Social housing and urban planning: inclusive cities for migrants

1. Introduction

Spontaneous migratory patterns suppose a social, cultural and economic challenge for both host and originating communities. In these situations, it is migrants who often bear the burden of exclusion of the opportunities that cities can offer, for example in the provision of basic and social services such as housing. Nonetheless, through the right policy interventions and preventative strategies, host and originating communities can capitalise on the unavoidable mobility of people.

The Mediterranean City to City Migration Project has already touched upon some of the most pressing issues faced by migrants, such as social cohesion and the importance of social dialogue [1]; the institutional will for migrants to benefit from opportunities offered by cities under the human rights frameworks in the fields of basic services[2] and employment[3],; and more recently, the need for authorities and stakeholders to enact strategies for specific target groups such as refugees in a wider framework of inclusion.

Housing is one of the most fundamental human needs, but its inadequacy, or lack thereof, can accentuate inequalities and constrain social mobility. Housing also has a major influence on migrants' employment options, educational opportunities, and social interaction with the mainstream society, and even their residence, family reunification and citizenship rights. Housing is a pathway for integration and at the same time, housing quality is a key outcome indicator of successful societal integration.

Improving the access to adequate housing in cities is one of the fundamental pathways to further improvements in the dimensions of social and spatial integration of migrant populations. Research shows[4] that adequate housing forms the third most important factor contributing to the successful integration of international migrants after sufficient language skills and access to employment.

This background paper will draw on inclusive approaches advocating for migrants' enjoyment of the right to adequate housing whilst creating civic, social and economic prosperity, within planning and urban design strategies at the local level. It will also stress out the **importance of housing in order to bridge the humanitarian and development divide,** and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, namely SDG11 to make cities inclusive, sustainable, resilient and safe; as well as implementing the New Urban Agenda.

2. Background

Housing affordability has become a global crisis affecting not only groups in vulnerable situations, but middle income and low income groups suffering the consequences of a deteriorating housing stock and a lack of tenure options. Today, both low- and middle-income Mediterranean households spend more of their income on housing costs than ever before[5]. In Spain, Greece, Portugal and Italy[6], almost half of the population in the bottom quintile of the income distribution spends more than 40% of disposable income on mortgage and rent. In addition, housing supply has been slow and unresponsive to the global demand, partly due to a prolonged boom in housing prices.

The mismatch between the ability of local governments to manage growth, and the dynamics of private development and financial resources of local authorities, pose serious challenges in the Mediterranean region. Moreover, economic factors such as the high price of urban land and its rapid appreciation, its complex and costly registration and title issuing procedures, as well as issues related to social cohesion and inequality, continue to affect lower income and vulnerable populations such as migrants and refugees.

Cities in the north of the Mediterranean are facing important challenges around housing. Currently, the need for social housing as an affordable option appears to be most critical in large metropolitan areas, where the housing markets are overheated due to demand. The UN Geneva *Charter on Sustainable Housing 2015*[7] stresses that the development of sustainable housing in the UNECE region[8] faces multiple challenges, resulting in a complex interplay of trends related to globalization, demographic changes, climate change and the economic crisis, which culminate in decreased housing affordability and a decline in access to habitable and safe housing. This has exacerbated social inequality and resulted in segregated urban space.

On the southern and eastern side of the Mediterranean, particularly in the Arab Region[9], the housing sector has suffered due to conflict; 9 out of the 22 countries[10] have suffered from at least one conflict since 2009, resulting in the weakening of the rule of law, the declining operational capacity of services, the spread of informal housing and land grabs, increased crime and reduced safety, and particularly the destruction of the housing stock itself.

After conflicts, the presence of large numbers of displaced persons can drive up housing and basic service costs in cities[11]. Jordan alone hosts 1.26 million Syrian refugees, out of whom and 85% live in non-camp settings[12]. The influx of refugees is still straining the absorption capacity of the Jordanian housing market affecting low-middle income Jordanian families. In light of the aforementioned it is widely acknowledged that Jordan requires new housing solutions with a pressing shortage of affordable housing estimated to be over 90,000 housing units.

Trends show that refugees primarily seek safety and shelter and services in the cities of neighbouring countries to the crisis, such as Turkey (2.62 million) and Lebanon (1.07 million)[13]. Therefore countries neighbouring those in conflict can be faced with housing challenges when they are not prepared or ill-equipped to deal with a sudden unplanned population surge.

The idea of adequate housing policy has been the source of a long political debate influenced by shifting views about the role of governments in socio-economic and environmental affairs. During the last two

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decades, housing policies have focused on housing as a commoditization instead of an element of welfare. Thus, the role of public authorities in the provision of housing has been reduced, from land management to regulation of the housing market. Likewise, Governments have often promoted individual home ownership, the privatization of social housing programmes, the deregulation of housing finance markets, and the use of housing allowances to provide assistance to lower income households[14].

Middle and high income governments, promoting the enabling approach to housing[15] were concerned with reducing public deficits, targeting subsidies to the poor, privatizing public assets, deregulating markets and establishing private property rights and policies that would enable rather than replace markets. Broadly, this conception and interpretation of enabling markets[16] and the demand-supply debate has been polarizing and obstructive in policy circles, as it has not focused efficiently enough on providing housing to the groups that need it most such as the elderly, youth, women, dispersed ethnic populations, single parents and low-income migrants.

As the experience of transitional economies and the effects of mortgage markets deregulation re-affirm, governments are necessary and integral players in the dynamics of housing markets, namely in addressing investment outcomes. Without a strong role for public authorities and legislators, housing markets can be harmfully volatile and fail to meet minimum standards, such as the criteria mentioned in the internationally recognized *Right to Adequate Housing* (see Box 1 below) for adequate quality, social inclusion, among others.

Despite economic crises, civil unrest, political turmoil and conflicts experienced during the past decade, many cities have achieved significant progress in the broad area of urban development and housing. In both stable and post-conflict countries, Governments are making efforts to keep pace with urbanization trends by opening up of new development areas and the construction of affordable housing, by promoting inclusion and increasing the affordability of land and housing, and abiding to Human Rights frameworks such as the Right to Adequate Housing and the prevention of forced evictions.

3. Housing and urban planning for inclusive cities

Prosperous urban areas often offer a wide spectrum of employment opportunities which attract migrants. Similarly, safe cities can offer much needed shelter for refugees, asylum seekers, and IDPs. Additionally, cities can also offer a supportive social network through, for example, members of the same diaspora. The supportive role of cities can provide the most important needs for newcomers, such as urban basic services, housing and even employment. Nonetheless, when cities are unprepared, low-pay, low-skill and informal jobs are often the only alternatives available for migrants; and they are mostly located in urban areas. It is thus at the city scale where most of the migration issues and challenges appear.

Due to conflict, natural disasters, and climate change among others, migration is often spontaneous; therefore host cities are frequently found trying to accommodate additional populations without the advantage of long-term planning and equitable distribution of resources. This frequently results in migrants, including refugees, living in overcrowded conditions or informal settlements, most of which lack access to basic services, social protection, access to the labour market, etc.

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Migration poses several distinct socio-cultural, economic, ecological, and institutional challenges that need to be addressed in order to foster sustainable urbanization via the realization of human rights in cities and inclusive development. Most of these challenges that related to migratory fluxes can be addressed well beforehand with the use of integrated planning. Planners in this sense can foresee change, prepare and accommodate growth, while making the best out of the potential of migratory flows.

Even though cities might invest in planning for demographic change, it is important to also use Human Rights frameworks. For instance, if the Right to Adequate Housing is not fully considered, migrant populations can be left with little options of housing that truly cater to them; meaning that current solutions may lack integrated and inclusive approaches, resulting in disconnected housing solutions and fragmented settlements.

Box1. The Right to Adequate Housing

The United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has underlined[17] that the right to adequate housing should not be interpreted narrowly. Rather, it should be seen as the right to live somewhere in security, peace and dignity.

The right to adequate housing contains freedoms. These freedoms include:

• protection against forced evictions and the arbitrary destruction and demolition of one's home;
• the right to be free from arbitrary interference with one's home, privacy and family; the right to choose one's residence, to determine where to live and to freedom of movement.

The right to adequate housing contains entitlements. These entitlements include:

• security of tenure;
• housing, land and property restitution;
• equal and non-discriminatory access to adequate housing;
• participation in housing-related decision-making at the national and community levels.

A number of conditions must be met before particular forms of shelter can be considered to constitute "adequate housing":

• Security of tenure: housing is not adequate if its occupants do not have a degree of tenure security which guarantees legal protection against forced evictions, harassment and other threats.
• Availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure: housing is not adequate if its occupants do not have safe drinking water, adequate sanitation, and energy for cooking, heating, lighting, food storage or refuse disposal.
• Affordability: housing is not adequate if its cost threatens or compromises the occupants' enjoyment of other human rights.
• Habitability: housing is not adequate if it does not guarantee physical safety or provide adequate space, as well as protection against the cold, damp, heat, rain, wind, other threats to health and structural hazards.
• Accessibility: housing is not adequate if the specific needs of disadvantaged and marginalized groups are not taken into account.
• Location: housing is not adequate if it is cut off from employment opportunities, health-care services, schools, child care centres and other social facilities, or if located in polluted or dangerous areas.
• Cultural adequacy: housing is not adequate if it does not respect and take into account the expression of cultural identity.

3.1 Constrains for migrants to access adequate housing

Migrants often find themselves in a disadvantaged situation to access housing compared to the native-born populations. In the 28 EU countries[18], migrants are disproportionately dependent on private rentals, more likely to be uninformed of their rights as well as discriminated against. On the Mediterranean region they also face greater obstacles to access public housing or housing benefits, are more likely to live in substandard and poorly connected accommodations at a higher rental cost burden than the national average, are more likely to live in overcrowded housing, and spend a higher proportion of their income on rent. The following are some of the constraints faced by migrants in accessing adequate housing.

Migrants are often spatially segregated:

Migrants are particularly vulnerable to human rights violations, including to violations of their right to adequate housing and to forced evictions. Inadequate planning, combined with influxes of migrant populations, contributes directly to long-term social and spatial segregation within urban areas. When faced with no other choice, migrant populations, including refugees, will ultimately use available land to settle, namely areas that lack proper tenure and ownership. Often, such places are located in areas prone to natural hazards, or on unsuitable land for housing, adjacent to roads, railways, riverbeds, slopes, etc.

Migrants can be excluded from already limited local resources

The population flow towards urban areas can result in added constraints towards the access to land, housing and basic services. Growing demand for these limited resources can cause social tension between host populations and migrants. The United Nations[19] also points to rural-urban migration adding challenges relative to the urban management of resources such as electricity, solid-waste and wastewater management, as well as the provision of potable water, thus posing increased ecological and public health challenges within local administrations. Additionally, migrants are faced with more difficulties when trying to access subsidies and social benefits. All of the above are fundamental for adequate housing.

Migrants are often not considered in decision making and not included in participatory processes

Local and national authorities are generally lacking sufficient financial resources and technical skills to facilitate migrant inclusion in planning. Inclusion may be achieved through the management of urban areas that support equitability and inclusion (UN-Habitat & UNESCO, 2015) in order to achieve the realization of the migrants' rights as well as with adequate participatory processes specific to target groups.

In certain countries, such as Germany or Austria, where decentralisation is strong, integration is above all a local and provincial issue. As a result, these countries have developed an important series of integration practices[20] at the local level that are based on access to rights and strongly based on participatory approaches that included migrants.

Migrants have more difficulties affording adequate housing

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Housing markets are related to social issues, particularly in the context of migration. Several studies[21] have exposed the fact that different indicators related to housing can show to what level cities are coping with the integration of migrants: for instance, property ownership is an indicator of migrants' long-term settlement in the country; and rental tenure is an indicator of protection from discrimination on the rental market. Across Europe, migrant households are three times less likely to be homeowners, especially in destinations such as Spain, Italy, Greece and Belgium.

A study commissioned by the EU found that the housing cost overburden rate for non-EU citizens saw a significant increase from 2013 to 2014, when 30 per cent of non-EU citizens in working age belonged to this group, compared to 11 per cent among nationals[22]. The housing cost overburden rate allows policymakers to assess how housing costs affects migrants' poverty and quality of life[23].

Migrants are prone to live in overcrowded situations

Nearly 1 in 4 people in deprived or overcrowded homes in OECD countries live in an immigrant household. It is common to find migrants living in poor conditions due to a lack of habitable space and sanitation. In the EU, overcrowding is understood as the ratio between household rooms and number of household members[24]. The United Nations understands that a dwelling unit is considered to provide sufficient living area for household members if there are fewer than three persons per habitable room[25].

Overcrowding and housing cost overburden are two key general EU social inclusion indicators relevant for migrants. EU-wide, the overcrowding rate among those born outside the EU and aged 20-64 stands at 25 per cent, compared with 17 per cent for the native-born. The levels are highest (40-55 per cent) in Central and Southeast Europe (Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary and Poland) and lowest (<10 per cent) in Belgium, Cyprus, Ireland, Malta and the Netherlands.[26]

Moreover, the temporary shelters that are provided by cities, namely for refugees and homeless persons, are often overcrowded and do not cater to the specific needs of particular groups such as women and girls. Overcrowding situations in shelters or dormitories particularly affect women's and girls' dignity, privacy and/or personal security.

Migrants are prone to forced evictions and homelessness

Migrants are often more vulnerable to access housing or shelter as they are faced with great challenges linked to employment opportunities. Even if they can secure an accommodation, having an uncertain income will always put them at risk of being evicted. For these two reasons, undocumented migrants tend to be the majority among the homeless. Their undocumented status and their criminalization in many countries - coupled with the added negative stigma of homelessness- means that most will be unable or unwilling to challenge discriminatory or otherwise abusive rental practices and thus seek informal housing remedies.

Migrants often face discrimination

Housing discrimination can be subtle and difficult to prove. Nonetheless, discrimination on the housing market negatively impacts the already challenging situations in which migrants find themselves. It reinforces segregation and undermines social and spatial inclusion.

In Spain for instance, it was revealed in a survey that when renting an apartment, the response of real estate agents and homeowners differs depending on whether or not the tenant-to-be is a migrant[27]. This same study conducted in 2016 showed that 69.8 per cent of people who were told by phone that there was no apartment available were foreign-born applicants. The share of people with migrant background who received such feedback during in-person visits is even higher: 86.7 per cent. Therefore, it is common to find housing markets that are not regulated by policies meant to combat discriminatory practices against migrants, and that increase migrants risk of default of payments and produce conflicts.

3.2 Housing and urban planning that promotes inclusivity, equality and diversity: key factors for the successful integration of migrants

International commitments:

UN-Habitat is promoting the **Housing at the Centre** approach as a means to achieve sustainable, inclusive, resilient and safe urbanization. 'Housing at the Centre' is the conceptual framework of action that aims to shift the focus from building houses to a holistic framework for housing development, orchestrated with urban planning practice and placing people and human rights at the forefront of urban sustainable development. This is in the hopes of producing new and more sustainable housing solutions, especially for groups in vulnerable situations such as migrants, including refugees.

Additionally, the **New Urban Agenda** recognizes the vital role of urbanization in achieving sustainable development. This role is reflected strongly in Agenda 2030 where SDG 11 aims to 'Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable'. Both agendas encourage Governments to implement holistic responses to the challenges and opportunities presented by migration for sustainable urban development. Migration is an essential parameter to be taken into account in urban planning and housing policy development.

> *We commit to promote equitable and affordable access to **sustainable basic physical and social infrastructure for all, without discrimination, including affordable serviced land, housing,** modern and renewable energy, safe drinking water and sanitation, safe, nutritious and adequate food, waste disposal, sustainable mobility, healthcare and family planning, education, culture, and information and communication technologies. We further commit to ensure that these services are responsive to the rights and needs of women, children and youth, older persons and persons with disabilities, migrants, indigenous peoples and local communities as appropriate, and others that are in vulnerable situations. In this regard, we encourage the elimination of legal, institutional, socio-economic, or physical barriers.[28]*

On the international sphere, paragraph 39 of the "United Nations Declaration for Refugees and Migrants"[29] mentions the importance of national urban policies for inclusion, in which housing plays a central role.

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"We commit to combating xenophobia, racism and discrimination in our societies against refugees and migrants. We will take measures to improve their integration and inclusion, as appropriate, and with particular reference to access to education, health care, justice and language training. We recognize that these measures will reduce the risks of marginalization and radicalization. National policies relating to integration and inclusion will be developed, as appropriate, in conjunction with relevant civil society organizations, including faith-based organizations, the private sector, employers' and workers' organizations and other stakeholders. We also note the obligation for refugees and migrants to observe the laws and regulations of their host countries."

Promoting the realization of migrants' rights in cities: Article 13 of the Human Rights Declaration posits the freedom of movement, 'the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country at any time'. Migrant populations need to be ensured equal human rights to the rest of society, paying particular attention to most disadvantaged and marginalized migrant groups. This is clearly stated by the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants[30]; inclusion of migrants in relevant national action plans and strategies such as national public housing strategies is also a necessity.

Promoting inclusive, equitable urban development through participatory processes

Migrants need to be ensured equal access to all dimensions of the city such as land, housing, employment opportunities and services. This requires the strengthening of anti-discriminatory practices and reinforcement of a general atmosphere of tolerance (UN-Habitat & UNESCO, 2015), coupled with integrated, sustainable, and participatory urban planning. The migrant population needs to be actively engaged in the public sphere of the host society through measures such as participatory decision-making at the local level.

In order to ignite the discussion about the role that the national and local level plays on the aforementioned issues, this background paper proposes the following general recommendations:

Recommendations for local Governments

- Support migrants' inclusion in the city through participatory urban planning.

- Generate joint global and regional programmes on migrants and cities, with a strong focus on local authorities, urban and housing policy development and human rights. Development of joint normative tools, capacity building modules and field operations.

- Invest in project development and funding opportunities in order to obtain additional resources needed to facilitate migrant access to adequate housing.

- Explore innovative and more sustainable housing solutions in order to facilitate the access of adequate housing for the integration of migrant groups.

- Prohibit discrimination in the access to housing on grounds of nationality, race, ethnicity, or religion.

- Ensure that housing standards and building codes at a local level should have the same health and safety standards for nationals, as for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

- Promote conditions for access to publicly supported and organised housing that does not indirectly discriminate

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against migrants; through awareness raising, multilingual services, reporting discriminatory practices, etc.

- Promote the use of urban renewal and the use of vacant stock -where available- for migrant housing purposes.

- Promote inclusivity and intercultural tolerance within all relevant institutions and organisations in the housing sector, and introduction of diversity management tools like multilingual services and intercultural training sessions.

- Foster local urban planning that favours well located and mixed used neighbourhoods that also take into consideration the need of migrant populations through participatory design processes.

Recommendations for national Governments

- Highlight the key role of cities in the international/national migration agenda.

- Support local authorities in tapping into funding opportunities related to migration issues around housing.

- Enforce legislation banning discrimination in the field of service provision, including housing, besides effective enforcement mechanisms and awareness-raising.

- Aim at achieving social balance and mitigation of spatial segregation by spreading public housing within the city and fostering mixed neighbourhoods.

- Engage constantly in the monitoring and evaluation of policies, including on the housing situation of migrants and level of social cohesion in urban neighbourhoods.

- Increase the access to housing finance options, as well as facilitated access to bank loans for low-income migrant families.

Conclusions

Housing and urban planning have to come under the current and growing call for metropolitan urban management, the empowerment of local urban stakeholders, and the recognition of the positive results that integrated urban planning and housing can bring to local economies. In this sense, cities will have key solutions for the challenges linked to migratory patterns, including the informal sector and the overall growth of substandard housing, and the provision of basic services for all. It is crucial to have a long-term vision of inclusive and participatory governance that combats the mushrooming of urban sprawl, and promotes spatial integration and inclusivity in all aspects of city life.

In addition, local authorities are often the best informed about local realities and therefore have the knowledge and the capacity to implement the right policies into local planning. Local governments can provide migrants with access to relevant information and services regarding adequate housing, and foster their participation in the social and political life of the territories concerned.

Adequate migration policies linked to housing will depend on cities' responses to the various migration fluxes and their ability to plan and develop practical solutions that take into account how migration transforms, expands, and diversifies an urban space from a neighbourhood to the city level. Migrant inclusion in cities is an important element that can shape the economic, social, and cultural vibrancy of cities. Well-directed

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migration policies have the power to contribute to the flow of money, increase public revenue, knowledge and ideas between cities of origin and destination, as well as enhancing social cohesion and livelihoods among the host and migrant communities.

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