

Focus on bottlenecks to integration of refugees through housing

DRAFT

N°3 –Communication and knowledge gap

Description of the challenge:

- **Lack of knowledge of the local level on the social profile of newcomers to adapt the offer**

A home is a first crucial step in any case for all to get access to employment and social protection. We can observe a lack of knowledge on both the side of the refugees and also on the side of local authorities.

When trying to find an accommodation on the private rental market, refugees often lack assistance. Very often they do not have appropriate language skills and do not have information about affordable rental stock to be able to take care of the search themselves. Groups with specific needs will also 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.

On the other hand, due to the big overburden on the cities capacity, an information gap exist to allocate housing. A multisectorial approach in communication between stakeholders is also apparent issue.

Potential solutions:

The assistance of social service providers, like housing associations is crucial to help access of refugees to accommodation as soon as possible. They can strike agreements with private landlords for instance guaranteeing the payment of rent, thus easing the match between demand from refugees and supply.

In the case of application for social housing, the personnel of housing associations can help in identifying the needs of refugees according to their financial situation, family size and time spent on the waiting list. Housing providers are also able to liase with local authorities and social workers hence accelerating the process of integration into the society and the labour market. The development of online platforms, flyers to inform asylum seekers about the different housing options and application procedures is an option.

By learning from the different partners, like housing providers, cities will be able to succeed in long term. Starting from the administration level, IT services development is the first step to have a stable structure to get informed about the needs and situation of asylum seekers.

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.

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.

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.

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 should be a continuous exercise by capacity-building workshops, guidance and counselling.

- Lack of tools to create social acceptance from local residents

Description of the challenge:

The anti-immigrant sentiment among the public has a growing tendency. 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.¹ Hidden discrimination is an obstacle despite the work of charities and associations to liaise with private landlords and the anti-discrimination legislation related to good and services including housing.

Potential solutions:

¹ 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



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, fighting segregation and promoting cultural diversity 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.