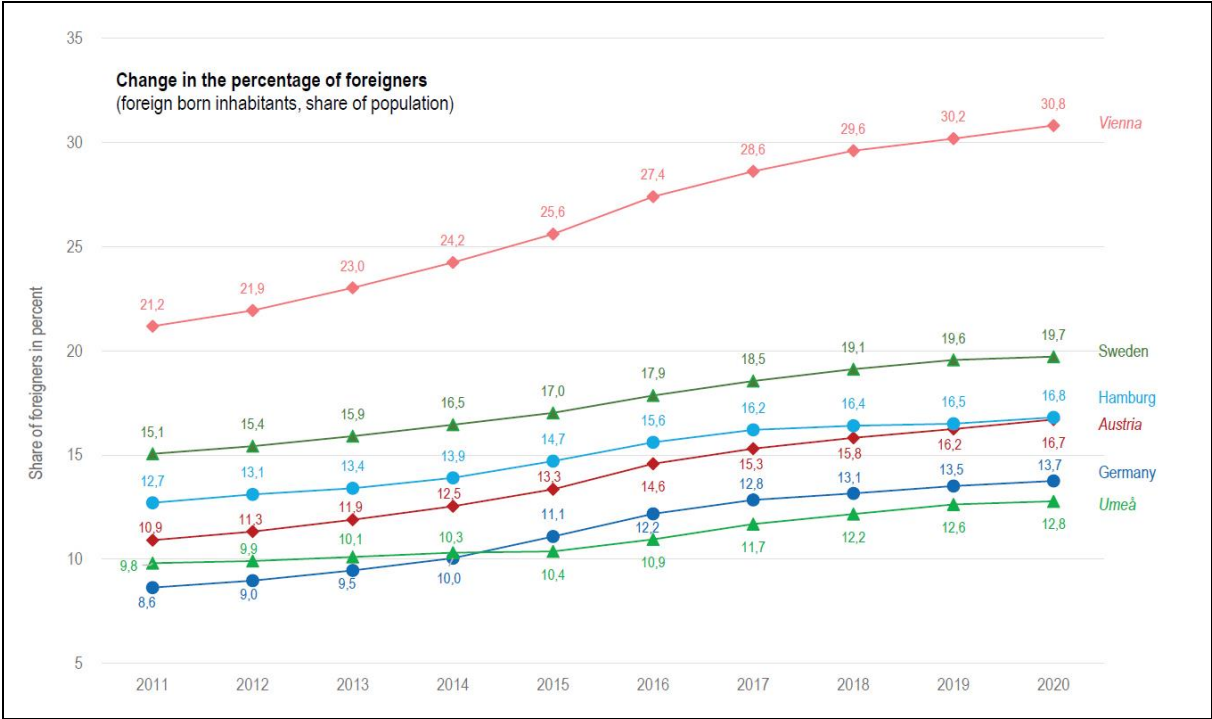
Germany is the worlds’ second largest destination for international migrants. Germany had reached full employment from the middle of 1950s, and labour shortages started to occur in many industries. Thereupon, Germany began to recruit workers from abroad in a targeted way, especially for the production industry. The recruitment concentrated on Italy, Turkey, the former Yugoslavia, and Greece, and even on Spain and Portugal to a lesser extent. With the official recognition as a country of immigration in the 2000s (“Süssmuth Commission” 2001), integration became the new central element of German migration discourse. Germany’s population is primarily increasing only due to the high net immigration. Immigration has accelerated again since the beginning of the last decade, mainly due to labour migration within the EU. In addition, increased immigration from third countries since 2015 has resulted in a high number of arrivals of persons seeking protection (cf. Fachkommission Integrationsfähigkeit, 2020, 26 ff.).

Ever since World War II Sweden has been a country of immigration. The year of 2021, over 2 million of the population was foreign born which is almost 20 % of the entire population (Central bureau of statistics 2022). During the 1950-1970’s the in-migrant was mainly of labour migrant workers from Nordic and

other European nations. From 1980's and onwards, the immigration has mainly consisted of refugee-immigration from war- and conflict-zones.

Since 2019, the largest immigration group has been returning Swedes – that is, people who have once emigrated and then choose to return to Sweden. One of the most common reasons to move to Sweden, apart from work, is to reunite with close family members. The characterization of the Swedish immigration regime towards both labour and refugee immigration has, in a European perspective, often been viewed as open, generous and characterized as a migration-regime applying a 'rule of permanency' (Hammar, 1999). However, the migration-regime has gradually changed into a more fragmented one, leaning towards a 'rule of temporariness'.

Figure 1: Proportion of foreigners in the population (DE/AT/SE)



Source: Own illustration based on data from the statistical offices of the three countries

Summer of migrations' impact on migration regimes

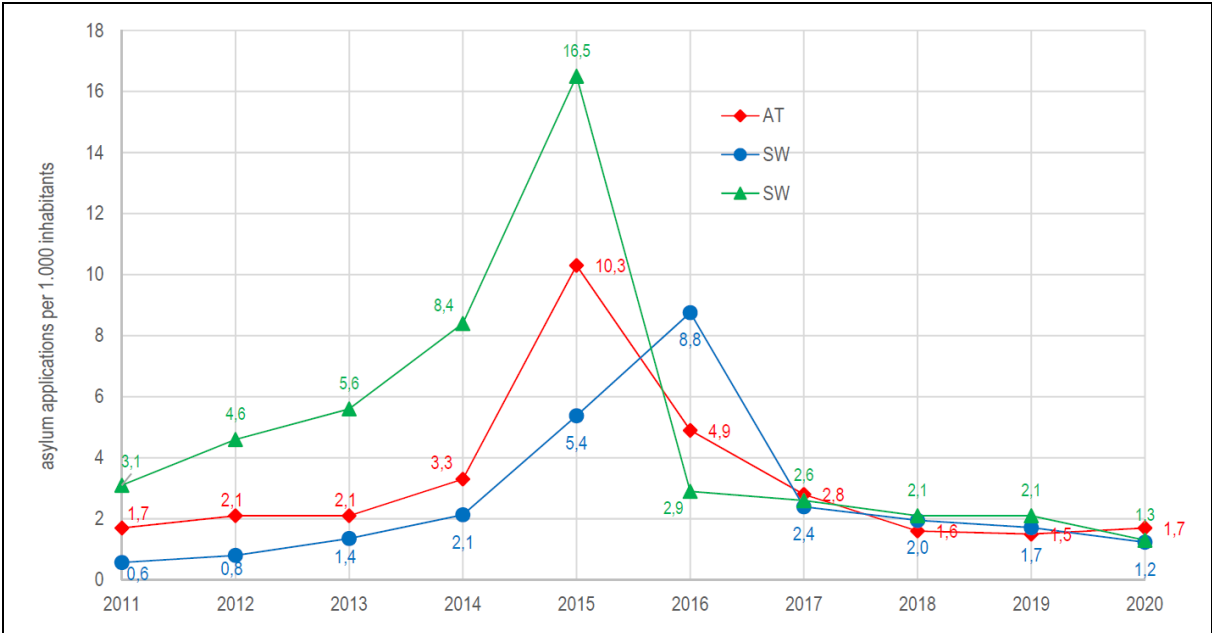
Austria received 88.340 asylum seekers in 2015. The “summer of migration” (Ataç et al., 2015) first was answered by the so-called “welcoming culture” (originally: Willkommenskultur). However, it soon ended and the Austrian Asylum law was exacerbated even further (cf. Jong et al., 2017, p. 12:12). At the Austrian borders, a new management system and a temporary fence were built and practices of “return”, “readmission” and “voluntary return” were increasingly focused by Austrian politics (Rutz, 2018, 17 f). The Asylums' residence permit was limited to three years (with possibility of extension), the maximum of the Asylum procedure's duration was extended to 15 months and family reunion options were restricted. In the following years, further restrictions followed.

In Germany, 1.036.235 refugees sought asylum in 2015. New Asylum Packages I and II were introduced in 2015, which brought with them predominantly restrictive changes (cf. Dernbach, 2022). In addition to the expansion of the list of safe countries of origin, the residence obligation was extended both within the initial reception facilities and in the assigned districts, and family reunification for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection was suspended for 2 years. Deportations should be easier and faster to carry out, whereby health restrictions should no longer be a reason against it. Participation in integration courses became compulsory and labour market access for asylum seekers was facilitated, but financial support were reduced, and benefit restrictions were made. While the need for protection is the only legal criterion

for the decision on who qualifies as a refugee, the passing of subsequently adopted laws, such as the “Integration Act” in 2016, or the Migration Package 2019/2020, demonstrate that the individual performance of refugees, defined primarily in terms of work and education, is certainly relevant when it comes to the continuation of residence and full participation in various aspects of everyday life (cf. Schammann, 2017; SpiegelOnline, 2016). Today’s rationality, does not reject migration, but rather regulates, selects, and entitles or deprives according to dominant categories, leading to a shift from a system of seclusion from specific migrant groups (one motive: protection of social systems) to a *regime of migration management*. Current debates and new tightening of the law illustrate therefore that despite Germany’s prevailing self-description as a migration society, migration still appears in the dominant view not as a constitutive part of society, but often primarily as a problem (cf. Pak, 2004; Schwiertz, 2019).

In Sweden, 162 877 individuals sought asylum in 2015. The 2015 peak was mainly due to the Syrian Civil War, but a large share of people also came from Afghanistan and Iraq. More than one in five were children who arrived without parents or another legal guardian. After 2015, there was a big drop in asylum applications, mostly due to changes to Sweden’s closing of the borders. The Swedish migration-regime is in literature often labelled as a ‘regime of permanency’ (Hammar, 1999) referring to the high levels of granted permanent residency for foremost, refugee-migrants. This labelling of the regime is now questioned after several policy changes which followed 2015. In 2015, the government presented a political Agreement about interventions due to the so-called ‘refugee crisis’. This involved several restrictions on the refugee immigration policy, including a tightening of the asylum application pathway and introduction of temporary residence permits. This was the first step of a number of decisions that have drastically changed immigration policy for refugees to Sweden. Now in 2022, the norm of granted residencies on refugee-grounds is an admission of temporary permits.

Figure 2: Asylum applications per 1.000 inhabitants



Source: wn illustration based on data from the statistical offices of the three countries

Summary/Comparison:

Sweden and Germany have a long history of in-migration, while Austria’s migration history may, to a greater extent, be characterised as a trans-migratory regime. The so-called refugee crisis in 2015 turned all the involved nations’ migration and integration policies into a restrictive direction. Among some of the policy restrictions made in all three nations were: more restrictive interpretations on asylum-laws; time-

limitations on residency were sharpened or introduced; deportations were facilitated, and various forms of demand put on “performances” for prolongation or permanency of residency; were applied.

Principles and preconditions for integration (of refugees)

This section characterizes the current trends and development of each nations’ integration regimes.

Austria’s immigration possibilities of third-country nationals are highly selective and benefit mostly persons who come with a high number of economic resources (in terms of job qualification, education, finances). The duration of residence permits is dependent on the immigrants’ fulfilment of ‘integration agreement’ (originally: Integrationsvereinbarung) (cf. Bundesministerium für Inneres [BMI], 2020), which includes various modules, such as German courses and value and orientation courses. The agreement also applies to refugees (cf. BMI, 2022). Austria practices the principle of ‘regulated openness,’ which aims to make immigration organised, predictable, and productive (Ghosh, 2007, p. 10). Foreigners can achieve full social participation by law if they become citizens. However, citizenship laws are highly restrictive. According to MIPEX, Austria internationally ranks penultimate place (cf. Migration Policy Group [MPG], 2020). The possibility of gaining citizenship is linked to cultural, economic and social resources according to with neoliberal interests. Immigration is regulated not only by so-called ‘hard’ tools, such as border controls and residence permit, but also by offering full social participation possibilities only to certain groups (cf. Valchars, 2017, p. 49). At the same time, the asylum system is continuously becoming more restrictive (Jong et al., 2017).

In the past two decades, Germany has undergone a transformation from a system of isolation to a regime of migration management. This means not rejecting migration across the borders, but instead regulating, selecting and granting or withdrawing access according to certain criterias. In the face of the strong influx of people seeking protection in 2015, the conditions for integration were reflected upon and structural changes implemented. For example, asylum procedures were accelerated through the reorganisation and expansion of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF). The legal conditions were created to enable asylum seekers from countries with good prospects of staying to participate in state-funded integration courses and to integrate those seeking protection and their children into the German school system, into training and studies. Integration into the labour market is faster for newly immigrated protection seekers than for those who immigrated in the past: Of the protection seekers who have immigrated since 2013, half have already taken up their first gainful employment in Germany after 46 months; protection seekers who immigrated since the 1990s had only crossed this threshold after 50 months. There are also signs of improvement over time in the housing situation and accommodation. In 2015 and early 2016, a large proportion of asylum seekers were still living in emergency shelters and other temporary shared accommodation (tents, gymnasiums and other buildings not suitable for residential purposes). In the meantime, however, the situation has eased considerably. In Germany, asylum seekers receive limited social benefits under the Asylum Seekers’ Benefits Act (Asylbewerberleistungsgesetz), which, depending on the situation, are between 10 and 30 per cent lower than the benefits for German citizens. Recognised refugees, on the other hand, receive the same benefits.

The principles of integration in Sweden are to achieve general measures targeting the entire population, regardless of country of birth or ethnic background. The Swedish regime, rests on a basic idea that the foundation of the universal welfare-state will succeed in providing basic resources for the entire population. The general welfare-state measures are supplemented by targeted support for the introduction of newly arrived immigrants in their first two years in Sweden. The Swedish model for integration has changed considerable during recent years, turning from a rights-based to a performance- and contribution-based system. This entails that the prolongation of temporary residency for several categories of applicants, depends on employment and income-levels. For example, the right for an individual with permit on refugee-grounds, to reunite with family members, is dependent on that

individuals' income levels and housing contract. The employment and the housing contract need to be durable and stable, and a certain income level and size of housing need to be fulfilled (Migrationsverket 2022). The municipalities are responsible for organising support to newly arrived during this two years *Establishment period*, and the costs associated with housing, language training, support for labour market training, financial supplement and more, are fully reimbursed by the state. Hence, the need for following years' establishment support, is expected to be covered by, and incorporated by general welfare-state services and support system, thus becoming a municipal responsibility and financial burden. The policy goal is that the refugee has entered the labour market and is able to financially support him/herself after two years - but this is seldom the case. One of the obstacles for refugees to enter labourmarket is the high-skilled labour market demand on education and experiences. The Swedish labourmarket in international comparison, are one of the nations with the least number of low-skilled job-opportunities (only 4 % of the jobs, are considered as low-skilled jobs without quest for education or previous job-experiences) (Torstensson, 29.04.22). Nearly 50 % (48,5 %) on average of all refugees arriving in 2011 were in employment after five years (SCB 2019). However, the differences within the group of refugees are considerable, for instance the employment level between men and women differs to a great extent.

Summary/comparison:

In all three countries, the rules and processes for residency were changed under the impression of immigration from 2014/15 onwards. In Germany, the focus was on integration into the labour market (building on the experience of labour migration). Sweden is still in theory, sticking to an integration model incorporated in the general welfare-system. However, in practice, the integration measures have become more focused on putting demand on the refugees' performances in labour and economy. Refugees' residency (ie rules and prolongations of temporary permits) are clearly conflated with and depending on the refugees' performances or advancements in economy and labour market. Austria's immigration system is highly selective. Integration is expected from refugees, while social participation is often impeded by the legal system.

Housing policies and politics – trends and developments

This section characterizes the current trends and development of each nations' housing market and policy directions.

Structure and challenges of housing markets

Austria's housing system has historically been controlled and regulated to a high extent (Reinprecht 2014:61). Various actors participate in the housing system: building contractors and owners, the construction sector and credit institutions as well as local, regional and national authorities. Public subsidy comes as direct construction subsidies but also in form of subsidies to consumers and tax concessions. It supports all flats and homes, of which half is social housing. Due to privatisation of housing companies in the early 2000s, rents have increased strongly since (cf. Reinprecht, 2014, pp. 64–68). Between 2016 and 2020 rents increased by an average of 12,2 %. During the same period the general inflation rate increased only by 7,3 % (cf. Statistik Austria, 2021c). Still, residential construction is currently documented in higher numbers than it has been in the last 10 years (cf. Statistik Austria, 2022c). Various reforms on the housing market led to an increasing deregulation of the private rental market (cf. Friesenecker & Kazepov, 2021, p. 77).

These current developments affect the affordability of rental housing as well as of owner-occupied flats (Statistik Austria, 2022b). Furthermore, social housing is affected. In this segment, an increasing fragmentation is observed in the access to social housing. While social housing tenant profiles are still rather mixed, the fragmented access impedes diversity in the provision of social housing (Kazepov and

Friesenecker 2021:77). At the same time, more expensive residential areas become more exclusive and the social status of the population living in lower social status areas tend to decrease even further. However, there are also wide areas inhabited by a socially mixed population (cf. Molina et al., 2020, p. 116). According to Kazepov and Friesenecker (2021), segregation decreases, while instead a more consistent spatial distribution of high and low status groups with increasing isolation levels can be observed. In Austria, there is a high level of regulation not only in the social housing sector but in the general housing market. Various actors participate in the housing system: “national, regional and local authorities, building contractors and owners, the construction sector and credit institutions”. All homes and flats benefit from public subsidy, 50 % of it is social housing. Public support includes subsidies to consumers and tax concessions as well as direct construction subsidies (Reinprecht, 2014, p. 66.).

Housing supply in Germany has reached a historic level: On average, each resident lives in 47 square metres of living space, the level of renovation is high, and the housing cost burden is 26 %. But the average value hides an increasing polarisation. In the agglomeration areas, large cities and university towns demand has been increasing for 10 years due to immigration and the change in household sizes. The housing shortage is leading to price increases, some of which are enormous (e.g. Hamburg's population increased by 135.000 inhabitants in the period from 2011 -2020). In contrast, rural-peripheral regions, but also areas undergoing industrial structural change, are characterised by migration and vacancies. Nationwide, approx. 4.2 % of all dwellings (1.7 million dwellings) were vacant in 2018. Overall, it is assumed that the number of vacant flats across Germany may almost double by 2030 compared to 2015 (vgl. BBSR, 2021). There are hardly any vacant flats in the booming big cities (1.3 %), where even the necessary fluctuation reserve is far too low and makes it difficult for households to move and relocate. Federal housing policy is thus faced with the dilemma of having to integrate these two different “worlds” of housing market situations. In the growing cities, low-income population groups were the first to face the problem of finding a place to live. This has now extended to middle-class households. In Hamburg, such an “Alliance for Housing” was already concluded in 2011 between the Senate, housing industry associations and SAGA (municipal housing company) with the participation of tenants' associations. Since then, the number of new buildings has increased, and the target figures have always been exceeded. The availability of building land is currently seen as the biggest bottleneck for new construction. Building land prices have risen significantly. Between 2013 and 2018, they rose by around 50 % nationwide and by as much as 100 % in large cities with over 500,000 inhabitants (vgl. Zander, 2021). Completion of new housing construction falls short of required numbers. Construction industry is at its capacity limits. In addition, rising building costs, more complex building regulations and more difficult-to-develop land areas make housing construction more difficult.

There is significant housing shortage in Sweden, primarily in its metropolitan regions. Sweden has one of the highest levels of urbanisation in the EU. The municipal companies have continually produced housing over the years and, alongside private stakeholders, have constructed housing for all markets. According to statistics from Eurostat, construction prices in Sweden are the highest in the EU. It is approximately 70 per cent more expensive to build housing here than the European average. Only Norway and Switzerland have higher construction prices in Europe. Affordable housing is disappearing from the housing stock and the lack of affordable housing and rising housing prices are exacerbating housing inequalities (cf. Listerborn, 2021). The rising housing inequality in Swedish cities is manifested in an increase in temporary contracts, subletting, renovations and overcrowding (cf. Listerborn, 2021; Sahlin, 2020). Through the “public housing” (allmännytt) building and provision of housing should be provided in accordance with housing needs, and the municipalities' have by law, an obligation for housing provision for all groups residing in the municipalities. More than 3 of 10 million Swedes live in rental housing. Over half live in public housing, municipally owned rental housing. There is a shortage of housing and at the same time, it is more difficult than ever to build at a cost that ordinary people can afford. Meanwhile, legislation means that the public housing companies must combine their social responsibility with a business-like approach. According to estimated needs of housing provision, the

total need of an additional supply of housing is that 710 000 units are needed in 2025. Currently the building-pace is too slow with about 30 000 units per year. Swedish housing policies and the Swedish housing situation has shifted from being the most equal in the world in the 1970's, to becoming one of the most market liberal in Europe (cf. Sahlin, 2020; Salonen, 2015).

Social housing – models and principles

In Austria all homes and flats benefit from public subsidy, 50 % of it is social housing. Public support includes subsidies to consumers and tax concessions as well as direct construction subsidies (ebd.). Only small parts of social housing are provided by public authorities (non-profit municipal bodies). Limited-profit housing associations, that fall under the Non-Profit Housing Act, provide social housing. Municipal housing, as in most of the social housing in Vienna, is governed by the general Tenancy Act. Housing cooperatives and firms that are majority-owned by public authorities, by civil society actors or by other companies share the management of around 840.000 flats. Additionally, banks and insurance companies are active in 14 % of these firms (cf. Reinprecht, 2014, 65 f). The access to social housing is based on certain income limits. In Vienna, the income ceiling for subsidised rental apartments in 2021 for one person is 47.740,00 EUR and for a couple 71.130,00 EUR. For subsidised ownership apartments the income limit amounts to 54.560,00 EUR for one person and 81.300,00 EUR for a couple (Wohnberatung Wien, 2022). 80 to 90 % of the population have access by these means (Reinprecht 2014:69). Proof of residence of two years minimum and a stable income are access criteria. Access criteria applies to Austrian and EU citizens as well as to third-country nationals equally (Wohnberatung Wien). However, people, who are employed and possess stability of income are prioritised by the Austrian social housing system. However, there are some programmes that benefit lower income households. These differ in various regions. In Vienna, there are some emergency dwellings provided to people in acute housing need (cf. Reinprecht, 2014, p. 69). “The barriers to access for the poorest households and immigrants force these groups to find accommodation in the mostly very badly equipped units of the private rented sector. Because of urban renewal and modernisation of the old housing stock, the number of such dwellings is shrinking rapidly. There are also problems in this sector with regard to quality standards, rent levels and the security of tenancy” (Reinprecht, 2014, p. 70). In Austria, the right to housing is considered as a fundamental human right. However, its affordability is not always given. In 2020, 8.758 persons in Austria were documented to be affected by poverty or exclusion (cf. Statistik Austria, 2022a). The problem is currently reinforced, as Austria's economic output collapsed dramatically due to the ongoing COVID pandemic (cf. Statistik Austria, 2021a). At the same time, the pandemic increasingly places domesticity at the center of everyday life. This era of “new Biedermeier” intensifies the relevance of adequate and affordable housing and therefore the need for social housing.

In Germany: Social housing presents one of the housing tenures within a national housing system. The term “social housing“ is interpreted in diverse ways. This means that some form of state support and subsidy is inevitably involved with this tenure. However, the definition (and use) of the term social housing, the definition of the housing need, eligibility for social housing, legal and institutional frameworks, funding, and financial mechanisms differs significantly across the countries. In the Old Federal Republic (before Reunion), this followed the paradigm that the market alone cannot provide sufficient housing for the population due to the special characteristics of the good "housing". In the 1950s and 1960s, the goal was to provide broad segments of the population with access to housing to solve the housing question. The heyday of social housing construction was in the post-war decades; in the 1950s alone, the federal government financed the construction of a total of 3.3 million dwellings (Egner, 2019, 62 ff.). By the end of the 1960s, publicly subsidised rental housing accounted for a share of almost 30%. However, these flats were only subject to the subsidy regulations (rent and occupancy) for a certain period (usually 25-30 years), which is why the total stock has shrunk to around 1.2 million today. The allocation of subsidized housing (rent and tenancy commitments) is a municipal responsibility. Entitlement to access the subsidized housing market segment is obtained by applying for

a housing entitlement certificate (Wohnberechtigungsschein). For this purpose, the household income must not exceed specified limits. The income limits are regulated by law nationwide. For a single person, the limit is €12,000.00, for a two-person household it is €18,000.00. For each additional person belonging to the future household, € 4,100.00 is added - the federal states can determine the amount by which these limits may be exceeded (in Hamburg 45 % and 85 % respectively). The certificate of eligibility for housing (Wohnberechtigungsschein) only entitles the holder to move into a subsidized apartment - the apartment must be found on the housing market by oneself and may not exceed certain sizes – 50 square meters of living space for a one-person household. Since the structures in the different Länder and municipalities are quite different, it is not possible to describe a applicable process. In some cities, there is a housing office as an independent administrative body. In other cities, these tasks are taken over by the social welfare office or the building department.

Hamburg: More than 40 percent of households in Hamburg would be entitled to a subsidized apartment – but there are not that many apartments. In addition to a certificate of eligibility for housing, the districts' housing agencies require a certificate of urgency. Only those who have been registered in Hamburg for at least three years with their sole or main residence can obtain a certificate of urgency. Entitlement to the housing allowance is not tied to German citizenship, which means that foreigners (according to § 2 (1) of the Residence Act) who reside in the Federal Republic of Germany can also receive the rent or burden allowance (Lastenzuschuss). For foreigners who belong to an EU state, no further requirements are necessary. Foreigners from a non-EU state, on the other hand, must present a valid residence title showing their residence status and the duration of their stay in the Federal Republic of Germany.

In Sweden there is nothing that is labelled as a social housing sector. Sweden has a 'universalist' public rental housing model, that historically is built on the idea of a public responsibility for all inhabitant's rights to affordable, secure and high-quality housing. This means that anyone can apply to access one of the roughly 830,000 units owned and managed by the 'allmännyttiga bostadsföretag' (public housing companies). Sweden was unique within Europe, as the public housing we built not only included social housing for the less fortunate members of society, but also increased the quality of life for everyone. The annual completion of new homes in Sweden has been consistently below underlying demand since 2006, reflecting not only insufficient supply, but also strong population growth and the inefficient use of the existing housing stock. Therefore, a significant 'overhang' in demand for new dwellings has emerged. According to Boverket's (2021) calculation of construction needs, about 60,000 new dwellings are needed annually until 2030 to meet expected future population growth while also meeting latent housing needs that have built up over the past 15 years when housing construction has not kept pace with population growth.

Comparison: Rent-setting approaches for social and affordable housing

Germany: Market-based: Rent levels determined (at least partly) as a percentage of market-level rent levels for similar properties. This often referred to as "affordable" housing and may include both rental and affordable purchase options.

Austria: Cost-based: Rent levels determined (at least partly) by the costs of building/acquiring the dwelling, to allow long-term cost recovery. At the same time, refugees often cannot access social housing due to its access preconditions that require a registration address of a two year duration, which is not possible for most refugees, who have problems accessing the general housing market first hand.

Dimension of the social housing market (or public housing market)

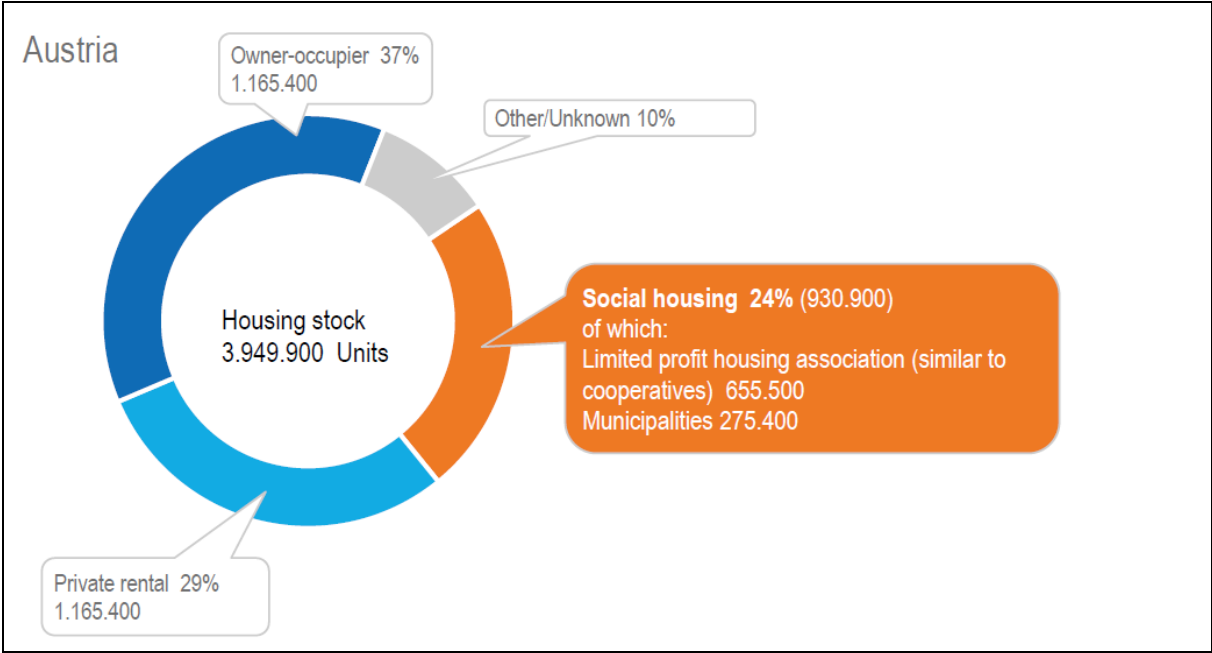
In Austria, 7 % of principal residence dwellings are communal apartments ("Gemeindewohnungen"), 17 % are cooperative apartments ("Genossenschaftswohnung") (Statistik Austria, 2021b, p. 28).

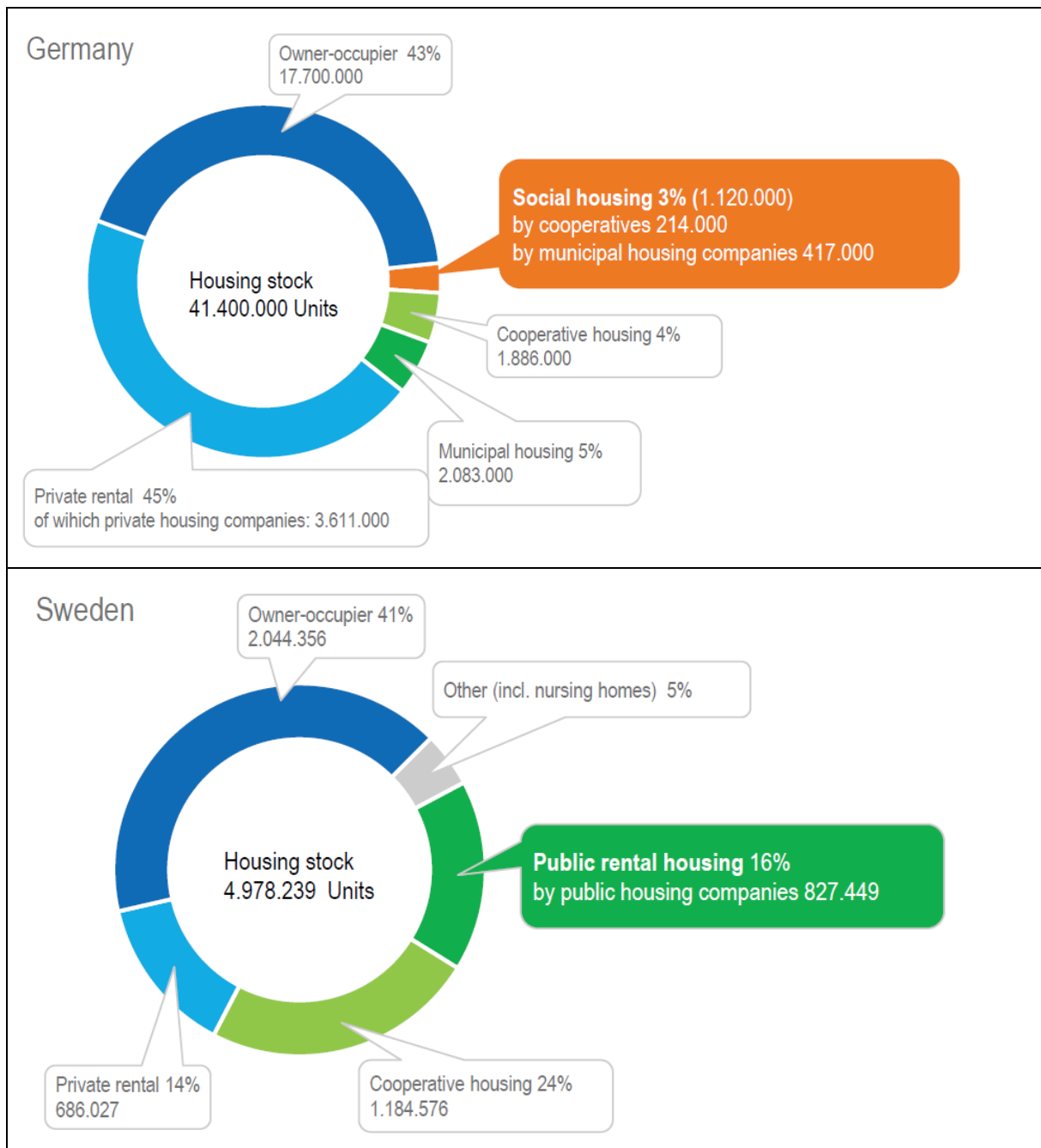
In Germany, social housing (which is subject to obligations) only makes up a small part of the social housing supply. Much more households are supported in housing by transfer payments: Approx. 600,000 households receive housing benefit, and approx. 2.7 million households receive transfer payments (unemployment, etc.). The number of apartments that fall under the regulations of the housing subsidy is not known. This is due to the different subsidy programs, each with different terms. The German Housing Association (GdW) estimates based on a member survey that there were around 1.12 million social housing units in 2019.

Each year, some of these fall out of the binding because the subsidies expire. So far, only a few cities have managed to compensate for this loss through new construction, not to mention expanding their stocks. "Fortunately, the reduction in social rental housing has thus been decelerated further compared with the average losses of the past 10 years, which averaged 68,400 housing units per year" (Deutscher Bundestag, 2019, p. 4).

In Sweden, there are 1,4 million rental apartments – 915 000 apartments of those are owned by public housing-companies. Public housing account for almost 20 % of Sweden’s housing stock – half the rental sector 900’ condominium flats (partly owned privately and housing cooperatives). There are 2 million private owned houses.

Figure 3: Structure of the housing markets





Source: Own illustration (according to Housing Europe, 2021, 39, 63, 95)

Housing situation for refugees

This section characterizes the current trends and development of each nation's housing situation for refugees, which inclusive policy measures there are in each nation and main challenges in each nation to fulfil goals of inclusive housing for refugees.

Inclusive Housing policies for refugees and protection seekers

The Austrian housing system allows access to certain housing forms based on refugees' protection statuses. While waiting for their protection status, refugees can access initial reception or basic care centers. After receiving their status of international protection, refugees in Austria face a four-month transition period, in which they have to move out of basic supply accommodations and organize housing

independently. In this time, refugees are entitled to the basic minimum income (originally: Mindestsicherung) for only two months after notifying a new residence. Thus, refugees face increased financing difficulties. This adds to the time limit they have on their protection status, which is another barrier in accessing housing (Kirsch-Soriano da Silva et al., 2020, S. 79ff).

For refugees of all international protection statuses, it is possible to access emergency accommodations, if they cannot access housing independently. NGO-organized Transitory Apartments are available for people entitled to asylum or subsidiary protection only. Shared apartments that are run or arranged by NGOs and are available both supervised or non-supervised as well as own apartments on the private housing market are accessible for all refugees, independently of their protection status.

Municipal housing on the other hand, is available for people with asylum or subsidiary protection. Subsidised housing can be accessed by those groups as well as by refugees with residence permits in cases that merit special consideration. In order to access municipal or subsidised housing, inhabitants have to own a continuous rental agreement at their primary residence in a Viennese address. Especially for refugees, who just moved to Vienna, this means, that accessing social housing is often not an option. Lack of information, bureaucratic obstacles and experiences of racism and discrimination add up and make accessing housing even more difficult (Kirsch-Soriano da Silva et al., 2020, S. 79ff). Furthermore, women refugees can access women's shelters as long as they are of full age. Assemblies are open to refugees with asylum, subsidiary protection and Residence permits in cases that merit special consideration.

Until now, refugees have been structurally disadvantaged in the German housing market (cf. Baier & Siegert, 2018, p. 10). Integration into the regular housing market is difficult. In many regions with housing shortages, recognised refugees and families who have moved to Germany – as well as homeless people – continue to live in (official) accommodation that does not promote successful integration, neither in terms of its framework conditions nor in terms of urban planning. Of the former, around one fifth lived in shared accommodation of a temporary nature (Baier/Siegert, 2018). In 2018, on the other hand, three quarters of those seeking protection were already living in private accommodation (cf. Tanis, 2020), and significantly more often in urban than in rural areas. However, there are considerable differences between the federal states: Particularly in the city states of Berlin, Hamburg and Bremen, where the housing markets are tight, accommodation of shared nature increased sharply because of the high immigration figures in 2015 (own calculations based on the IAB-BAMF-SOEP survey of refugees 2018). The protection seekers themselves especially critical of the often poor connections to the public infrastructure. The satisfaction level with accommodation is much higher in individual accommodations than in shared accommodations (Baier & Siegert, 2018; Tanis, 2020). The following characteristics are positively related to the satisfaction with private accommodation: urban location, high security, multi-family houses, no other refugees in the house, high level of amenities and flat size assessed as sufficient. In 2018, the number of square metres was 28 sqm per person. The median number of persons in one household was 4.1 persons. The rent for refugees was 650 Euros (median).

Before the Integration Act came into force in Germany 2016, recognised beneficiaries of protection were free to choose their place of residence. Since then, they have been subject to a residence requirement: They must stay in their assigned federal state for three years from the time their application for protection is approved, to carry out the asylum procedure unless they can prove a minimum income from employment subject to social insurance contributions or other exception regulation and hardship provisions apply (§ 12a Residence Act (AufenthG)). The federal states can also restrict the choice of residence on a small-scale basis at the level of districts, urban districts or even cities and towns (allocation to certain municipalities or corresponding immigration ban). However, only some of the states make use of this. The regulation was initially limited to three years; in 2019, it was extended indefinitely without evaluation. In the second half of 2016, half of the protection seekers who arrived from 2013 onwards were accommodated in shared accommodation, the other half in individual accommodation.

In 2016, Sweden's adopted new housing policies for refugees, the Settlement Act (2016: 38), which involves one category of refugees labeled as "assigned refugees", those who accept and are assigned to stay in the Migration Agency's reception centers as their first accommodation once they arrive in Sweden. The Settlement Act made it mandatory for municipalities to arrange accommodation for a period of at least two years for those who have had their asylum application accepted and belong to the category "assigned" refugees.

Some of the motives for this Settlement Act (2016: 38) were an ambition to place refugees in towns with good labour markets and to avoid a concentration of refugees in segregated metropolitan areas. However, the Settlement Act has led to the development of a particularistic housing integration policy. The distinction between newly arrived who are 'assigned' and those that are 'self-settled', has proved to be in focus for most of the Swedish municipalities' housing provision practises, as they are obliged to accommodate the 'assigned' category (Righard & Öberg, 2019; Sahlin, 2020). Unaccompanied children (up to the age of 18) are since 2014 assigned to municipalities for accommodation and care, and the costs are fully reimbursed by the central state.

Challenges regarding refugees' housing situation

In Austria, refugees tend to reside in Vienna's private housing market, especially in a housing segment that is associated with precarious housing conditions. They are more likely than average to live in temporary tenancies and at higher rents. At the same time, they usually have less living space and fewer rooms per person. The share of housing costs in household income is thus particularly high and poses financial challenges. In addition, they are more often exposed to legal uncertainties, forms of exploitation in the context of (sub)tenancies, overcrowding and unhealthy living situations in unrenovated or inadequately renovated old apartments. Many also experience discrimination while looking for housing. (cf. Stadt Wien, 2021; Kirsch-Soriano da Silva et al., 2020, 4 f).

The largest share of recipients of basic welfare benefits (accessible for asylum seekers, people non-deportable) is to be found in Vienna. Vienna is home to 45 % of those eligible for asylum, 64% of those eligible for subsidiary protection and 60% of those with other statuses (mostly humanitarian right to stay). The socio-spatial distribution of refugees in Vienna varies due to population size, density, and the presence of shelter structures. However, in principle, it can be stated that low-income populations, including most of refugees, tend to live outside of the inner-city centre. Current developments and dynamics of gentrification in the Viennese real estate market, tend to modify the integrational function of the workingclass neighbourhoods, that refugees live in the biggest challenges regarding the housing situations of refugees found in prior research are: 1) Housing access, 2) Financing difficulties, 3) Lack of information and misinformation. (cf. Kirsch-Soriano da Silva et al., 2020, ff.)

In Germany refugees often stay in shelter accommodations over years. On the one hand, this is due to the tightness of the housing markets. On the other hand, refugees are often not sufficiently informed. In Berlin, for example, many protection seekers do not know that they can move into a flat while the procedure is still ongoing. Bureaucratic hurdles make finding housing more difficult. In Berlin, for example, once refugees have found a flat, the offer of housing must first be checked by the authorities. Only then can an assumption of costs be issued and the flat rented. In 2016, this examination took several weeks. During this time, the flat had often already been given to another party.

In Sweden we have seen the development of a variety of municipal housing strategies, as a response to the high influx of refugees in 2015 (Boverket, 2020). The Swedish integration model, known for putting emphasis on a 'two-way process' aiming for refugees' citizenship, has gradually changed into a more fragmented model adapted to an increase in short term residence permits, which is reflected in housing strategies by policy makers, as well as the housing situations experienced by the refugees. Time-limited and conditioned residence permits are reflected in insecure, temporary and inadequate housing solutions. Although the Swedish housing supply still is characterized by a considerable proportion of

public housing, many municipalities have struggled to find enough and adequate housing for refugees, and therefore developed new ways to provide shelter for the newly arrived. Due to a general shortage of affordable apartments and public housing, a more selective and fragmented supplement of housing is practiced in the municipalities. In the municipal practices there is a variety of local application of which groups are entitled to housing support, and the width and duration of this support (Righard & Öberg 2019; Sahlin 2019; Eriksson & Wikström forthcoming). In sum, there is a growing difference in local acknowledgements of refugees housing rights, whereas larger cities with housing shortage, often apply more time-limited and restricted housing contracts, while in smaller municipals, with available housing (but less job opportunities), more often apply permanent housing contracts for all categories of refugees with residency. A general trend is the rise in the role of civil society for organizing housing solutions for the groups of refugees which are not qualified for municipal housing support. But the pressure put on refugees (and other in the margins of housing market) to find housing without the support from authorities, has opened up for an informal housing market which takes advantages of the high quest for housing, with high rental levels and insecure housing conditions, fake housing contracts and overcrowded living. The refugees also encounter widely-spread ethnic discrimination in the second-hand rental market.

Summary/comparison

The overview on policies and trends for inclusive housing for refugee migrants in Austria, Germany and Sweden shows that there are differences in development of rules, practices and outcome in terms of housing-inclusion between the nations depicted. Differences that to a great deal is grounded in the different welfare-regimes and migration history of the nations. However, there is also similarities in the development of regimes and policy responses after the “summer of migration” in 2015 and onwards. In all three nations it is demonstrated that there has been a turn in mindset, in the way all migration-regimes has become more restrictive in rules and selective in practices of residency. Less refugee groups are recognized as refugees and included in various support for integration. More demand is put on refugees’ performances in economy and labour market, used as proof for the right to attain residency as well as for housing-rights.

It is also demonstrated that there is growing differences in integration- and housing policies applied within the nations, between cities and regions.

In the three nations there are considerable challenges for refugees’ housing inclusion. They, as every inhabitant, encounter the similar European development with shortage of affordable housing and a marketization of housing building and supplies. In this context, while struggling for labour market and housing integration, they are also likely to encounter ethnic discrimination and exclusionary practices. The voluntary sector and alternative housing solutions have turned up as ways to “fill the gaps” for providing housing support to the groups which the welfare-states don’t engage in, or which responsibility which is no longer the states or local authorities.

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