



# Long-term, sustainable housing solutions for the intercultural city

Policy brief



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# 1 INTRODUCTION

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*'I don't like to use the term refugee crisis. We don't have a refugee crisis; we have a housing crisis'* Tomas Fabian, Mayor of Leipzig, said in 2016<sup>1</sup>.

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The truth of Tomas Fabian's statement is very clear: in many European cities there is a housing crisis that is not caused by migration, but within which migrants face particular difficulties. This poses a grave threat to migrant integration at all stages. For civic leaders the longer-term issue of how to harness the benefits of migration for their cities also demands a focus on housing. "Research has long recognised that housing is a central element in migrants' path towards inclusion, as much as employment and access to services ...Harnessing the opportunities migration brings to cities and curtailing possible negative effects requires well-planned, cross-sectoral and integrated urban development, in function as well of migration-driven population growth<sup>2</sup>".

The housing crisis the Mayor of Leipzig referred to back in in 2016, shows no signs of ending. In fact, all the indications are that housing crises are on the increase in Europe's largest cities; although the "refugee crisis" is now that of Ukrainians seeking shelter in neighboring European countries. Cities, especially the largest cities, are still the focus for these crises, and often the places where imaginative solutions are found by local people.

Housing, and especially the long term process of creating and settling into a home is a central focus of residents and so a significant focus for city leaders. In building intercultural cities, housing is both an area of concern and an opportunity to put the core principles into effective action.

- **Real equality** demands action on discrimination and a commitment to equal access to housing services
- A **positive attitude to diversity** and pluralism is expressed in imaginative solutions to the housing problems faced by migrants and other citizens
- Housing projects can enable **meaningful interaction** between migrants and others who might not otherwise share the same spaces
- A commitment to **active citizenship and participation** starts with ensuring everyone in the city has a place in it, and a role to play in ensuring decent housing for all

This briefing, commissioned by the Intercultural Cities (ICC) programme of the Council of Europe, began with concerns from Polish cities on the frontline of the housing crisis, where so many Ukrainians have arrived and where there is an urgent need to find sustainable and long-term housing solutions for these new residents. The policy brief focuses on exploring good practice and solutions from cities and communities, in order to create a resource for those facing large-scale arrivals or welcoming migrants, who seek sustainable and long-term housing solutions for residents.

Just as the effects of this crisis are felt at city level, the solutions to them can only come from cities themselves. Governments have an important role to play, but the core work of enabling and coordinating the provision can only be done well locally. Similarly, just as it is not only migrants who face this housing crisis, action to deal with it will benefit other residents and the city as a whole.

The solutions explored here are not specific to Poland or to Ukrainians (who are somewhat of a special case: see below), but have been developed in many countries for a variety of migrants, both forced and voluntary. Housing plays a key role in successful migrant integration and there is a pressing need to ensure fairness for these new arrivals. The data shows that many face significant disadvantage.

This briefing is therefore intended as a resource for cities and towns across Europe facing large scale arrivals or welcoming any migrants, who are seeking sustainable and long-term housing solutions for their new residents so that all can reap the full benefits of migration. The housing solutions explored

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/we-don-t-have-refugee-crisis-we-have-housing-crisis/>

<sup>2</sup> Promising practices in the provision of essential services to migrants January 2022 UN Network on Migration

here may also be applicable to, and developed with, other vulnerable populations in our cities. Indeed, some of them bring migrants together with other vulnerable populations to be housed. Just as it is not only migrants who face this housing crisis, the strategic approach and actions to deal with it will benefit other residents, and indeed the city as a whole.

### About the research

MigrationWork<sup>3</sup> is a community interest company based in the UK with a sister cooperative based in Spain. We have drawn on our team of analysts and the many projects we worked with or run to explore projects across Europe (and sometimes elsewhere) that offer insights, challenges and inspirations into developing migrant housing.

In our research to prepare this policy brief, we have also benefited from insights via interviews and discussions with those on the front line in Polish cities as city employees or running NGOs, municipal officers from various European cities, representatives of housing focused NGOs, and some researchers: some spoke anonymously so we would like to take the opportunity to thank them all here.

We owe particular thanks to Dr Eli Auslender (University of York), and Toby Parsloe (University of Cambridge) who shared their PhD researches and theses with us. We also conducted extensive desk research, focusing on research in related fields and particularly on available, often grey, information about projects of interest. Where available all sources are cited in the footnotes.

## 2 MIGRANT HOUSING DISADVANTAGE

Housing inequality is a significant issue for migrants in Europe. They are more likely to be overcrowded than others (36% of migrants compared with 17% of the non-migrant population). Migrants find housing more difficult to pay for: “Around 25 per cent of them struggle to meet housing expenses, compared to 19 per cent of residents from other EU Member States and 9 per cent of national citizens”<sup>4</sup>. Migrants also find housing difficult to access. “Some of these obstacles are faced by other groups of residents, too, and include housing unaffordability, housing supply/demand mismatch in economically attractive areas, a stagnant housing market and rising construction costs, and bottlenecks in public housing”<sup>5</sup>. This can all be exacerbated by gentrification, which often affects migrant communities particularly because they are concentrated in areas of cheaper housing.<sup>6</sup> Migrants face this disadvantage in the context of housing difficulties for all. Why?

A major cause is the low priority given to housing in government budgets. In Europe, housing budgets are split between the construction of new housing and social benefits for housing. These combined budgets are small: amounting to just 1.3% of European governmental expenditure in 2019. Between 2017 and 2019, an average of only 2% of social protection benefits was spent on housing.<sup>7</sup> Resources are desperately needed, and they are not forthcoming.

Cities are already facing severe constraints, especially as they recover from the pandemic. Most face a tight housing market, with rents and prices too high for many residents and rising in many cities<sup>8</sup>, plus limited social housing supply (which may not even be available to all cities). Immediate or long-term options for increasing supply may be constrained by planning regulations or simple lack of land. Thus, across Europe, the private sector and NGOs are left to meet housing need, while cities grapple with the social consequences of homelessness and poor housing.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.migrationwork.org/>

<sup>4</sup> [IncludEU Briefing Housing 0.pdf \(iom.int\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> [IncludEU Briefing Housing 0.pdf \(iom.int\)](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Intercultural Cities: Managing Gentrification, Intercultural Cities Policy Study. May 2020](#)

<sup>7</sup> Precarious Housing in Europe: A Critical Guide Eds Sybille Münch and Anna Siede 2022 <https://door.donau-uni.ac.at/open/o:2583>

<sup>8</sup> See Eurostat data cited in IncludEU briefing [IncludEU Briefing Housing 0.pdf \(iom.int\)](#)

“Between 2010 and 2019, house prices saw a steady upward trend with a total increase of 19 per cent. Rents went up by 13 per cent during the same period, with increases in most Member States”

## An example: Welcoming Ukrainians to European cities

Eurostat reports that by June 2022 there were 1.2 million Ukrainians, predominantly, women and children, in Poland with temporary protection, and significant numbers in the **Czech Republic, Bulgaria, France, Italy, Slovak Republic**, and most European countries<sup>1</sup>. **Polish cities** reckon that there are actually 3.2 million refugees, 2.2 millions of them in cities.

The efforts of those cities and people living in them have ensured that the new residents, in their vast majority women and children, have found shelter, been looked after and welcomed. However, cities are not primarily providers of humanitarian disaster relief: they are places where the majority of the world's population seek to make their homes and they are the places where effective migrant integration happens.

“It is the largest cities that play a huge role in accepting Ukrainian refugees. Were it not for the present-day situation of local government, authorities and residents, we would have had a great refugee crisis. But thanks to our great commitment, refugees can feel at home with us” said Marcin Krupa, Mayor of **Katowice**<sup>1</sup>.

Arrivals from Ukraine in Poland and other border areas have been significant and may have lasting impact: **Warsaw** has grown by 15% to more than 2 million residents for the first time. **Kraków** has grown by 23%, **Gdańsk** by 34%, the most significant population growth ever for Polish cities.

The President of the Capital City of Warsaw, Rafał Trzaskowski said that “Polish cities have sheltered over 2 million Ukrainians. This is a huge challenge and even greater responsibility. We must provide our new neighbours with a roof ....., a sense of security and psychological help.<sup>1”</sup>. The numbers and the immediate task are daunting, and some cities have responded negatively to concerns about capacity – this may be a sign of waning public support. It is widely acknowledged that the prolonging of war and the cost of living crises across Europe will make it challenging to maintain the same level of public support as early in the war. In June 2022, the Mayor of **Prague** closed the main processing centre (some of which is in tents) for a month saying the city could not cope and refugees needed to go to other smaller towns.<sup>9</sup>

Other European cities have felt less pressure: **Berlin** reckons that of the 70,000 Ukrainians who have arrived there, only 2,000 have asked the city for help with housing. All the rest are hosted by families, friends, altruistic citizens or NGOs or have made their own arrangements. Ukrainian arrivals may not even register their presence officially: “People have not decided they want to stay and settle. They are in a temporary mindset”<sup>1</sup>. Some move around Europe, some return once or more to Ukraine. The majority of arrivals are women and children, often unsure as to how and when they may be reunited with other family members. Much of the housing is done via informal matching, often online, which poses safeguarding risks for the many more vulnerable people involved. But, like other migrants, people fleeing Ukraine are also making decisions based on pragmatic assessments: going where they know they have communities, shops, places of worship, even holiday homes bought before the war.

The immediate response by cities has been varied. Emergency shelters have been set up at train stations, gyms, churches, schools, offering no privacy but a rapid response. There has been some use of camps or “tent cities” although these are not favoured. Some accommodation has been requisitioned and assigned to those who need more care, such as student halls.<sup>1</sup> Hotels have offered out of season spaces using subsidies to cover costs. Temporary housing, often in containers, has been reopened<sup>1</sup> in **Germany**. Meanwhile, across Europe people have volunteered to take Ukrainians into their homes: hosting, previously a tiny component of provision for refugees, migrants and other vulnerable people, has become a mass phenomenon, often supported by government subsidies. The **United Kingdom (UK)**, for example, has issued over 100,000 visas to Ukrainians to come and stay with family members or volunteer hosts for at least six months. However, by August 2022, over 1,000 families and almost 500 single people had asked local authorities to house them because the arrangements had broken down within that six months<sup>1</sup>. Across Europe similar stories are told.

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<sup>9</sup> See: <https://metropolie.pl/artykul/raport-miejaska-goscinnosc-wielki-wzrost-wyzwania-i-szanse>

### **What have cities learned from managing the Ukraine arrivals?**

- Planning is difficult because numbers are uncertain and changing: people may not register their presence officially, may move on (especially from the “border” regions), or return home for visits that may be extended, families may grow, absorb new arrivals or divide. Cities have had to develop new ways of engaging them to gather the information needed.
- The lack of official housing options exacerbates the lack of data because people find their own solutions and so “disappear”.
- Housing provision has to be locally led and managed. The role of central government ideally is to respond in a timely way with sufficient funding (one city told us that the funding received so far covered the costs incurred by supporting about 3 – 5% of the refugees they have helped), resources and, where necessary, legislation to meet needs.
- Cities lead but collaboration with all available actors, especially NGOs and civil society is essential.
- The response by individuals has been remarkable, and bodes well for the political support city leaders need, but does not offer a long-term housing solution.

This forms the background to the struggles European cities face in welcoming and managing the people fleeing Ukraine, and indeed all those in need of a new home. But as noted above, the Ukrainians are a particular group of migrants, that, for the moment generally does not have a focus on the longer term but is in need of temporary protection. Many other migrants have also arrived in Europe and sought to make it their home and the evidence is that housing presents significant obstacles to their successful integration.

### 3 ROLES, RELATIONSHIPS AND PRINCIPLES

As advocated by the Intercultural Cities programme and recently noted also by the United Nations Network on Migration, migration can bring great opportunities to cities, if harnessed by effective cross-sectoral and integrated urban development. This requires coordination, cooperation and a participatory approach – including migrant groups as well as stakeholders and different levels of government.<sup>10</sup>

To respond effectively to the need for housing, it is important to identify who the actors involved in the development of housing solutions in cities are, how they work with the city authorities and how can the city best work to mobilise them?

#### 3.1 A multilevel multi-stakeholder approach

**In centralised states, the central government** sets migration and border policies at national level, which may include restrictions on access to public services including housing and rent or purchase subsidies. Cities may be represented on national advisory or steering bodies, directly or via local government associations.

Generally, the relationship depends on the powers and resources that cities have: in a more centralised system, cities may need to lobby governments for resources and additional powers or for changes to legislation or guidance they consider necessary. In all cases, cities can be a valued voice at national level for the interests and needs of their migrant residents. Local politicians with a track record in housing delivery and national reach can play an important role in shaping the national government agendas.

In **France** the [Programme Emile](#) is an initiative launched as a partnership between the Interministerial Delegation for Housing and Access to Housing (DIHAL), the General Directorate for foreign residents in France, the General Delegation for Employment and professional Training, the Regional Government of Île de France and civil society organisations. The Programme targets both French and migrant residents, encouraging them to move out of the Paris region – an area where it is difficult to find both housing and employment. Specifically for migrant residents, the programme addresses housing, training and employment needs as part of the welcoming and integration process, offering them the opportunity to find a job that makes the most of their skills and suitable accommodation in a new host department. This approach presents the additional advantage of repopulating regions of France suffering from demographic decline that results in the loss of public services (eg. closure of schools) for the whole community.

As part of their mobility project, candidates are supported in defining the sectors and professions that correspond to their skills and qualifications. Specific training courses or skills development services may be offered and advice provided to help them choose the most suitable host territory accordingly. This support can last up to 6 months. Once the job and host territory has been defined, an official in the chosen territory organises a 5-day immersive visit during which the candidate will meet future employers or the selected training organisation. The visit is also a chance to learn about the new environment: travel and subsistence expenses are met by the programme. After the visit, if a job or training opportunity is confirmed and the candidate still wishes to move, the local official liaises with all relevant public services to provide logistical support for the move, find housing, deal with the transfer of administrative rights, etc. This support continues for six months after the move.

**Local authorities** (i.e. regions and municipalities) as noted above vary across Europe in terms of powers and resources, and combine political leadership (implicit and explicit) with managing efficient and fair service delivery. In this landscape, cities are key mobilisers and can:

- Create conditions for innovation.
- Encourage, support, fund, mobilise and inspire community and business led initiatives.
- Bring together partners and facilitate networks.

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<sup>10</sup> Promising practices in the provision of essential services to migrants January 2022 UN Network on Migration [https://migrationnetwork.un.org/sites/g/files/tmzbd416/files/docs/provision\\_of\\_essential\\_services\\_-\\_good\\_practices.pdf](https://migrationnetwork.un.org/sites/g/files/tmzbd416/files/docs/provision_of_essential_services_-_good_practices.pdf)

- Develop and enhance what already exists in the city.
- Build community resilience across the board, which is much more needed in times of economic stress.
- Promote migrants as drivers of regeneration and economic development.

To facilitate and support sustainable long-term housing solutions for migrants, cities need to:

- Provide effective leadership in the local network of actors.
- Bring the right people together.
- Find the appropriate locations for housing opportunities – including by mapping and repurposing unused public buildings, and steer them through local planning and consultation processes.

Cities leading can declare themselves ‘Intercultural Cities’, ‘Cities of Sanctuary’, ‘Cities of refuge’ or ‘Cities of welcome’ which may combine several of these roles, but declarations of this sort need to be backed up with real commitment and investment if they are to be more than gestures. Participation within one of these networks can enable a city to find ways around restrictive legal and policy frameworks. Some examples of this are:

- In **the Netherlands** local governments, often prompted by organisations like Refugees Welcome, are finding ways of ‘cushioning, bypassing, resisting and counteracting various aspects of exclusionary asylum policies’, by extending services and support.
- **Vienna** has expressed its solidarity with refugees by providing forms of temporary accommodation for otherwise homeless migrants.
- **Barcelona** has designated itself a ‘city of refuge’ and used this to mobilise and develop a coalition of European cities working together to improve refugee reception conditions<sup>11</sup>”.

The “**Leverkusen model**” of housing, in which the German city and two NGOs “collaborate to manage the governance responsibilities, allows for more expedited refugee integration into society. Started in 2002, the Leverkusen Model of refugee housing has not only saved the city thousands of euros per year in costs associated with refugee housing but has aided in the cultivation of a very direct, fluid connection between government, civil society, and the refugees themselves<sup>12</sup>.” The strength of the relationships between the city and the NGOs contributed to a highly efficient housing system. Refugees were assessed by the NGOs on arrival in the city, and generally moved into long term accommodation after just six months to a year.<sup>13</sup> The relationships of trust built through collaboration led to fruitful outcomes.

Local authorities at sub-city level may also play important roles and find it easier to provide long term housing for migrants locally because of their connection to the neighbourhood or district. In **Berlin** for example, the district of Mitte bought flats and rented them out to migrants and refugees and the district of Treptow-Köpenik organised time for volunteers and refugees to network and find a place to live, as well as organising workshops about the housing market<sup>14</sup>. In **Switzerland** housing for asylum seekers and recently for Ukrainians is provided on the basis of “subsidiarity”: people are evenly distributed to 26 cantons, and every village or town within then finds a local housing solution for the proportional number of people they receive<sup>15</sup>.

**Civil society and the voluntary sector** (including NGOs, faith communities, trade unions, community groups) have been key stakeholders, sometimes acting as pressure groups nationally and within cities,

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<sup>11</sup> Precarious Housing in Europe: A Critical Guide Eds Sybille Münch and Anna Siede 2022 <https://door.donau-uni.ac.at/open/o:2583> p92

<sup>12</sup> <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s12134-021-00876-4.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Interview, Auslender, August 2022

<sup>14</sup> Auslender, Eli (2021) *Brick-by-Brick Integration: The Effect of Multi-Level Governance on Refugee Housing and Integration in Germany*. PhD thesis, University of York. [https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/29549/1/Auslender\\_204049747\\_CorrectedThesisClean.pdf](https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/29549/1/Auslender_204049747_CorrectedThesisClean.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> University of Warsaw Centre for Migration Research Webinar Forced migration, relocation and housing <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B25pUMEPQi8> Tilia Jacomet from St Gallen at 58mins”



playing crucial leadership roles building understanding in communities, but also offering options for service provision otherwise not available.

In 2015 in **Berlin**, civil society solutions ‘sprung up overnight’ to find housing in the absence of an adequate governmental response.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, countries in the Global South hosting refugees have found that supporting civil society is not only effective and efficient but also important for lessening tensions between refugees and local longer term resident communities.

One faith-based organisation makes the case very strongly: “Strengthen churches, mosques, faith groups and CSOs. When civil society, churches and faith groups lead responses, tensions lessen between refugee and host communities. Faith groups and churches have a unique role in building understanding, hope and compassion. Faith actors, civil society and local authorities are doing an excellent job in Poland, Moldova and Romania. Instead of replacing local capacity, the UN and multinational NGOs should be coming in to support and fund their efforts and to build capacity.”<sup>17</sup>

**The private sector** is often already an established partner in local authority service provision, and there are obvious roles for social housing companies, such as that played by East Metropole Housing in the **Lyon Home Silk Road project**<sup>18</sup>. Social value contracting where social aims are included in the specification for contracts and assessed alongside value for money, viability etc., may offer further opportunities especially in new housing developments. Across Europe private sector companies have offered temporary spaces to house people fleeing Ukraine, some making use of subsidies available, and may be open to longer term arrangements. Within the sector, migrant run businesses may offer particular expertise.

In the **UK**, the private sector has been a key delivery partner in the supply of housing for refugees and migrants, for both central and local government. However, a risk with private sector provision is often inconsistency in service and poor quality. With robust scrutiny and careful contracting, including assessing contracts on wider social criteria as well as value for money, the private sector can become a meaningful partner in meeting migrant housing needs.

**Migrants themselves, and their organisations** are often ignored as potential partners, although their participation should offer all involved opportunities for community development, co-design and greater expertise. It is noted that only two of the projects identified and described in this research are migrant run (both supported by a recent European programme focusing on innovation), but the current new emphasis on co-design at municipal, regional and national levels may right this imbalance. The UNITES project<sup>19</sup> for example involves eight cities in co-designing integration strategies with stakeholders, migrants, and established residents.

### 3.2 Cities create the conditions for effective housing solutions

Effective housing solutions rely on stable foundations. There are some key principles which form the basis for successful housing approaches:

- **Be strategic:** plan for the whole life cycle and the long term. Take into account where people may want to move on to, what they may need later, and how communities may change.
- **Think long-term:** Emergency responses are, of course, necessary, but housing provision may last for centuries. It must be sustainable in the ecological sense<sup>20</sup>, sustainable politically and built to last.
- **Provide leadership, both locally, regionally and nationally:** ensure there is some political consensus if possible, but put welcoming and a positive approach to long-term migrant inclusion

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<sup>16</sup> Auslender 2021 149

<sup>17</sup> Warm welcome, lurking tensions. World vision. [https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/warm-welcomes-lurking-tensions-vital-lessons-global-south-countries-hosting\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/warm-welcomes-lurking-tensions-vital-lessons-global-south-countries-hosting_en)

<sup>18</sup> <https://uia-initiative.eu/en/uia-cities/lyon-metropole>

<sup>19</sup> <https://eurocities.eu/projects/unites/>.

<sup>20</sup> For more on this see <https://rm.coe.int/policy-brief-green-urban-planning-for-intercultural-cities-/1680a836f3>

at the centre of it. A confident and thriving city is proud to welcome new residents and recognises and realises their potential.

- **Develop effective collaboration:** this is particularly important with the voluntary sector, but also with other key institutions (local universities and colleges, the police, local health services).
- **Support, strengthen and develop civil society and community:** this is where effective migrant integration happens. Develop solutions which benefit all the community: investment should benefit existing residents as well as newcomers or risk creating tension<sup>21</sup>.
- **Create the perspective you need:** from reception to long term, ensure that all systems focus on supporting, enabling and learning rather than “helping”<sup>22</sup> and ensure to involve those being housed. Co-design can also be a tool for migrant and other community development. “Tenants empowerment is the key to responsible housing solutions<sup>23</sup>”.
- **Be holistic:** do not look at housing in isolation from all the other aspects of migrants’ lives. People also need transport, jobs, education, training, access to social care, green spaces for leisure and social contact.
- **Create mixed communities:** work to ensure equal housing access for migrants and non-migrants (with options for reserving or creating some spaces for those with particular needs) and avoid creating segregation. Build community connections as part of the development work. Aim to create a migrant tenure mix that parallels that of the whole community.
- **Don’t skimp on quality:** however urgent the problem, the solution needs to last and age well. Quality control is particularly important to embed in relationships with external partners. Quality is inseparable from sustainability<sup>24</sup>.
- **Embed learning in your processes:** ensure that all work is regularly reviewed and projects include well-resourced evaluations that can question or challenge as well as report. Make space in decision-making structures for learning to be incorporated.

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*Housing is about finding a home for people to live in, not finding people to live in your home.*

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## 4 CHALLENGES AND HOW TO ADDRESS THEM

What problems do migrants face that need solving? Most, of course are not confined to migrants. Below some of the key problems are briefly described so as the projects that have been designed to solve them.

**Scarcity of suitable housing:** As the Mayor of **Leipzig** said, it is housing crisis, not a refugee crisis. In many cities there is little scope for new development because it is restricted simply by lack of land, planning controls or public concern about losing more green space. Social housing may also be in short supply, especially if demand is fuelled by a scarcity of affordable housing in other sectors. Some groups such as larger families or those with disabilities may need particular types of housing that are less available. Rents and house prices, as noted above, are rising in many cities, and may rise further when cities experience increased demand because of new arrivals. This, in turn, may fuel community tensions and political pressure blaming migrants for the shortages.

**Local authorities may lack the necessary powers or resources:** Lack of powers and resources lie at the heart of the housing crisis. Although housing is most commonly a local authority function, cities may not have the powers required, for example, to build new rented housing, to requisition land or buildings, or to cap rents, and planning may be constrained by national legislation. Even with the powers

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<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Warm welcome, lurking tensions. World vision report cited above).

<sup>22</sup> the video from University of Warsaw has interesting examples of this from Nova Scotia, Canada (see citation 20)

<sup>23</sup> European Handbook on Responsible Housing awards 2022, page 5

[https://www.responsiblehousing.eu/files/ugd/8ac5c3\\_2e3d4168a7eb441c84a934ce7548ad39.pdf](https://www.responsiblehousing.eu/files/ugd/8ac5c3_2e3d4168a7eb441c84a934ce7548ad39.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> see <https://rm.coe.int/policy-brief-green-urban-planning-for-intercultural-cities-/1680a836f3> for more detail on this.

needed, housing requires resources and cities may depend on uncertain finance from central or regional government to meet additional needs.

**Unequal access to suitable housing:** States may have laws that prevent in practice some migrants (especially migrants with irregular status or people seeking asylum while their demand is pending assessment) from accessing rental markets or social housing. Discrimination, although illegal in many states, is rife and often difficult to prove especially when systemic. Hostility to migrants may effectively bar their access to some areas. Migrants may find themselves trapped in unsuitable housing because of exploitation by unscrupulous landlords (or employers), or as a result of earlier provision that may disqualify them later. In order to secure access to housing, migrants may need information, advice and advocacy that they cannot easily access, either because it does not exist or because there are linguistic or cultural barriers. In the long term, if migrants do not play a full part in local decision-making, they are unable to secure further housing provision that might serve their communities.

**Transition from temporary to longer term housing:** Many migrants arrive into temporary arrangements, whether refugee facilities or accommodation with family or friends. Moving from these into longer term sustainable housing can be difficult. People with “a roof over their heads” may not be able to access services for those who are homeless and initial arrangements may have stranded people in areas that are unsuitable but deprived them of getting necessary residence qualifications in areas in which they could thrive. The formal and informal support available may feel difficult to leave behind, and further, sometimes what is available as “move-on” housing appears worse, or more expensive, difficult to manage or simply less friendly than where they are.

Below the brief will address some solutions that have been developed to tackle these problems. Many have been developed in response to needs as they emerge and so some address two or more of the problems above, which are, of course, often related.

#### 4.1 Addressing housing scarcity

##### Creating more housing

The [Norwegian State Housing Bank Husbanken](#) offers subsidised loans to build or renovate eco homes or lifetime homes (adapted for disabilities) for all residents and encourages refugees to take these up as a way into the housing market.

[The Home Silk Road project](#) in Lyon, France, is transforming a former silk industrial building into social housing for vulnerable groups. They are housing and employing 30 vulnerable inhabitants on the construction site itself, and engaging them in the participatory development process.

The **Czech Republic** government's [Ukraine - Expanding Public Accommodation programme](#) offers central government funding to local authorities to support refurbishment of municipal and regional buildings not currently used for accommodation, to offer medium-term accommodation for refugees, and later be brought into the general social housing stock.

[Canopy Housing](#) enables prospective tenants and volunteers to renovate empty and derelict homes in **Leeds**, UK, which are offered to homeless people, many of them refugees and migrants, who also have the chance to work alongside others in the community.

[Habitat Poland](#) has developed a pilot project in **Warsaw** to house young people coming out of foster care in adapted unused attic spaces.

The [TOM](#) housing project ‘Living Together in Tolerance’ in **Berlin**, Germany, developed by Berlin's leading housing company created a new neighbourhood with 164 rental apartments (half of which are for refugees, the rest for other Berliners), a residents' café, communal rooms, tenants' gardens and an integration office. The intercultural day-care centre with 100 places is also open to children from the surrounding area. Modular or demountable housing, including containers, has been used for some inspiring projects. It is, of course, quicker to produce but also offers other advantages. Often demountable housing is subject to less rigorous planning requirements and it is also likely to be more politically acceptable and welcomed by local communities, especially if the buildings are on spaces that are “unloved” or perceived as causing problems for the area.

- **MUF** started in 2015 and now has 28 sites using containers in **Berlin**, Germany, providing a third of the city's refugee accommodation. Originally these housed dormitories and shared kitchens, as well as space for a social worker, and around 400 people could be housed in each new area. The current model 'has more of a 'long-term' focus and has been amended to include private apartments. This means they can house 250 people maximum which decreases the quantity but improves individual quality of life.
- The **Curant** project in **Antwerp**, Belgium, which houses unaccompanied young refugees aged 17-22 sharing with young Flemish people aged 20-30 mainly in modular units "combines human compassion and social responsibility" by offering vulnerable young people "buddies" as well as a home.
- **Amsterdam Start Blok**, the Netherlands, is built from containers, and houses 283 young people who pay rent with 282 asylum seekers and refugees whose housing is subsidised.

### Addressing affordability

The **City of Tuzla**, Bosnia and Herzegovina, also offers rent subsidies and has selective application criteria in order to ensure vulnerable and displaced people are prioritised for these. "The City of Tuzla managed to provide social and economic assistance to several families who have moved into these buildings by supporting them with the purchase of beekeeping equipment, chainsaws, excavators, computers, as well as professional training and additional training for individual users."<sup>25</sup>

In **Estonia**, the state offers deposits for rental for refugees, in order to support access to the private rental market and to encourage landlords to rent to migrants. The state is also engaging an intermediary organisation to support migrants to access housing, including state owned housing.

The **ESTIA project** in **Greece** operates in several cities and guarantees rents to landlords for city centre apartments for recognised vulnerable asylum seekers. Some of these projects combine rent subsidies with social support, and some of the social rental agencies mentioned below also include assistance with rent or deposits.

### 4.2 What if the city lacks the necessary powers?

The various schemes described above that use modular, demountable and container housing are responses not just to the need for rapid development but also planning controls that may make permanent building impossible. **Berlin**, Germany, faced these problems and pushed to get new powers: new laws in 2015 included a special regulation to allow city states to sidestep building regulations to develop emergency refugee shelters, a rent cap (which was later overturned by the courts) and a new affordable housing law "which designates 20% of all newly built units as sequestered for special needs groups such as refugees, homeless people, those needing assisted living, and other special circumstances. It also raises funds for the development and modernisation of social housing"<sup>26</sup>.

Many European cities or planning authorities have passed similar planning rules which designate a minimum percentage of social or affordable housing for all new developments, which, while not specifically for migrants, assists all vulnerable people looking for housing. **Barcelona**, for example, designated 30% of all new building from 2018. Some **London boroughs** demand as high as 50%.

Many of the schemes described here are partnerships between cities and NGOs or other civil society organisations, where the non-statutory organisations take on roles that the city cannot, or which are better performed by other bodies. These are also responses to identified gaps in powers and resources, as are decisions by cities to use their influence to leverage other organisations to provide housing for migrants.

The **Leverkusen model** mentioned above is one example of this: "the city's goals were to save on expenditures for refugee accommodations while the NGOs sought to facilitate refugee entry into society through private housing. Both were obtained."<sup>27</sup> Part of the success of the Leverkusen model is

<sup>25</sup> Page 13, [European Responsible Housing Awards Handbook 2022](#)

<sup>26</sup> Auslander 2021:151, 154

<sup>27</sup> <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s12134-021-00876-4.pdf>

attributed to the trust and respect that the municipality had for the NGOs, who were treated as equal partners with specialist knowledge. This relationship formed the basis of a productive partnership, with the NGOs able to effectively deliver where the municipality lacked the specialist competence.

Another is the [MOI](#) project in **Turin**, Italy. This project is a partnership between the Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo - an ancient local philanthropic organisation - the city council, the Prefecture, the regional authority, and the local Diocese. These organisations have worked together to offer a holistic response to transition migrants from an informal squat within an old Olympic Village into formal accommodation, offering a range of support including employment support and immigration advice (see chapter 4.4 for more detailed information).

[Innisfree Housing Association](#), **UK**, is an example of leadership. It was set up to house Irish migrants in the UK and now sees its mission as widened to other migrants. It is a medium sized association and like most in the UK much of its vacant housing is allocated via local authority systems and so not within its control. It has chosen to allocate a small number of properties to new Afghan and Syrian refugee arrivals, funds the housing rights website and leads in national efforts to bring other housing associations on board to help get migrants housed.

Undocumented migrants present specific dilemmas. Not only are cities often barred by legislation from providing some services, but the migrants themselves may be reluctant to ask official bodies for help because of fears that their whereabouts will be made known to immigration authorities, even where there are effective firewalls against information sharing in place. Two UK based projects specifically address these needs.

The [No Recourse to Public Funds project](#) by Commonweal Housing and Praxis in **London** houses destitute migrant families who the local authorities often have a duty to accommodate if they are applying to regularise their status, and so will pay their rent and living costs. The houses are shared with single destitute undocumented migrant women (who generally have no access to social security or other support) and all are supported by Praxis who also offer immigration advocacy. This cross-subsidy model also enables the families and women to build networks of support.

[CARAG Housing Project](#) in **Coventry**, was set up by undocumented migrants themselves to support and house homeless destitute migrants and runs a house with 6 bedspaces. It started from seed money and support from the local council as part of an EU funded pilot project focusing on innovative practices, and moved into housing provision as a result of the pandemic. They have now secured further funding from a range of charitable foundations.

### 4.3 Enabling fair access to housing

#### Tackling discrimination against migrants by landlords

Many projects described in this policy brief were developed in response to the fact that migrants generally live in worse housing conditions and even pay higher rents for their homes than the population average. At the root of this is often discrimination, by landlords, who refuse to house migrants or place them in worse conditions or charge them more. At a basic level, projects like [Moabit Hilft](#) in **Berlin**, Germany, offer accompaniment and advocacy by volunteers that can challenge and bear witness to this.

The [Housing Rights website](#) run by the **UK** Chartered Institute of Housing provides up to date information on migrant housing rights and options, including how to tackle discrimination, for migrants themselves and those advising them.

[Game of Homes](#) in **Wolverhampton**, UK was set up to educate migrants about their housing rights and responsibilities. The project focused on creating accessible and fun training programmes about maintaining tenancies, to make participants “good tenants” and reduce homelessness. It educated people about their rights and the responsibilities of the landlord, which helps prevent exploitation.

The city of [Bergen, Norway](#), asks refugees to sign an agreement with the community to demonstrate their commitment to uphold their obligations regarding their accommodation. In return, the city pays for

the deposit, and makes checks to ensure that private rental properties are suitable and appropriately priced, to prevent landlords from overcharging migrants.

### **Enabling better access to private rented housing**

There are examples of social rental agencies across Europe, some for specific groups some for all prospective tenants. Generally, all broker the landlord/tenant relationship in some way, recruiting or identifying landlords willing to work with them, sometimes managing rent subsidies or deposit schemes, and advising and supporting tenants.

**Co-operative Housing Ireland** has successfully provided 800+ homes for Syrians in sustainable communities, and was developed as a rapid response to the needs of displaced families. They navigate between stakeholders – including local government and NGOs, and inspect and identify suitable housing for refugees. They also match refugees with hosts in city centre areas to enable and support access to the private rental market and work with the Irish Red Cross in order to offer holistic support to the people homed.

**Social Rental Agency, Belgium** link people excluded from housing market with private landlords, and provide incentives (mostly financed by public funds) to landlords who agree to rent their property at a reasonable price. They were formalised in housing legislation in 1997 and are sponsored by the government and 23 SRAs now manage 5500 living places.

**Warsaw, Poland, – Habitat for Humanity – ‘Social Rental Enterprise’** offers rental housing support, employment services, and social work – for instance, supporting people to find work or secure social benefits in order to fund and sustain their accommodation. The properties are either private rental or are provided by the municipality.

**‘Homelab Romodrom’, Czech Republic** links people from the Roma community with empty flats, supporting them with social services support, negotiating with neighbours etc.

**Cicsene** is a Social Rental Agency in **Turin**, Italy, 70% of whose clients are migrants. Their **‘PAOLA’ project** is a pilot project which offers social care, psychological support, and training alongside accommodation, in order to holistically support vulnerable individuals.

**Habitat Poland** is participating in **HomeLab**, a pilot agency project funded through a European Union grant in partnership with the City of Warsaw using housing stock from private landlords and the city. The agency also provides support from specialists in social integration and employment and navigates other issues that may arise.

**The Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS)**, in **Canada** builds relationships with landlords in order to create a network of private housing opportunities specifically for migrants<sup>28</sup>

### **Building community relations alongside housing**

Projects which offer wrap around support often also build community relations, and some have this as an explicit aim. Co-housing projects, such as the previously mentioned **Amsterdam Start Blok**, the Netherlands, the **Curant** project in **Antwerp**, Belgium, and **No Recourse to Public Funds project** also build community relations within their housing, grouping different people together and fostering new supportive networks.

**Curing the Limbo** in **Athens**, Greece, offers refugees places in affordable decent housing in return for engaging in local public benefit and citizen led activities as well as training to improve employability.

**Refugee Launch Pad**, **Utrecht**, the Netherlands, houses young people with refugees in a community-oriented project which involves residents and social networks within the neighbourhood.

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<sup>28</sup> Jennifer Watts, Chief Executive Officer, Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS), Canada  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B25pUMEPQi8&list=PLDGaWzYnsgUt1vDlIXjRcJxzfvB8JTHk&index=5&t=82s> Webinar  
Forced migration, relocation and housing

[CALICO - Brussels, Belgium](#), has developed 34 homes on land purchased by Community Land Trust Brussels which provides owner-occupied homes and social rental apartments. The homes are grouped into clusters targeting specific vulnerable groups including low income families, migrants, etc, with a community-led model of care. The aim is to strengthen social cohesion by bringing together different intergenerational and intercultural population groups. The project empowers these groups by directly involving them in estate management and governance.

[‘Berlin Houses New Neighbours’ \(BENN\) project](#), Berlin, Germany, aims to strengthen relations between long-term residents and newcomers on a neighbourhood level. It seeks to create opportunities for diverse encounters and discussions to strengthen feelings of togetherness and to alleviate fears and reservations, in areas where migrant-only housing projects have been developed.

#### 4.4 Easing the transition into longer term housing

Providing longer term housing solutions may not be enough: migrants also have to move into it. That may be difficult:

- Reception and other systems (like immigration detention) may be disempowering and undermine future decision-making.
- Emergency provision in areas of low housing demand often leaves migrants in areas of few employment opportunities from which they need to move to work.
- The support, and sometimes the conditions, in reception centres and other temporary homes may make a move out seem unattractive.

Therefore, people may need support to move on. Many of the projects detailed above offer that support as part of other initiatives, and effective initial triage and management of expectations is identified as another key component for successful rehousing programmes.

[Project MOI: Migrants, an opportunity for Inclusion](#) in Turin, Italy, is an example of a large-scale social inclusion project which offered housing and work opportunities to the occupants of the former Olympic Village (MOI) to enable the area to be used for more formal residential purposes. The site of the 2006 winter Olympics had been occupied by over 1000 refugees and migrants, and was Turin’s largest ever occupation, supported by activists and residents. In 2017, Project MOI began, as a gradual move to support residents into better housing, and to transform the space itself into social housing. They focused on four core areas: immigration status, education and language, employment, and accommodation. Each person or family had their own caseworker, and people with vulnerabilities had specialised pathways. The Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo - an ancient local philanthropic organisation - worked with the city council to support migrants to secure or improve their immigration status, through legal advice and casework support. Next, people were supported to access education, work and training opportunities and found housing elsewhere: a total of 806 people were assisted. The area is now being developed for social housing.

Other projects referenced in this report also ease the transition from short-long term housing, by providing wrap-around support such as language training, education and employability services. These include many of the social rental agencies referenced above such as [Homelab Romodrom](#). Other projects such as [Curing the Limbo](#) and [Refugee Launch Pad](#) strengthen social networks by engaging residents in community activities and initiatives. This may enable access to a wider pool of housing opportunities. The [Curant](#) project in Antwerp and [Amsterdam Start Blok](#) also built relations through co-housing different groups together.

## 5 STEP BY STEP GUIDE

Across Europe cities have taken action to mitigate the housing crisis as it affects migrants and other vulnerable residents. They have shown that they can deliver sustainable solutions especially if all if they draw in civil society, NGOs and migrant communities. These are solutions that can only be delivered at local level and with local partners, because housing is a core component of migrant integration and that takes place where migrants are making a new home, not in central government or parliamentary debates.

But cities and their communities and residents cannot do this alone. In writing this policy brief, the problems where fewer solutions were identified were those where the city lacked the powers or resources it needed. Indeed, the projects found in this area were largely small-scale. **Without the collaboration of central government which can offer finance and authority to borrow, planning powers, options to buy state property and legislation to support city initiatives, larger scale long-term projects remain difficult for some cities to initiate or run.**

City leaders know, however, that they have to overcome those difficulties, and will continue to do so. This briefing offers ideas for how they can do that.

### Starting the journey: sustainable long-term housing for migrants and other vulnerable people

Most city leaders and managers aspire to create or enable enough social housing and affordable housing to meet the needs of all residents. To do that requires power, space, and resources, and where they are lacking, the means to fill the gaps. This checklist can be helpful to start that journey.

5.1 MAP: The context	
Powers	What powers does the city have? What is missing?
Space to build	Does the city have space within its boundaries or under its control where it can build?
Resources	How much will it cost? What can the city afford? What are possible future costs in terms of maintenance? How can these be met, can they be reduced e.g. by mobilising self-help or working with others, and can they be offset against savings that might result in other budgets?
Who do you want or need to house? And who else will be affected?	Is this solely a “migrant housing problem”? or do migrants need housing because of a wider housing problem? Are there other populations facing the same problems? What might be gained by working on those problems together? How can the city support migrant integration and good community relations together?
Key actors and potential partners	Who shares the city’s aims, concerns and remits?  Who might need persuading or even pressure to come alongside and help?
5.2 POWERS: When you lack the powers you need	
Can you get them?	What powers do you need?  Can you lobby national or regional government to make legislation or rules more tailor made to local needs?  Can you create local legislation, maybe on a smaller scale, to fill some gaps or buy some time?



Who else could do it?	<p>What potential partners can fill the gaps?</p> <p>How best can you enable, support and work with these partners?</p> <p>What collaborations can you foster?</p>
<b>5.3 SPACE TO BUILD: When the city has no more left or cannot build more</b>	
Can you use existing empty spaces differently?	<p>Can you build up (on top of existing buildings)?</p> <p>Can you use non-housing buildings such as offices, industrial spaces, to house people?</p> <p>Can you find space in existing housing (attics, unused facilities on housing estates)?</p>
Can you use temporary but potentially longer-term options?	Can you put up demountable/temporary housing, including containers, in spaces without needing (or with easier) planning permission?
Can you rely on current public support to house specific groups at least temporarily?	When might local residents support use of public or other land for temporary housing because they sympathise with those housed?
Who might have the land or space you need?	<p>Can you build collaboration with others who might have that space?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ NGOs?</li> <li>▪ Private sector organisations?</li> <li>▪ Other local authorities?</li> </ul>
<b>5.4 RESOURCES: Not just money but skills and help in kind</b>	
Can you lobby to get them?	Is central or regional government playing its part? Can you work with other cities and local government associations to ask for more?
Can you find more?	<p>Have you explored European institutions and funding for specific groups?</p> <p>Can you raise extra resources locally via increased local taxation?</p> <p>Can you ask the private and charitable sector for help?</p>
Who could provide those resources in partnership with you?	If you do not have the skills in-house, who has them? Can you develop a partnership with them or commission them?
<b>5.5 HOUSING NEEDS: The housing problems to be solved</b>	
Is housing available but this group not accessing it?	<p>How can you ensure they get the information support and advocacy to get into the available housing?</p> <p>Who is best placed to provide these services?</p> <p>How can the city support them to provide them?</p>
Is this group excluded from the housing they need by legal restrictions or discrimination?	Can you change these restrictions, or lobby government to do so?

	<p>Can you collaborate to provide accommodation for those excluded?</p> <p>Can you ensure all residents have effective access to information, support and advocacy to challenge discrimination?</p>
Does this group need help to move from temporary to longer term housing?	<p>How can you ensure that temporary housing offers include effective triage and manage longer term expectations?</p> <p>Can you ensure that the move on housing meets non-housing needs (work, access to services, education)?</p> <p>How can you provide or enable holistic advice and support to help them move on?</p> <p>Can you set up longer-term housing that meets needs for support?</p>
Do you need to expand the housing available to this group?	<p>Can you collaborate with or develop social rental agencies that broker new arrangements with private landlords and offer support?</p> <p>Can you work with or persuade other housing providers to offer housing to them?</p>
Are you concerned about the effect of housing on community relations and migrant integration?	<p>Can you support the creation of co-housing projects?</p> <p>How can you ensure that migrant housing projects benefit their wider communities?</p> <p>How will you communicate this?</p>

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Diversity has become a key feature of societies today and is particularly tangible in urban centres. While people of diverse national, ethnic, linguistic and faith backgrounds have immensely contributed to post-war prosperity, inequalities related to origin, culture and skin colour persist, and anxiety about pluralism, identity and shared values is often politically instrumentalised. The challenge of fostering equity and cohesion in culturally diverse societies has become more acute. Cities are uniquely placed to imagine and test responses to this challenge.

The Council of Europe and its partner cities have developed and validated an intercultural approach to integration and inclusion which enables cities to reap the benefits and minimise the risks related to human mobility and cultural diversity. A decade after the start of this work, there is growing evidence that diversity, when recognised and managed as a resource, produces positive outcomes in terms of creativity, wellbeing, and economic development.

The Intercultural Cities (ICC) programme invites cities in Europe and beyond to explore and apply policies that harness diversity for personal and societal development.

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.