

Factsheet for municipal actors on the expert brief

Housing for newly arrived migrants in rural areas **More than a roof over your head**

Municipal actors play a central role in the integration of newly arrived migrants. For instance, they are often the ones responsible for the initial care for refugees in communal arrival centres or in other accommodations. Through involvement in municipal housing companies, they also have a presence on the local housing market. In addition, municipal authorities also have a large number of other tools at their disposal to promote the integration of newly arrived migrants.

Newly arrived migrants in rural areas

The **expert brief** *Wohnen von Neuzugewanderten in ländlichen Räumen – Mehr als nur ein Dach über dem Kopf* [Housing for newly arrived migrants in rural areas – More than a roof over your head] published in 2023 highlights the needs and aspirations of migrants regarding housing in rural areas. One central finding of the analysis are the partially diverging needs and desires that newly arrived migrants have compared to the local population.

The wishes of newly arrived migrants are often highly **dynamic** and are in a constant state of flux. This group often also requires some support in accessing the housing market. Municipal actors play a central role in working with newly arrived migrants. The policy decisions they make and the measures they take can have a real impact on the living reality, and housing quality, of newly arrived migrants.

Barriers for newly arrived migrants in accessing the housing market

The decisions made in municipal public administration can sometimes be to the **detriment** of new arrivals.

One type of actor that can be especially highlighted in this regard are (public) **municipal housing companies**. In addition to the problem of the scarcity of municipally managed housing, the search of newly arrived migrants for housing is often made even more difficult by the **lack of transparency regarding the selection criteria** for tenants, which are only rarely shared with prospective tenants. Another obstacle is the **allocation of land plots for new construction** in some municipalities, if the population already living there is given preference over new arrivals, a practice which prevents newly arrived migrants from building a home for themselves.

Housing and living conditions of newly arrived migrants

The housing and living conditions of newly arrived migrants are highly varied and depend on the type of accommodations. Collective or communal accommodations in particular **suffer from a lack of basic amenities**: the heating is often defective, the sanitary facilities are often scarce and in a state of disrepair, and the living area is sometimes intentionally limited.

Another problem in rural areas are **poor transport connections and infrastructure**. This is all the more problematic in situations where collective accommodations and private apartments are located far from larger urban/municipal structures. This physical distance means that migrants who **do not own a car** are limited in their social interactions, ability to commute to school or to the workplace as well as any visits to medical facilities. The resulting **longer commuting times and distances** thus pose an obstacle to contact with the local population, often limiting it to the direct social environment, i.e. employer, volunteers, advisers and supporting staff or flatmates.

The wishes of newly arrived migrants

Many newly arrived migrants share the aspiration for **long-term social advancement** and obtaining their own flat or home with sufficient space for their families. Currently, however, only about **one third** of refugees living in rural areas are planning to stay **and live there in the long term**. The orientation of newly arrived migrants regarding where they wish to stay depends on the quality of life and the living environment, as well as the available infrastructure and job opportunities, all of which can differ greatly **depending on the region**.

To better promote the integration of newly arrived migrants in rural housing markets, the expert brief provides various recommendations for municipal actors:



Viewing housing needs as dynamic and ensuring flexibility

- Support migrants in the transition between different forms of housing
- Ensure that the search for subsequent tenants be transparent and follow systematic criteria
- Understand the particular dynamic of the needs of newly arrived migrants

Making access to the housing market sustainable

- Improve the existing infrastructure; expand the public transport network and Internet access
- Promote home exchange, incl. the construction of smaller apartments
- Distribute refugees strategically among municipalities, e.g. through community sponsorship programmes or pilot projects like Match'In
- Build social housing; acquire and renovate existing buildings
- Appoint dedicated points of contact in public administration for landlords and neighbours
- Inform migrants about their rights and obligations as tenants

Enshrining the existence of a specialist unit for housing matters in legislation

- Make permanent, earmarked (human) resources available
- Make living space as well as counselling, support and assistance available to newly arrived migrants
- Detailed tasks must be oriented to the needs in the region

Ensuring the quality of (refugee) accommodations

- Set binding standards for collective accommodations
- Introduce a protection concept and appoint a coordinator for protection against violence
- Carry out independent and regular monitoring
- Set up a decentralised internal participation and complaint management in collective accommodation facilities

Ensuring quality in private flats

- Ensure an ongoing dialogue with all parties involved
- Ensure an intensified control of the quality of living spaces of newly arrived migrants

Meeting the obligation to protect vulnerable populations

- Develop protection concepts for refugees; sensitise employees
- Ensure low-threshold and comprehensive psychosocial support
- Prioritise persons with special needs in the selection of tenants
- Have accessible housing in public ownership available

Promoting social cohesion through architecture and the development of the living environment

- Promote social cohesion through development of the neighbourhood
- Strengthen the participation of migrants in planning processes even more than before and approach them actively for this purpose