

# Scoping paper

## Summary

Main bottlenecks and potentials in meeting housing needs and ensuring successful integration of refugees in cities.

### 1. Structural challenges in cities

The increasing migration bringing refugees into Europe is not only due to warzones but also to poverty, climate change, drought and demographic change. This has added to challenges that European neighbourhoods and providers of affordable housing were already confronted with:

- **Lack of temporary and permanent housing in appealing areas:** Europe builds less since the beginning of the crisis in 2008, regardless of the sector (private, public, cooperative), with the sole exception of Germany. Rising construction costs make it even more difficult for most countries to keep up with the demand.
- **Empty houses in unattractive areas that do not offer much future:** In Southern and Eastern Europe, a significant part of the housing stock is empty, mainly because the economic downturn and the demographic evolution.
- **Difficulty to maintain and improve building standards:** Poor or inadequate housing implies a risk associated to health and safety. Accommodating 6-10 peoples in a hostel room should not be an option even for a short period. Regarding the newly built houses, the issue lies in ensuring the quality requirements which involves not only high building costs but also long procedures to get a building permit.
- **More vulnerable peoples on waiting lists:** The situation of the most vulnerable keeps getting worse and phenomena of social exclusion become more intense. The social housing sector needs to be supported to address this issue, at times when the state retreats from the social housing sector and hands over a big share of responsibility to private initiatives.
- **Discrimination & anti-immigrant sentiment among the public:** While Member States are strengthening the anti-discrimination legislations, third-country nationals all still confronted with exclusion. Migrants are often met with hospitality but also with hostility. This can get many forms, such as the denial of accommodation by private property owners; imposing restrictive conditions or criteria limiting access into publicly supported accommodation; and opposition from neighbours.
- **Information gap and lack of administrative capacity to allocate housing:** When looking at the allocation of housing we can distinguish the difference between closed and open systems. Some countries will tie the delivery of a residence permit to a certain city that will have a dwelling ready for that person. Other countries deliver a permit without a housing solution or sometimes only a housing allowance. These different approaches are probably explained by the relevance of public or social housing and its ability to coordinate with the national/regional reception system.
- **Budgetary issues:** Cities do not have enough budget capacity to house and assist no/low income groups due to budgetary cuts and recruitment freezes. Furthermore, cities get

very little financial support from national or regional governments compared to the given responsibilities. Like that, the cities lack upfront funding to local service providers which can hamper both reception and integration services for refugees. One practical example is the lack of skills and personnel to integrate, train and teach new refugee households.

- **Political issues:** Threat of losing votes to nationalist parties changes the political narrative, contributing to the uncertainty for long-term investments such as social and public housing. Finally, it is politically controversial to adopt measures for new housing exclusively for migrants/refugees and leave other groups behind. Much broader consensus could be built by adopting more general housing measures that will benefit broader segments of the population.

## **2. Access to housing for refugees**

### **Hidden discrimination, high prices and lack of adequate supply on the private rental market**

One way to find an accommodation for refugees is to go to search on the private rental market, most commonly with the assistance of social service providers, charities which can strike agreements with private landlords. As other groups with specific needs, they will face difficulties in gaining access to appropriate private accommodation, partly due to a shortage of accommodation in areas perceived by them to be adequate, the high prices compared to their social benefits (or income if they find a job rapidly) and the lack of appropriately sized accommodation for larger refugee families. Despite the work of charities and associations to liaise with private landlords and the anti-discrimination legislation related to good and services including housing, hidden discrimination is a further obstacle.

### **Priorities in allocating social housing**

Another way for refugees to find an accommodation is to apply for social housing. In most cases social housing is allocated according to criteria reflecting the households' financial situation, family size, and time spent on the waiting list. Refugees which have been granted asylum have no higher priority than other groups when applying to social housing. However, since in most cases, when they apply, they are low-income, living in temporary shelter or hostels, with young children, or single parent, they rank high on the priority list. In a nutshell, refugees which have been granted asylum have no extra right to access to housing or housing assistance. Furthermore, because of the situation they are in, they are likely to be among those that are entitled social protection services (as long as they have an address) and access to social housing (to the extent that supply of social housing is sufficient). Besides, associations and charities work with refugees help them to find an accommodation by liaising with landlords. A home is for refugees a first crucial step in any case to get access to employment and social protection.

## 1. Definition and background

While it is becoming increasingly common to see the terms 'refugee' and 'migrant' being used interchangeably in media and public discourse, there is a difference in the nature and level of support they receive in the hosting country.

Using the UNHCR definitions<sup>1</sup>, we can make the following distinction

**Migrants (Economic):** Persons who leave their countries of origin purely for economic reasons not in any way related to the refugee definition, or in order to seek material improvements in their livelihood. Economic migrants do not fall within the criteria for refugee status and are therefore not entitled to benefit from international protection as refugees.

**Refugee:** A person fleeing armed conflict or persecution. There were 19.5 million of them worldwide at the end of 2014. Refugees are people fleeing conflict or persecution. They are defined and protected in international law, and must not be expelled or returned to situations where their life and freedom are at risk.

In this paper, we will focus on the challenges and solutions concerned with permanent housing for refugees which have been granted asylum. However migration in all forms is an important challenge for cities.<sup>2</sup>

As large scale migration towards and within Europe is becoming a norm, political leaders at the EU level are trying to agree on common measures. At the local level though, cities, local government and relevant stakeholders like providers of affordable housing in many countries are already offering solutions to the integration of refugees. However, the issue goes far beyond the refugee crisis and changes the social dynamics of the continent. By providing better regulation, better funding and better knowledge on the topic, the European Union can help practitioners make the difference for communities.

While there is a Common European Asylum System<sup>3</sup>, policies aiming at integrating refugees and other third country nationals remain mainly a competence of the Member States. Since the Tampere programme in 1999, the European Union has developed a strong framework for policy-making in this area. This framework (made of several guidelines and action plans<sup>4</sup>) underlines the importance of a holistic approach to integration and aims, inter alia, at assisting EU States in formulating integration policies.

Back in 2011 the European Commission had formally acknowledged the crucial role of cities in the integration of migrants and refugees<sup>5</sup> and created internal inter-service groups and the

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance : <http://www.unhcr.org/refugees.html>

<sup>2</sup> And as we will see in the chapter 2.1. in terms of access to housing, refugees and other migrants face similar problems, although refugees can usually benefit from the assistance of charities or dedicated associations.

<sup>3</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum/index_en.htm)

<sup>4</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/legal-migration/integration/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/legal-migration/integration/index_en.htm)

<sup>5</sup> Cities of tomorrow, October 2011, Directorate-General Regional Policy, [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docgener/studies/pdf/citiesoftomorrow/citiesoftomorrow\\_final.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/studies/pdf/citiesoftomorrow/citiesoftomorrow_final.pdf)

European Network on Integration to coordinate the efforts of different services in integration policies and practices.<sup>6</sup>

Even though housing is not an EU competence either, several initiatives linking integration and the role of the housing sector can be noted. In its recent Action Plan on the integration of third country nationals the European Commission highlights<sup>7</sup> that access to adequate and affordable housing is crucial for third-country nationals and declares its commitment to assist Member States in the integration process by providing structural and financial support.

In particular, access to housing is prerequisite to enter the labour market. As the recent report of DG ECFIN highlights: *“Inaccessible rental markets and a shortage of social housing may not only limit the chances of finding proper accommodation but also of integrating in the labour market. In Member States where the stock of affordable housing is low and prices are high, such as Sweden, policies may also be needed on the supply side, to encourage the construction of new housing.”*<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, the following questions still remain to be answered: Is the help of the European Union enough to address the needs effectively? Is the role of affordable housing providers’ key to integration? How can policies deliver results more efficiently? Why is a holistic approach needed? How can the communities of our future be shaped in a sustainable way?

## 2. Bottlenecks in housing at the national and local level

### 2.1 Structural challenges in cities:

The increasing migration bringing refugees into Europe is not only due to warzones but also to poverty, climate change, drought and demographic change. This has added to challenges that European neighbourhoods and providers of affordable housing were already confronted with:

- **Lack of temporary and permanent housing in appealing areas:**

Generally speaking, Europe builds less since the beginning of the crisis in 2008, regardless of the sector (private, public, cooperative), with the sole exception of Germany. Rising construction costs make it even more difficult for most countries to keep up with the demand. For example, in Sweden 436,000 homes are needed until 2020 while the government’s national objective is 250,000. 245,000 new homes are needed in the UK every year and not even half of them are being built.

This has an impact on the capacity of countries to meet housing demands from new comers (asylum seekers and refugees). As an example, Sweden has been for years one of the countries in Europe receiving the highest proportion of asylum seekers compared to its population. By the end of 2015, the country had received 163000 asylum seekers. Most Swedish municipalities lack both temporary and permanent housing solutions. Our member SABO has managed through framework agreement

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/clip-european-network-of-cities-for-local-integration-policies-for-migrants>

<sup>7</sup> 7 June 2016, Communication on the Action Plan on the integration of third-country nationals

<sup>8</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/economy\\_finance/publications/eeip/pdf/ip033\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/publications/eeip/pdf/ip033_en.pdf) p. 27

procurements of Kombohus to cut construction costs by 25 percent, showing the way forward to build housing where more people can afford to live.

In the Netherlands 48.000 people are entering the country as a refugee of which still 28.000 people are in need of finding a house before the end of 2016. Aedes members are looking for solutions in realizing additional housing in the metropolitan areas<sup>9</sup>. In rural areas where there is no need for more homes, social housing providers are allowed to make a construction in which they rent the houses of private owners to permit holders.

In Germany, the migration challenge with more than 800.000 people entering the country in 2015 must be added to the existing housing shortage in metropolitan areas and in university cities. Our member GdW has issued 3 key demands that would make addressing the growing needs easier: a) temporarily lowered standards & accelerated procedures b) ensuring social support c) considerably more cost-effective construction.

- **Empty houses in unattractive areas** that do not offer much future:

In Southern and Eastern Europe, a significant part of the housing stock is empty, mainly because the economic downturn and the demographic evolution. For instance, in Portugal, vacant dwellings make 12,5% of the total housing stock. In Germany, while there is strong demand-side pressure in metropolitan areas, on the contrary, population is decreasing in other areas resulting in costly structural vacancy in the housing stock. The current forecasts for the population level in Germany in the near future leaves no doubt: the population will shrink in more and more cities and municipalities.

- **Difficulty to maintain and improve building standards:**

Poor or inadequate housing implies a risk associated to health and safety. Accommodating 6-10 peoples in a hostel room should not be an option even for a short period. The question of how that has an impact on housing allowances can be raised. Regarding the newly built houses, the issue lies in ensuring the quality requirements which involves not only high building costs but also long procedures to get a building permit. Thirdly, the problem of empty buildings being awaited for future use (ex. former offices) should be tackled as well.

- **More vulnerable peoples on waiting lists:** from 2009 to 2012, the waiting list increased in Belgium from 140 000 to 186 000, in Italy from 600 000 to 650 000 and in France from 1,2 million to 1,7 million.<sup>10</sup> Homelessness is also on the rise across the continent. The situation of the most vulnerable keeps getting worse and phenomena of social exclusion become more intense. The social housing sector needs to be supported to address this issue, at times when the state retreats from the social housing sector and hands over a big share of responsibility to private initiatives
- **Discrimination & anti-immigrant sentiment among the public:** While Member States are strengthening the anti-discrimination legislations, third-country nationals all still confronted with exclusion. Migrants are often met with hospitality but also with hostility. This can get many forms, such as the denial of accommodation by private

<sup>9</sup> F.e project Riekerhaven in Amsterdam, More information: <http://www.startblok.amsterdam/en/>

<sup>10</sup> State of housing in the EU, 2015, published by Housing Europe, page 16

property owners; imposing restrictive conditions or criteria limiting access into publicly supported accommodation; and opposition from neighbours.<sup>11</sup>

- **Information gap and lack of administrative capacity to allocate housing:** When looking at the allocation of housing we can distinguish the difference between closed and open systems. Some countries will tie the delivery of a residence permit to a certain city that will have a dwelling ready for that person. Other countries deliver a permit without a housing solution or sometimes only a housing allowance. These different approaches are probably explained by the relevance of public or social housing and its ability to coordinate with the national/regional reception system. After all, an important information gap lies between EU and local level; and a multisectorial communication between stakeholders is also apparent issue.
- **Budgetary issues:**  
As the latest Eurocities report highlights<sup>12</sup>, cities do not have enough budget capacity to house and assist no/low income groups due to budgetary cuts and recruitment freezes. Furthermore, cities get very little financial support from national or regional governments compared to the given responsibilities. Like that, the cities lack upfront funding to local service providers which can hamper both reception and integration services for refugees. One practical example is the lack of skills and personnel to integrate, train and teach new refugee households. Some service providers on the ground can offer provisions without any clear commitment to be reimbursed, which can be problematic especially for smaller organisations.
- **Political issues:**  
Threat of losing votes to nationalist parties changes the political narrative, contributing to the uncertainty for long-term investments such as social and public housing. For example, the ongoing political discussions about the removal of the current priority status of refugees on waiting lists for social housing in the Netherlands<sup>13</sup>. Or the lack of public involvement and policies to inform and involve local citizens when refugees arrive. Finally, it is politically controversial to adopt measures for new housing exclusively for migrants/refugees and leave other groups behind. Much broader consensus could be built by adopting more general housing measures that will benefit broader segments of the population. This will help the inclusion of refugees and solve the housing shortages that is affecting many people, especially in cities.

## 2.2. Access to housing for refugees

As already mentioned, in this paper we focus on the refugees<sup>14</sup> which have been granted asylum<sup>15</sup>. Newly recognised refugees with asylum are considered as legal migrants (unlike

<sup>11</sup> Malcolm Harrison et al (2005), Migrants, Minorities and Housing: Exclusion, Discrimination and Anti-discrimination in 15 member states of the European Union, EUMC, page 5

<sup>12</sup> [http://nws.eurocities.eu/MediaShell/media/RefugeeReport\\_final.pdf](http://nws.eurocities.eu/MediaShell/media/RefugeeReport_final.pdf), page 5

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.aedes.nl/content/artikelen/klant-en-wonen/bijzondere-doelgroepen/statushouders/aedes--behoud-voorrang-vergunninghouders.xml>

<sup>14</sup> People under temporary or subsidiary protection have broadly speaking the same rights therefore we will not make a distinction

undocumented migrants) and are allowed to apply for social benefits in the hosting country. In general one prerequisite is to have an address and thus a permanent home. One way for refugees to find an accommodation is to go to search on the private rental market, most commonly with the assistance of social service providers, charities, etc which can strike agreements with private landlords for instance guaranteeing the payment of rent, thus easing the match between demand from refugees and supply. As other groups with specific needs, they will face difficulties in gaining access to appropriate private accommodation, partly due to a shortage of accommodation in areas perceived by them to be adequate, the high prices compared to their social benefits (or income if they find a job rapidly) and the lack of appropriately sized accommodation for larger refugee families. Despite the work of charities and associations to liaise with private landlords and the anti-discrimination legislation related to good and services including housing, hidden discrimination is a further obstacle.

Another way for refugees to find an accommodation is to apply for social housing. In most cases social housing is allocated according to criteria reflecting the households' financial situation, family size, and time spent on the waiting list. Refugees which have been granted asylum have no higher priority than other groups when applying to social housing. However, since in most cases, when they apply, they are low-income, living in temporary shelter or hostels, with young children, or single parent, they rank high on the priority list. For instance, in France, refugees which have been granted asylum and are in temporary shelters or hostels for more than 6 months, or which live in bad quality housing, will be part of the groups which can claim an enforceable right to housing (DALO)<sup>16</sup>. It means that local authorities are obliged to make an offer for an accommodation within 3 months ( 6 months in Paris) after the decision of a special committee that verify that the claimant is indeed eligible.

In a nutshell, refugees which have been granted asylum have no extra right to access to housing or housing assistance. Furthermore, because of the situation they are in, they are likely to be among those that are entitled social protection services (as long as they have an address) and access to social housing (to the extent that supply of social housing is sufficient). Besides, associations and charities work with refugees help them to find an accommodation by liaising with landlords. A home is a first crucial step in any case for them to get access to employment and social protection.

### 3. Solutions from the ground

The integrating role of housing providers<sup>17</sup>

Part of the daily job of social housing providers is to understand residents' needs and provide early support, which could take various forms: from employment and skills training to advice on welfare support and direct care provision. They already cooperate with a wide range of stakeholders from various sectors, including health and homelessness, within the community,

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<sup>15</sup> Before getting the asylum, refugees are usually housed in specialised shelters, hostels, or private (or more exceptionally public and social) accommodation provided by associations or municipalities.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.service-public.fr/particuliers/vosdroits/F18005>

<sup>17</sup> Accessible at <http://www.housingeurope.eu/resource-629/the-communities-of-our-future>

even more now that communities and neighbourhoods are hit by unemployment and poverty as well as new migration flow. Thereby cities can ensure that nobody is left behind and an integration into the society can start effectively.

In Lyon, France

The Accelair programme was launched in 2002 within the framework of EQUAL by Forum Réfugié and aims at fostering social and professional integration of refugees through a coordination response providing access to employment, training and housing. The key elements of the programme are the following:

- All refugees can benefit from support if they live in the Lyon region or if they are housed in a shelter in the Rhône-Alps region; and if they have obtained refugee status for less than one year
- Accelair is a partnership project which associates all stakeholders related to refugees – such as housing & employment...
- This program is based on a local platform which works on employment and housing for refugees. The platform tries to develop all actions which can help to overcome the obstacles which prevent refugees from having access to their rights.

In 2008, the Immigration Ministry asked Forum Réfugié to transfer its methodology to national level. On December 31st 2010, 20 counties in France asked Forum Réfugié to develop a program like Accelair in their own areas. It's not exactly the same program in each area, but they try to transpose some key principles such as integration and actions at local level.

In Bradford, UK

Horton Housing Association in Bradford works closely with partners including Bradford Council, private landlords, schools, its own training centre and other training providers and the Job Centre to make sure people coming to the city are given a warm welcome.

BRICSS is a scheme to prevent 'bed blocking' by providing high quality accommodation for people being discharged from hospital that are homeless or living in inadequate housing. The support offered includes providing suitable accommodation, access to education and health services, support with language skills and cultural orientation, and other housing-related support, including counselling, drop-in services and maintaining connections to family and friends. Run in partnership with Bevan Healthcare CIC, the scheme is one of the first of its kind in the country and has since been adopted as a pilot in other areas.

In the Netherlands

The "Home again" Platform<sup>18</sup> is aimed to accelerate the housing of refugees. The national federation of social housing association, Aedes, is also involved in this platform. In the Netherlands, each municipality receives a task from the central government to provide housing to legalized refugees. Each one has a minimum housing quota.

The Platform Home Again offers a digital map which allows to see the housing progress in the different municipalities and gives a picture of the country (see illustration) with the monthly progress of the housing quota, by municipality or by province. Furthermore, a monthly newsletter is distributed and there is an online forum so members can communicate with each other and exchange good practices. For instance a project where refugees and students are

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.opnieuwthuis.nl/>



sharing an apartment block and where the social housing provider cooperates with a Vluchtelingenwerk, an NGO with volunteers that help refugees with practical support<sup>19</sup>.

Besides refugees social housing providers have other urgency targets. They make local arrangements about this with municipalities. In 2013 one out of three social housing allocations was based on urgency in Amsterdam. This example shows social housing providers, regions and municipalities can provide solutions in the short and long term by working with public authorities and other social actors to help with the housing and integration of refugees.<sup>20</sup>

Other Best practices from the city level

Complex programmes of Leipzig link housing, health and educational support

The city council is committed to housing refugees in different areas across the city as it aids integration by working against the concentration of migrant communities in particular areas of the city. There are serious health, education and social issues that have to be taken into consideration when integrating refugees, citing the educational examples of finding kindergarten places or placing refugees in apprenticeships.

According to the Deputy Mayor (Thomas Fabian) the key element of integration is employment and this is dealt with from day one he states, in terms of offering refugees languages classes and support and exploring employment and to training options, from their initial reception. Private partners have a role to play in the housing of refugees and in managing their integration into the labour market. In terms of fostering inclusion. It is important that migrants engage with the range of social, health and education available services they have to learn to help themselves, although assistance should be offered where required. Leipzig city council approach is that the idea of separate services should be rejected as this would limit engagement with local people and work against integration into the broader society.

Initiative of the Belgian Ngo Convivial to recruit landlords to rent houses to migrants

More than two thousand landlords are involved in the programme. It highlights the importance of housing refugees and migrants throughout the city, both in terms of encouraging integration and minimising possible ghettos. The initiative counters criticisms that migrants are housed in poorer areas, with the resultant pressures on local services.<sup>21</sup>

All these examples from local level show that bringing human contact and high quality increase the effectiveness of integration and gives better results. Learning successful techniques is the first step to achieve a more integrated approach in order to help people in need.

#### 4. Interlinkages with EU instruments

The way we treat the peoples arriving in our local communities is a first step in long term integration and social cohesion in Europe as whole. It is crucial to find more good examples and constructive ideas in order to get food for thoughts. Therefore, Housing Europe and our

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<sup>19</sup> More info at <http://www.housingeurope.eu/resource-674/dutch-housing-associations-and-the-integration-of-refugees>

<sup>20</sup> More info at <http://www.housingeurope.eu/blog-514/housing-refugees-in-the-netherlands>

<sup>21</sup> More info: <https://www.convivial.be/devenez-proprietaires-malins/>

partners prepared a list of recommendations divided in three areas that can help us to further improve our practices:

✓ *Better use of EU regulations and policies*

The EU can help promoting a holistic approach to migration that address accommodation & housing from a number of perspectives:

- Emergency mobilisation of resources: A challenge being faced by local authorities;
- Temporary housing: use of existing buildings/alternatives to regular stock;
- Medium & Long term Housing Needs including social issues - the impact of new influx;
- Social inclusion of immigrants (the launch of comprehensive programmes is needed)
- Integration: Local experience which shows what can work on the ground

We know well that the local level has a major role to play in adjusting to the new situation. However, cities have difficulty to impact the European policy making, even though they are the ones that should respond quickly in a creative way, by coordinating different partners on the ground (social service providers, churches, etc.). The recent Action Plan of the European Commission on integration recognises the importance and role of local authorities, including cities which would give a ground to them to have greater policy input at national and EU level. Being the representative body at local level, it would be important to strengthen the role of the regions and cities in the policy making processes of the European Commission for communities. This way, the voice of cities is echoed in a stronger way.

The Urban agenda and its partnerships offer a good opportunity to organize exchanges. This could indeed be the opportunity to discuss and peer review examples of national legislation aiming at better integrating disadvantaged groups. For instance the new French legislation proposal on 'égalité et citoyenneté' includes 'social mix of habitat' aiming at:

- improving transparency in the allocation of social housing, with the obligation to make public the criteria;
- clarifying the priority criteria (disabled persons, poor housing, victims of domestic violence, etc.)
- giving the possibility for social landlords to differentiate rents across sectors or within the buildings to promote a social mix;
- obliging local authorities to award at least 25% of social housing to priority households<sup>22</sup>;
- giving the possibility to the Préfet of issuing planning approvals in municipalities that do not meet the criteria of the SRU law on social housing.

The proposal suggests that these objectives will be financially supported by the national level.

**Change of the regulation on the access of asylum seekers to the labour market:** In fact, the current EU legislation already provides full and immediate access to the labour market<sup>23</sup>. Member States have to ensure that applicants have access to the labour market no later than

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<sup>22</sup> 25% of the financial support needs to be allocated to the priority households (marginalized neighbourhoods)

<sup>23</sup> Article 26 of the Qualification Directive DIRECTIVE 2011/95/EU

9 months from the application date<sup>24</sup>. However, beyond the regulatory framework, the integration into the labour market is influenced also by issues linked to discrimination, lack of qualifications and difficulties in the recognition of qualifications acquired in a third country. The recent EP Report of MEP Benifei<sup>25</sup> suggests a quicker process and proper implementation which recommends access to the labour market for asylum seekers within maximum 6 months. The recent Commission proposal to reform the Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection goes into this direction proposing to reduce the time limit for access to the labour market from the lodging of the application, when an administrative decision on the asylum application has not been taken, from 9 to 6 months<sup>26</sup>.

Putting forward ideas to the discussion

- ✚ How to strengthen the voice of the local actors? Can the Committee of the Regions provide with effective tools?
- ✚ To which extent does the EU regulatory framework need to change? Would a stronger EU integration policy make the situation easier?
- ✚ Is it worthwhile to define minimum standards of housing conditions for refugees?
- ✚ Is social mix the solution for all our problems?

✓ *Better use of EU funding*

Cities seem to lack funding to tackle the changing needs. However, we know that in the framework of the European Structural and Investment Funds 2014-2020 (ESIF) more than the already available €351,8 million should be spent on urban and social regeneration of cities, integrated urban development and change of use of empty buildings. The Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) should further finance accommodation, social integration and urban development in Member States with regard to the integration of asylum seekers in communities in order to avoid housing refugees neither in places with no job prospects, no social services nor in places with already high level of segregation.

The initiative of the Commission in the frame of its recent Action Plan on integration aiming to strengthen AMIF financial support in the context of the 2017 draft budget is welcomed by the civil society. However, the procedure to reach that point is rather complicated, considering that the draft budget should be approved by the budget authority after adoption of the Commission.

Since currently cities do not have direct access to ESIF, we need to make European budget more flexible and adaptable to allow cities to deal with changing needs. The proposal of the Budgetary Committee in the European Parliament is going this way, suggesting to increase the

<sup>24</sup> Article 15 of the Reception conditions directive DIRECTIVE 2013/33/EU

<sup>25</sup> Report on refugees: social inclusion and integration into the labour market (2015/2321(INI)), EMPL, Rapporteur: Brando Benifei

<sup>26</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/proposal-implementation-package/docs/20160713/proposal\\_on\\_standards\\_for\\_the\\_reception\\_of\\_applicants\\_for\\_international\\_protection\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/proposal-implementation-package/docs/20160713/proposal_on_standards_for_the_reception_of_applicants_for_international_protection_en.pdf)

share of European Social Fund (ESF) up to 25 % instead of 20 %. Concerning European Regional and Development Fund (ERDF), the issue lies in the fact that most of the support is allocated to those countries that do not need to deal with the migration crisis. This doesn't mean the refugees will be housed in richer areas though, often the contrary. Also, the Operational Programmes do not show enough flexibility in case of a crisis. Notably, their change is only possible for emergency measures for the reception systems which include the construction or extension of shelters but not long-term lasting facilities.

Is the potential solution not to allocate the ESIF budget at national level but rather divert it to specific urban and rural areas in need?

Regarding AMIF, the access to funding could be more easily facilitated if more players (in health, education, housing and social services) could be eligible to access directly the emergency financial assistance. In order to adjust to these needs it should not be necessary to create a different funding tool with different eligibility and rules as this would probably slow down the effective use of existing funding mechanisms.

Nevertheless, there is a clear need to get more support for building affordable homes more quickly. Regarding the long-term finance for new construction, the European Fund for Strategic Investment (EFSI) should be mobilized as a way to step up the activities of national public banks or other agencies in the field of affordable housing. Strengthening cooperation not only between the EIB and local players (housing associations, city councils, and other services) would be very beneficial. The European Commission should take a lead and promote the exchange.

On the other hand, in order to provide adequate support around sustainable and permanent housing, it is crucial to strengthen local acceptance and preventing extremist reactions and in breaking down stereotypes. Safeguarding the liveability of neighbourhoods and fighting segregation is part of the daily work of many social and affordable housing providers in the EU. For this they need to gather the support of their inhabitants and clear mandates from political leaders.

However, housing providers will only be able to do their part if the various components of the welfare state are properly functioning and funded: education, health and employment measures must be applied to support the smooth integration of refugees.

Putting forward ideas to the discussion

- ✚ How to get the political will back on track at the national and EU level to invest in (social) housing?
- ✚ Should be AMIF the main instrument to tackle the long-term housing demand or Do we need a special European Fund for Housing and Integration coming from EIB loans and Member States?
- ✚ Are subsidies out of date? How can local players get used to loans?
- ✚ Do the sustainable financing schemes bring a solution for housing shortages and quality problem as well?
- ✚ What are the best practices for the construction of housing for refugees?
- ✚ Do we need to focus on temporary housing or directly invest in long-term solutions?

✓ *Better use of EU data and knowledge*

Besides more effective policy making and EU funding schemes, we need to tackle the communication barriers between us. Learning from each other is a crucial element to be able to succeed in long term. Starting from the city administration level, IT services development is the first step (knowledge sharing networks) to have a stable structures to inform asylum seekers about the different housing options and application procedures.

Furthermore, due to the big overburden on city administrations, the involvement of volunteers (including through the European EVS initiative) can help not only to assist to the daily tasks but bringing an open minded, welcoming and supportive attitude to the team. A good example is community work when volunteers help identifying tenants' needs and work on complex support projects.





As far as the regional level is concerned, promoting peer learning exchanges between cities in the form of study visits, peer reviews and sharing of best practices on how to address housing challenges, including ghettoization would be a good starting point. The role of interregional cooperation can play a role here, especially the tools of Cohesion Policy (Interreg and the relatively young EGTC (European Groupings for Territorial Cooperation) that can be created to tackle a common problem in the bordering regions. The excellent example of EGTC Amphictyony in Greece (in the island of Chios) is a result of the big effort of local authorities to cope with the refugee challenge and turn this into possibilities.

Joint cooperation between civil society projects and efforts at city and state level would be important for the follow-up of the latest developments. The organization of regular meetings within the city administration and events involving different actors could be a key element in exchange facilitation.

The improvement the communication between the various cooperation partners at local, regional and EU level should be a continuous exercise by capacity-building workshops, guidance and counselling.

Concerning the European level, the existing Partnerships (Housing and Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees) under Urban Agenda have also their share in bringing high level decision makers. A creation of an online network where cities can directly exchange (peer-to-peer chat) would be beneficial for all the involved parties. This could potentially lead to an intelligent monitoring system that could provide data on migrant housing. Further, the European Migration Forum and round-table discussions with Mayors should be reinforced in order to more pro-actively address issues of integration, through working with the relevant local authorities and services who are operational on the ground.

#### Putting forward ideas to the discussion

-  How do the discussion groups at European level can offer an added value?
-  Can the involvement of local actors in the partnerships facilitate the implementation?
-  How does the civil society need to be organized?
-  Are skills and housing availability to be taken into account at early stage before refugees are allocated to certain countries, regions or cities?