



Inclusive Housing Policies: Recommendations for socially sustainable housing provision for refugees in European Cities.

The JPI Urban Europe project *Inclusive Housing* is carried out by partners from Austria, Germany and Sweden and aims to make an innovative contribution to inclusive housing policies. In close cooperation with relevant stakeholders from municipalities and housing market actors we elaborate recommendations regarding future housing policies and practices in order to improve the housing situation for refugees but also for other disadvantaged groups in the context of urban migration. This policy brief is based on our 2nd transnational stakeholder workshop in Umeå in May 2022.

Policy Brief II

Special Types of Inclusive Housing

Different types of housing for refugees have emerged

Housing and integration belong together. An own housing space offers possibilities for retreat as well as self-determined meetings and social interactions. Respecting the needs of refugees and fostering adequate living conditions also means improving their chances of integration. Today different types of housing are encountered by refugees. Some of them can be described as "special" types of housing because they lay outside the regular housing market. Generally, these forms of housing involve certain constraints when it comes to residence duration, contracts, standards, costs and other aspects. They do not represent a regular housing offer since they are not necessarily created by typical market actors such as housing associations or investors and often include community-oriented forms of housing that are supported by social organisations or initiatives. Especially regarding social issues, creative solutions often emerge in these forms of housing that also activate social capital for building bridges into local networks and neighbourhoods.

Finding ways from accommodation to housing

The accommodation of refugees is a controversial issue in Austria, Germany and Sweden. There is a professional consensus that decentralised housing – directly in local neighbourhoods – improves the conditions for integration. Discussions about improving the standards of accommodation and housing have been very much driven by the NGO sector so far.

However, the sheer number of refugees from 2015 onwards sometimes left no other option than to open temporary shelters for mass accommodation. In many cases, the shelters became also "waiting rooms" during the asylum procedure. At the same time, the provision of shelters was of importance for national politics to counter the flaring discussions about "unregulated" migration and, in this context, has also been used as a regulatory instrument. The housing shortage in the cities meant that many refugees could hardly leave the shelters, even after very long procedural periods. This once again revealed the deficits regarding affordable and adequate housing provision in European cities.

The regulations for housing for refugees differ to some extent in Austria, Germany and Sweden. More significant, however, is the gap that repeatedly opens: On one hand, there are high and ambitious goals with regard to integration and housing market policy and on the other hand, there is an implementation practice that often does not live up to these goals and high standards. Especially in times of

particularly high immigration and influx of refugees, resources are needed to find pragmatic and appropriate answers and solutions to an already tense situation on the housing market. Here the experiences of community projects can help to implement cooperative and supportive forms of housing also "beyond standards".

Recommendations:

- **Improve standards of accommodation with expertise of NGOs**
- **Seek cooperation with refugees in the design of the accommodation**
- **Offer support in everyday life (e.g. language courses, orientation, qualification, family help, therapy)**



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Community House Spinelli

Refugee accommodation built by students and refugees / Mannheim (GER)

Architecture students from University of Technology Kaiserslautern designed and built a communal house made of wood together with refugees. They aimed to create a space with a high quality of stay. With the construction, the new residents had the opportunity to actively shape parts of the facility.

Creating different types of housing for refugees

The term "special types of housing" indicates that they are different from "regular" housing. Distinguishing features can be tenure, type and dedication of housing, access, socio-spatial integration and support services. There is a broad spectrum of possible types of housing which also differ to some extent with reference to the three countries. Generally speaking, the following types of housing can be encountered by refugees, in different stages of their arrival process.

Community accommodation / shared shelter

Initial collective accommodations and designated asylum seekers' shelters are often the first point of contact. A distinction needs to be made between temporary emergency accommodation (often built up in existing, temporary used halls) and regular facilities, which have different standards of equipment. Especially in the case of longer stays, it is necessary to integrate social and educational services or to organise a cooperation with social organisations and NGOs.

Designated newly built accommodation

To avoid a competitive situation between refugees and other groups with low incomes, new modular buildings were constructed in all three countries especially for the target group. Frequently, those buildings were intended to be temporary, with lower building standards, developed via accelerated administrative procedures and the goal to allow rapid construction. However, the types of housing often include an opening perspective to other groups (e.g. students). Their locations can prove problematic if they are located in the urban periphery.

Decentralised accommodation / pool of designated flats

Decentralised accommodation is usually considered the ideal solution in terms of social integration. A pool of designated flats within the existing housing stock – e.g. of municipal, limited-profit or even private housing companies – are made available for refugees. In most cases, social organisations or the municipality rent flats, which are then sublet to the target group. This form of housing can be described as "dedicated flats" in ordinary housing estates. Also some collaborative housing projects offer "solidarity flats" for vulnerable groups such as refugees at a lower rent.

Inclusion in the regular housing market

In general, with the residence permit the regular housing market is open to refugees. In many cities, however, they then often face other difficulties in gaining access to affordable or subsidised housing. In the case of public housing, criteria such as length of stay, waiting time and urgency are relevant for the provision of flats. As a consequence, refugees often – at least for a transitional period – find housing mostly in the private housing market, especially in the "grey" housing market of expensive short-term rentals.

All four types of housing outlined above are needed. Therefore, it is important to further develop all forms in terms of standards and permeability from one type to another. Crosscutting these types of housing are the so-called "integrative housing projects" that have emerged in the three participating countries in recent years. These projects pursue intercultural, moderated living together of different social groups and people of different geographical origins. In addition, the architectural and spatial design often attempts to strengthen social interactions and to create connections in the neighbourhood.

Recommendations:

- **Consider the different needs of the target groups and verify the range of offers, e.g. for large families or young people**
- **Enable participation: Living in "in-between situations" is often of long duration, therefore refugees should be involved in decisions about their housing situation**
- **Build bridges to the neighbourhood and offer shared spaces: Communal shared spaces are crucial for integration and exchange between refugees and other people around them**
- **Collective spaces should be both outdoor and indoor in order to enable refugees to meet and spend time together without the need to consume goods**

Overcoming obstacles in the arrival process

The system of different types of accommodation for refugees leads to problematic transitions between these forms of housing. Accidental transitions and especially the lowering of standards can create ruptures in the arrival process, especially because the changes are not self-determined. Children must change schools, social contacts in the living environment are left behind or not established at all because it seems not worth it.

Ideally, the stay in the initial accommodation should be as short as possible. Then follows – even without recognition as a refugee or as a person with subsidiary protection – the assisted move into a flat of one's own. If there is a change in the residence status, the refugee should be able to take over the tenancy agreement. In this case, the status of the flat changes and the person does not have to move into another flat.

However, the described process too often remains theory. The attitude is maintained that it is possible for refugees to find their own, adequate housing. This is not impossible, but access to affordable housing is in many cases full of hurdles – in all three countries. Alternatives lay in municipal emergency shelters or in living with relatives or friends with the risk of overcrowding or long lasting unsecure housing conditions.

There are initiatives in Hamburg, Vienna and Umeå to improve access to the housing market. Most of them are second-hand contracts for a limited period, often arranged through NGOs. In Hamburg, anyone with a secure residence permit for more than six months can apply for a flat from the municipal housing association SAGA.



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Municipal flats for refugees

Municipal Housing Company Bostaden / Umeå (SWE)

The municipal housing company in Umeå offers approximately 300-350 apartments for refugees. Refugees receive a housing contract for a certain period of time and afterwards can apply for a contract for a primary residence like Swedish citizens.

In Umeå, refugees with a legal status receive a temporary housing contract through the municipality for a maximum of 4 years. After that, they have to apply for a contract for a primary residence in the same queue as Swedish citizens. The waiting time for a large family can be up to 15 years. There have been modular flats built in recent years exclusively to house newly arrived refugees, but these have all been small one-bedroom flats.

In Vienna the special allocation programme of the municipal housing company Wiener Wohnen works with NGOs who have first-hand contracts, which are sub-rented to refugees for a period of one year. After this, the resident has an opportunity for an own unlimited contract. Similar forms of cooperation are being developed in the limited-profit housing sector.

Recommendations:

- **Set up a more realistic timetable for refugees who have to find accommodation on their own**
- **Ease the requirements (e.g. length of stay) to obtain a lease in subsidised / public housing**
- **Create social housing pools for refugees and expand the approach of “Housing First”**
- **Enforce measures against discrimination, e.g. equality law**
- **Roll out information campaigns and provide peer-workers to support the search for housing and avoid illegal estate agencies**
- **Offer specific programmes which provide accommodation, job qualification and integration measures preferably where housing stock is available (e.g. areas with a higher vacancy rate)**

The most inclusive housing type often is the most invisible one

It sounds like a contradiction – “special” types of housing cannot be invisible, because they are special and therefore distinguishable.

Resolving this contradiction is firstly a question of scale. Accommodation for refugees is often – in view of the large number of people taken care of – planned on a large scale. This means that many flats and thus new social enclaves will be created at the respective locations. Alternatively, the housing and thus the social and integrative task could be distributed over many neighbourhoods. Each individual project would be manageable and become part of the neighbourhoods.

Secondly, it is a question of the actors. It turns out to be rather an "efficiency trap" to think that access to social support could be better organised from one source (one central location / shared accommodation). Experiences with the opening of communal types of housing for refugees show that this can create lower-threshold access to society.

The lack of affordable housing affects vulnerable groups in all countries, including refugees. Understanding “special” types of housing only as a visible transitional offer, may reinforce vulnerability and also segregation. Examples from the Swedish organisation Vän i Umeå show that contacts with locals from the host country increase the likelihood that refugees will not only get accommodation but also their own tenancy agreement. In Umeå as well as in Vienna and Hamburg, there are projects that aim to improve refugees' ability to find sustainable and adequate housing through networking and social cohesion projects, but also to become part of the production of inclusive and healthy neighbourhoods.

The policy task is therefore not only to create inclusive housing for refugees, but more generally to establish accessibility, affordability and adequacy as benchmarks for the development of housing.

Furthermore, the creation of affordable housing requires an active urban land policy. As it is predominantly a task of the municipalities to provide for housing, they need access to land to be able to better provide for affordable housing for all – including refugees.

Recommendations:

- **Promote new understanding: Housing for refugees is about more than "just" providing accommodation, it is about providing possibilities for integration and social inclusion**
- **Improve access to land to better provide for affordable housing for all, including refugees**
- **Distribute housing for refugees across the city area in a decentralised way**
- **Involve community-oriented groups of developers and initiatives in the creation of housing**
- **Build a framework to engage also the private market to contribute to social / affordable housing (e.g. by establishing urban development contracts for new housing areas in a city)**
- **Support a social mixture of tenants in each house, by avoiding a discriminatory rental practice based on ethnic criteria**



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Que[e]rbau Seestadt

Collaborative housing project in Seestadt / Vienna (AUT)

Que[e]rbau is a housing project located in Seestadt in Vienna, one of the largest urban development areas in Europe. The collaborative housing project offers housing for refugees and shows how civil society initiatives can make a contribution to inclusive housing. 2 apartments are reserved for persons with a refugee background. There is a cooperation with an NGO.

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