

Project description – 7 July 2016 version

Housing migrants: challenges and practices in the UNECE region

Background

According to the UNECE report on “Social Housing in the UNECE Region” (2015)¹, the economic downturn and recession in Europe had a critical impact on the housing sector: over 100 million people in the region are housing cost overburdened. As a result of the crises, the social and affordable housing sector faces two challenges: increased need and reduced funds.

The ongoing influx of migrants and refugees from Syria (See Figure 1) and other conflict zones to the region has exacerbated the situation. According to a report of the International Monetary Fund (2016)², the inflow of refugees puts further pressure on affordable housing in many countries in the region, and will require adjustments in national housing policies in order to support the provision of adequate housing as well as the integration of migrants in the countries’ labour markets.

However, the housing dimension of migrant integration is weakly developed in most integration strategies, compared to other issues. Policies on the integration of migrants usually focus on their employment, while integration strategies stress issues related to employment, language and citizenship. Critically, housing as a central element of integration into society has received limited attention.

The need for adjusting national policies for the provision of affordable adequate housing as a response to the economic, financial and migration crises has been discussed in different forums by the UNECE governments, not least during the annual sessions of the intergovernmental UNECE Committee of Housing and Land Management (CHLM), which unites high-level officials responsible for housing and land management in 56 countries in the “Global North”. The Committee, at its seventy-fifth annual session in 2014, agreed on the Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing, a non-legally binding document that aims to support governments of member States in their efforts to ensure access to decent, adequate, affordable and healthy housing for all. In December 2015, the Committee, at its seventy-sixth session, discussed the issue of addressing housing affordability issues and especially issues of housing provision to migrants and refugees.

As a result of these discussions, the Committee decided to prepare, in cooperation with partner organizations, studies on how countries in the UNECE region have tackled the economic and financial crises after 2008, and how they are addressing the current migration crisis in terms of the provision of affordable housing.

Project objectives

- To examine current challenges to housing migrants in selected UNECE countries;
- To identify innovative practices developed at national and local levels that have proven to bridge the identified challenges, both for the local population and that of migrants;
- To explore the links between social/affordable housing policies and integration policies;
- To draw lessons for advancing policy and practice, and formulate recommendations.

¹ https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/hlm/documents/Publications/Social_Housing_in_UNECE_region.pdf

² <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/cat/longres.aspx?sk=43609>

Expected outcomes

- The preparation and publication of a report, with an analysis of current practices and solutions for housing migrants and policy recommendations for national and local authorities;
- The organization of capacity-building and dissemination activities (workshops, presentations at relevant international meetings).

Proposal for the study

This study is aimed at examining and drawing lessons from best practices in housing migrants in the context of affordable housing provision. The goal is to use this experience to provide policy advice related to the states' efforts to promote inclusive growth, and the long-term sustainability of the housing and land management sectors.

The study has the following objectives:

- To examine the current challenges of housing migrants in selected UNECE countries (see affected countries in Figure 1);
- To identify innovative practices developed at national and local levels that have proven to bridge the identified challenges, both for the local population and that of the refugees;
- To explore the links between social/affordable housing policies and integration policies; and
- To draw lessons and recommendations for advancing policy and practice.

Development of the study will be organized by the CHLM secretariat in cooperation with UN-Habitat, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the International Organization for Migration. The UNECE member States will be invited to contribute to the study through participation in interviews. The Bureau of the CHLM will supervise the study.

Project beneficiaries

The direct beneficiaries of the study are the UNECE member States. The study will contribute to the member States' ongoing efforts to advance and more effectively implement their social housing policies in the context of the migration crisis.

The study will make use of existing tools and guidelines, such as the UN-Habitat Global Housing Strategy, the UNECE Social Housing Study, and policy papers prepared for the Habitat III Conference, in order to define and implement the most appropriate solutions in the specific national contexts. It will also contribute to the implementation of international agreements and commitments, including the Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing.

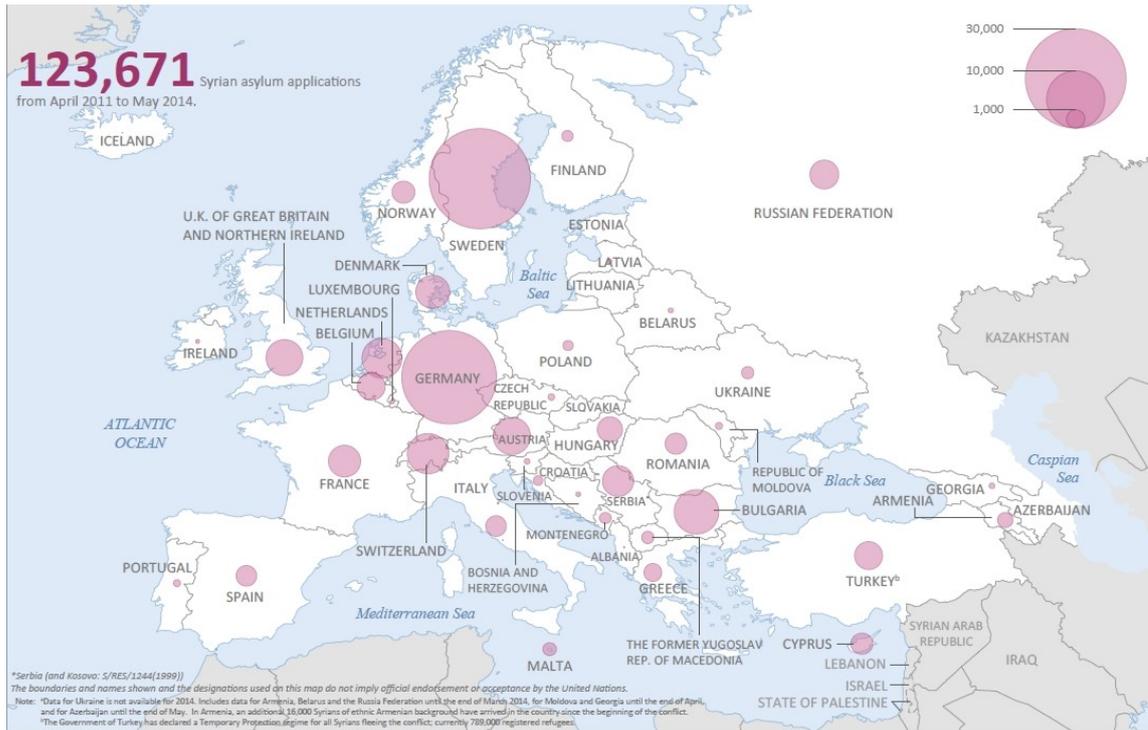


Figure 1. Syrian asylum applications in the UNECE countries from April 2011 to May 2014 Source: <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/files/2014/09/syriamap1.jpg>

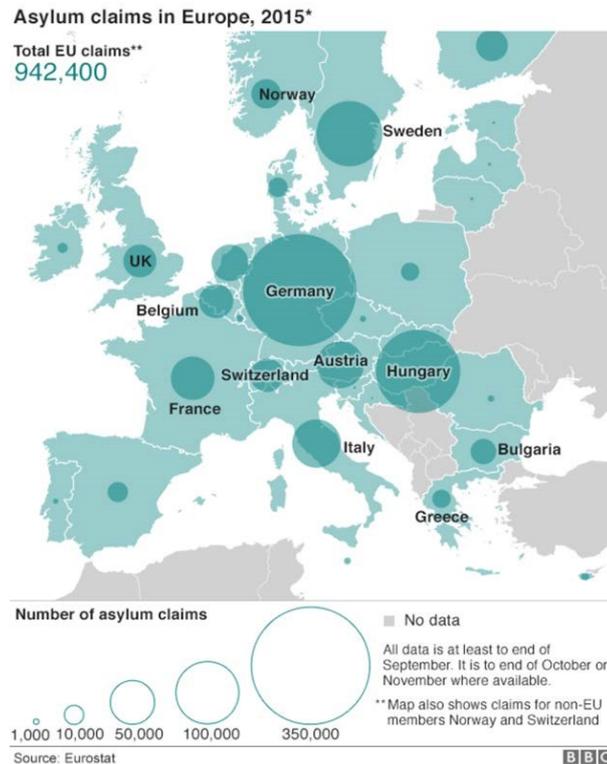


Figure 2. Asylum claims in Europe, 2015

Source: http://icchef-1.bbc.co.uk/news/660/cpsprodpb/ED8E/production/_87341806_europe_migrant_numbers_sep2015.png

Project activities

Project activities presented in this proposal are based on decisions about the focus of CHLM work, approved by the CHLM at its seventy-sixth session. Those based on the aims and objectives of the study include:

1. Kick-off meeting, Prague, 17 March 2016 (implemented)

On 17 March 2016, the CHLM, in cooperation with UN-Habitat and the OHCHR, organized a workshop on “Addressing housing affordability issues in the UNECE region in the context of economic, financial and migration crises: challenges and good practices”. This was held as a side event to the European Habitat Meeting³ in Prague. The workshop included a presentation of selected innovative practices developed at international, national and local levels, and a discussion on the situation of housing migrants in Europe. Participants discussed how housing is provided and financed, and how innovative housing projects support the improvement of social cohesion and living conditions, and help to overcome energy poverty and promote environmental sustainability. The workshop presentations and report are available at www.unece.org/housing/prague-affordablehousing.

2. Desktop review of practices for housing migrants in the UNECE region, February–June 2016

From February to May 2016, an intern at the UNECE Housing and Land Management Unit conducted a preliminary review of selected publications reporting on existing practices for housing migrants in the UNECE region. This included the analysis of newspapers published in English (UK), German (Austria and Germany) and Italian (Italy). She also prepared a report of the March 2016 kick-off meeting, and identified relevant UN and other international reports, policy documents, and academic literature sources. As a result of her work, she will provide short summaries of the material identified and a list of references. The literature review will be further conducted by consultants to be hired with the support of the City of Vienna, who will conduct an in-depth critical analysis of the literature sources and will work on a draft project report.

3. Interviews with the key stakeholders in the field of housing migrants, and the drafting of the study report, September-November 2016

Consultants (a lead consultant and a junior one) will be hired, with the support of the City of Vienna, to conduct semi-structured qualitative in-depth interviews to identify key challenges, trends and innovations in housing migrants during the current refugee crisis. Interviews will be conducted with government representatives from the UNECE region in order to understand the issues that they find challenging, as well as seeking recommendations for best practices.

In addition to government representatives, other important stakeholders implementing projects for housing migrants (e.g. international banks) will be identified and invited to contribute, through interviews and data sharing, on the major challenges and innovative actions in housing for migrants.

Data derived from the interviews will be analysed.

³ <http://www.europeanhabitat.com/?lang=en>

A report based on the literature, including mass-media, review and interviews, will be drafted during August-September 2016, and will be reviewed and revised by the project partners and stakeholders, the CHLM secretariat and then by the Bureau. Following that, the consultants will revise the report.

4. Secondary data and literature review (including in-depth critical analysis of literature sources, and primary and secondary data, and the drafting of the study report: including interviews with the key stakeholders in the field of housing migrants, August–February 2017)

- (1) This will include: (a) the identification and review of academic literature addressing the links between social/affordable housing and integration policies; and (b) the identification, review and analysis of secondary data sources (e.g. policy documents, reports) on innovative practices by key stakeholders and international organizations. **(A preliminary review will be carried out in the month of August to inform the Committee session).**
- (2) Identification of, and collaboration with, cities and networks providing housing and/or researching issues of housing refugees **(October–December 2017).**

The drafting of a report based on the literature review, including analysis triangulation⁴ of data sources and in-depth critical analysis, will allow the key relevant themes to be identified, trends and challenges to be explained in wider policy context, and recommendations to be drafted. The triangulation of multiple sources of primary data (interviews), literature (academic and policy) and secondary data (reports, media) will be employed to ensure that the account is rich, robust, comprehensive and well-developed. The time frame is January–February 2017.

5. Presentation of research progress at the seventy-seventh session of the CHLM, September 2016

A special session to present and discuss the preliminary findings of the research in progress will be organized during the CHLM seventy-seventh session.

6. Drafting the report, January–February 2017

The report will then be professionally edited, translated into Russian and French, and published by the UNECE. This work will be supported by the funds of the Swiss Federal Housing Office.

7. Publication and launch of the report, spring 2017

An international two-day workshop will be organized in 2017, where the study outcomes will be presented and discussed, and the publication will be launched. Representatives of governments and stakeholders will be invited to discuss the findings and recommendations of the study, and exchange their experiences, practices and lessons learned in housing migrants.

Special attention will be given to the discussion of practices that integrate housing with other supporting services such as employment, language and other integration techniques.

Project partners and stakeholders

The **UNECE CHLM, the project's lead partner**, in its capacity as the highest policymaking body of the UNECE in the field of housing and land management, has been assisting member States through: the

⁴ Triangulation is a technique that facilitates the validation of data through cross-verification from two or more sources. In particular, it refers to the application and combination of several research methods in the study of the same phenomenon.

assessments of countries' housing systems, the development of policy guidance for social housing, and the provision of advisory services and capacity-building activities. The Committee has valuable expertise and will contribute to the project through providing information on the major challenges that member States face innovations and best practices in developing the sustainable housing, urban management and land administration sectors, and future priorities in the three areas.

The **UN-Habitat Housing Unit** supports Habitat Agenda partners and all levels of government in formulating and implementing progressive housing sector reforms and legislation that contribute to the creation of inclusive and sustainable cities, and which comply with international law related to the right to adequate housing. It will share its experience of cooperative projects with European cities on the provision of housing to migrants.

The **OHCHR Human Rights and Economic and Social Issues Section** supports, advises and provides tools for states, international organizations and other partners on the practical implementation of international human rights standards, including those related to housing, land and urbanization, as well as migration.

The project partners will also consult with other international agencies, including the **International Organization for Migration**.

They will also involve international financial institutions active in housing migrants' projects, such as the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the Council of Europe Bank; the pan-European networks of housing providers at local level – Housing Europe, the European Federation of Public, Cooperative and Social Housing; the International Union of Tenants (IUT); the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA); subregional organizations – the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), the Nordic Council of Ministers; and networks of cities, such as EUROCITIES. Other key stakeholders will turn up in the process of identification of best practices.

Project budget

Activities	Funding
1. Kick-off, Prague	Organized by the UNECE, in-kind. Travel, interpretation and conference rooms are covered by the Czech Ministry of Regional Development
2. Desktop review of practices for housing migrants	UNECE, in-kind: an intern under the supervision of UNECE staff and in cooperation with partner organizations providing inputs (consultations with UN-Habitat, the OHCHR, the IOM, Housing Europe, and the EIB)
3. Interviews, literature review and drafting the report	Lead and junior consultants hired by the City of Vienna
4. Organization of a special session at the 77 th session of the CHLM	Organized by the UNECE. Support to expert travel from the Swiss Federal Housing Office
5. Editing, translation of the report into Russian and French, layout,	Organized by the UNECE and supported by the Swiss

printing dissemination	Federal Housing Office
6. Launch event of the report and a two-day workshop to develop capacities	Organized and supported by the City of Vienna in cooperation with the UNECE and other partners