

Housing refugees from Ukraine : preliminary insights and learnings from the local response in five European cities

Urban Research and Practice

Haase, Annegret; Arroyo, Ivette; Astolfo, Giovanna; Franz, Yvonne; Laksevics, Karlis et al

<https://doi.org/10.1080/17535069.2023.2225333>

This publication is made publicly available in the institutional repository of Wageningen University and Research, under the terms of article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, also known as the Amendment Taverne.

Article 25fa states that the author of a short scientific work funded either wholly or partially by Dutch public funds is entitled to make that work publicly available for no consideration following a reasonable period of time after the work was first published, provided that clear reference is made to the source of the first publication of the work.

This publication is distributed using the principles as determined in the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU) 'Article 25fa implementation' project. According to these principles research outputs of researchers employed by Dutch Universities that comply with the legal requirements of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act are distributed online and free of cost or other barriers in institutional repositories. Research outputs are distributed six months after their first online publication in the original published version and with proper attribution to the source of the original publication.





You are permitted to download and use the publication for personal purposes. All rights remain with the author(s) and / or copyright owner(s) of this work. Any use of the publication or parts of it other than authorised under article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright act is prohibited. Wageningen University & Research and the author(s) of this publication shall not be held responsible or liable for any damages resulting from your (re)use of this publication.

For questions regarding the public availability of this publication please contact openaccess.library@wur.nl

POLICY PAPER



Housing refugees from Ukraine: preliminary insights and learnings from the local response in five European cities

Annegret Haase ^a, Ivette Arroyo^b, Giovanna Astolfo ^c, Yvonne Franz ^d,
Karlis Laksevics ^{e,f}, Valeria Lazarenko^g, Bahanur Nasya^h, Ursula Reegerⁱ
and Anika Schmidt^a

^aHelmholtz Centre for Environmental Research – UFZ, Leipzig, Germany; ^bDepartment of Architecture and Built Environment, Lund University, Lund, Sweden; ^cThe Bartlett DPU London WC1H 9EZ, University College London, London, UK; ^dDepartment of Geography and Regional Research, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria; ^eUniversity of Latvia, Riga, Latvia; ^fWageningen University, Riga, Latvia; ^gGeorg Simmel Center for Metropolitan Studies, Humboldt University Berlin, Berlin, Germany; ^hEutroplan GmbH, Packhaus, Vienna, Austria; ⁱInstitute for Urban and Regional Research, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna, Austria

ABSTRACT

The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine caused an escape of >7 million people to other European countries. In this extreme context, the accommodation of refugees has been an urgent need and an unexpected challenge for the host cities and societies. This short paper discusses insights and learnings on housing and accommodation of Ukraine war refugees at the local scale. It summarises challenges within the general management of (housing) integration, discusses related learnings from the hitherto coping mechanisms and sheds light on policy implications for the future by embedding the migration challenge of Ukrainian refugees into a wider context.

KEYWORDS

Refugee migration; Ukraine; local housing integration; European cities; housing challenges; comparative perspective

Introduction

The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine caused a massive escape to other European countries. More than 7 million people were recorded at European borders, and about 5 million persons registered for temporary protection or another protection scheme (UNHCR Operational Data Portal: Ukrainian Refugee Situation 2022).¹ The European Union (EU) has provided support to Ukrainian refugees through the 2001 Temporary Protection Directive (TPD), an exceptional measure to provide immediate accommodation and care to displaced groups. This measure was initially developed after the Yugoslav Wars in the first half of the 1990s, and it was activated for the first time in 2022 to provide a common legal basis for the reception and settling of refugees from Ukraine.

In this extreme context, the accommodation of refugees has been both an urgent need and an unexpected challenge for the host cities and local societies. Housing, as both basic and humanitarian needs as well as key for settling and belonging, represents a major challenge during arrival and reception. These challenges are a recurring theme in the EU's management of refugee migration (e.g. 1994 and following years, or 2015–2016).

Set against this background, this short paper discusses insights and learnings on housing and accommodation of Ukraine war refugees as they can be drawn after one year experience for the local scale. It looks in a comparative manner to cities in six national contexts. It summarises challenges within the general management of (housing) integration, discusses related learnings from the hitherto coping mechanisms and sheds light on policy implications for the future by embedding the migration challenge of Ukrainian refugees into a wider context.

Materials and methods

This paper draws on previous results from interdisciplinary research (cf. Astolfo et al. 2022; Haase et al. 2022) dealing with housing of forced migrants from a transdisciplinary perspective² synthesising contributions from Austria, Germany, Latvia, Poland, Sweden and Ukraine. The methodological framing is based on the understanding of the housing-integration intersection as complex interdependencies between access to and quality of housing, the residential environment, the process of settling and belonging as well as forms of social encounter and support enabling people to settle. To what extent have local capacities developed in the previous refugee crisis (2015–2016) been instrumental for the humanitarian response provided to Ukrainian refugees in different European contexts? The results refer to the HOUSE-IN project case studies in Leipzig, Berlin, Lund, Riga and Vienna and also include experiences from Warsaw, Poland. Although these cities have distinctive contexts in terms of migration histories and housing market structures, the access to housing of Ukrainian refugees has been a challenge for all of them.

Local responses to the refugee migration from Ukraine

Main challenges and related learnings in a cross-European perspective

Housing and accommodation of war refugees from Ukraine pose challenges at various spatial and governance scales, in particular in relation to access and affordability, temporality and uncertainty, and the role of civil society actors. The following paragraphs reflect upon research findings across five European cities and *learnings* that can prove useful for the near future.

Access to adequate housing and long-term housing strategies as key challenges. The local governance of refugee migration from Ukraine (and refugee migration in general) is largely linked to housing challenges. Affordable and safe housing constitutes a fundamental basis to access jobs, education, childcare, healthcare and enjoy social interaction. After the Russian invasion, a considerable number of private households offered immediate accommodation to Ukrainian refugees for short and medium terms in the case study cities. In Austria, Germany, Latvia, and Sweden as well as in other countries, people have opened their houses to accommodate individuals, mostly women with children and families, marking an unprecedented solidarity. The case of refugees from Ukraine is significantly different from refugees from non-EU countries because Ukrainians can move freely in Europe. Accommodation in private homes continues to be significant and is one of the most important reasons why housing has not yet

become a much larger challenge in most cities. However, there is a need to identify forms of independent housing for refugees to unburden private households, and ensure better living conditions and autonomy from a long-term perspective (Pötzschke et al. 2022). Hence, considering that few housing solutions have been developed since 2015. As the situation drags on, there is an imperative for state institutions to play a stronger role in affordable housing provision and support, as well as fostering the sustainable transition from regular housing to novel forms of shared housing.

The ongoing racism and selective solidarity in the European border regime. European host societies demonstrated a high level of support to Ukrainian refugees in response to the outbreak of the war. Many of the supporters had never been engaged in refugee aid before and wanted to do more than donations (Haller et al. 2022 for Germany, Mieñkowska-Norkiene 2022 for Poland). Local housing providers and hotel owners offered accommodation, and new support platforms were established. At the same time, the mobilisation to house Ukrainian refugees exposed patterns of racism and discrimination, including differential treatment between Ukrainians and other refugees or minorities from Ukraine such as Roma (cf. De Coninck 2022; Näre et al. 2022, 2022), and cases of direct refusal to house ‘non-white’ refugees. Additionally, compared to Ukrainian refugees, other refugees experienced limited access to civic support structures, including housing, childcare and financial support.³ This ‘double-standard’ protection policy of some countries has led to frustration and anger amongst refugees from other regions in the form of a sense of discrimination that current protection measures enable Ukrainian refugees to receive a ‘privileged treatment’ in the receiving countries. Altogether, this is conducive to tensions between different groups of forced migrants. NGOs for which principles of social justice and equality form the ethical base of their work are faced with the dilemma of having to deal with regulations demanding unequal treatment. They are collaborating with municipalities and other support organisations to provide equal support to all vulnerable groups and to reduce discrimination against non-Ukrainians (Schmidt and Haase 2023 for Leipzig).

Since the spring of 2022, the debate on the selectiveness of solidarity toward refugees and its inherent racism has become particularly heated.⁴ The unequal treatment of refugees in Europe seems to have become a normalised practice, meaning it is tolerated if not deliberately pursued by policy and commonly accepted in practice.⁵ In relation to the increase in refugee migration and arrival of refugees from a variety of countries of origin since the autumn of 2022, protests have increased, including against the accommodation of Ukrainian refugees (e.g. see the case of Leipzig in Germany). The result is that xenophobia and anti-refugee attitudes end up compromising the above described large-scale solidarity and support that societies showed in the first months of Russia’s war of aggression and questions the feasibility to apply the same solutions to other forced migrants.

The changing governance of arrival: local scale innovations as examples for good practices. In Leipzig, Riga and Vienna, local authorities set up special arrival centres for Ukrainian civilians. These centres brought together different services and support structures (registration for welfare, access to housing, childcare and employment) and made arrival procedures comparatively easy and efficient. Local authorities were able to

build on the experience from earlier large-scale arrivals in 2015/16. Despite this, in many cities, (little) financial support was given to house owners to accommodate people. Bureaucratic obstacles and problems with access to housing remained significant, especially after the first months when the capacity for continuous help for housing started to decrease.

Good strategies such as temporary accommodation within neighbourhoods, decentralised accommodation or co-housing schemes are in place but they are (continuously) treated as niches in case study cities. Instead, what is lacking, is a general acknowledgement that refugee housing needs are part of a long-term challenge and need structural instead of ad-hoc responses.⁶ Especially for the context of contested housing markets as e.g. in Leipzig, Berlin, Lund, Riga and Vienna, good concepts for accessible and inclusive housing for forced migrants are not largely lacking but have to be guaranteed in case of need. A clear need for improved financial support of communes at local scale must be emphasised.

Continuous reliance on non-state actors. Non-state actors such as NGOs, faith-based groups (e.g. in Lund), migrant-based organisations, etc. have played a major and indispensable role within the governance of Ukrainian refugee arrival. Many cities could draw on the professional knowledge and past experiences of civil society actors; and on existing structures, organisations and networks built since 2015. In many cases, diverse forms of cooperation with local authorities have evolved because they are increasingly dependent on non-state actors' resources, experience, tacit knowledge and contacts with refugees. Although the experience and professionalism of non-state actors differ, they have played important roles in filling institutional gaps, pressuring local and supralocal authorities to improve conditions, prolonging financial support and/or making decisions on pressing questions. Non-state actors found themselves operating within a context of enhanced solidarity, involvement and support by civil society at a level that Europe had not seen for a long time. Many people offered their homes, time and financial resources to support refugees (Fuszara 2023). Surveys report a high level of empathy with refugees and desire to help (Haller et al. 2022). While this support is still in place (as of early spring 2023), there is a noticeable rise in 'compassion fatigue' among helpers due to the protraction of the situation, bureaucratic obstacles, and exhaustion from both the need to share private space with other people and moral obligation to keep the support (cf. Astolfo et al. 2022).

Dealing with politics of uncertainty. There is no certainty about whether or not the war will end in the near future. This represents the main challenge for each individual as well as for future governance, policy and support. Uncertainties affect various domains of life, including the future of young refugees.⁷ On the one hand, a huge number of Ukrainian refugees wish to return home as soon as possible and, thus, many of them question the need (and energy spent) to look for sustainable long-term housing solutions. On the other hand, considering the ongoing war and the resulting shortage of housing in Ukraine, refugees will have to make longer-term decisions concerning jobs and school attendance of their children. We expect that, the longer people stay away from their country, the less likely they will return home even in the event that the war ends. Hence, planning for provision of longer-term housing for the refugees represents a huge challenge (cf. Duszczuk and Kaczmarczek 2022). This holds for all the cases researched, no matter how different the

cities and their housing markets are. The desire of many Ukrainian refugees to settle only temporarily makes any planning for housing-integration solutions even more complicated. Nevertheless, the activation of the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) by the Council of the European Union in February 2022⁸ and mobilisation of civil society show signs that it is possible to aim at humanitarian response and integration approaches that are ‘rapid and flexible’ with prioritised and temporally adjustable housing provision approaches. It shows that, if there is political will, there is a way for more humane and dignified approaches to cope with arrival, settling and integration of refugees: ‘European states have the capacity to respond to the protection needs of asylum seekers with a more humane policy.’⁹ This holds consistent with the local coping responses of the cities under investigation.

Discussion: Implications for the future

The challenges and learnings summarised above lead to future *implications* regarding the migration of Ukraine refugees, embedding them into a wider context. Uncertainty will remain a major challenge not just for the future of housing and accommodating Ukrainian refugees. Rather, it might become a ‘wicked problem’ under the present conditions of financialisation that affect housing markets in most European cities. There is a need to counteract negative consequences of uncertainty and to provide pathways for planning the future, i.e. providing additional support and long-term educational perspectives for children and youths from Ukraine. At the same time, European host countries and municipalities have to acknowledge the arrival of forced migrants as a structural issue and provide a long-term response with respect to housing integration (to avoid ad-hoc, temporary solutions or rely too heavily on civic society). Therefore, cities and municipalities need better financial and human resources to enable housing forms and neighbourhoods where housing integration occurs. This should include strategies and regulations to make the housing market more accessible and affordable, instead of relying solely on the public housing sector. From the perspective of forced migrants, a clear analysis is still needed to fully understand who is excluded from accessing housing and how existing barriers and injustices can be tackled.

It is an open question, whether the strong role that non-state actors played in the response to the arrival of Ukraine refugees, can be used as a paradigm for a more inclusive and emancipatory welcome practice. This, however, would only be possible if issues of double standards and solidarity are explicitly discussed and addressed. In turn, ‘compassion fatigue’ must be prevented through support mechanisms, a clear roadmap and action plan.

The recent increase in the number of refugees arriving via the Western Balkan route and the continued struggle of refugees to cross the Belarusian border are fuelling the public and political discourses on how to deal with refugees in general and this group in particular. At the national and European scale, current policies to respond to forced migration are becoming increasingly restrictive and punitive. They are far more concerned with protecting borders and repel and criminalise migrants than anything else. This remains the largest unaddressed challenge.

Finally, being not an implication but an emerging challenge: the combination of a ‘permanent’ housing crisis and the war related energy crisis is making the living costs rising in unprecedented ways. This constitutes an additional obstacle to the governance of arrival, as it erodes the willingness and capacity of local groups to support refugees from Ukraine

through providing shelter. Financial hardship in the receiving (urban) societies threatens to increase the rejection of migrants at large and puts solidarity at risk.

Notes

1. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>, accessed on 20 Oct 2022; Temporary Protection Directive (TPD; Council Directive 2001/55/EC). https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/common-european-asylum-system/temporary-protection_en. (accessed on 20 Oct 2022)
2. HOUSE-IN (June 2021–Nov 2022) was a European project on challenges at the intersection of housing and integration of migrants in cities funded within the JPI Urban Europe Call ‘Urban Migration’. Full title: The Housing-Integration-Nexus: shaping exchange and innovation for migrants’ access to housing and social inclusion; <https://jpi-urbaneurope.eu/project/house-in/>. (accessed on 20 Oct 2022)
3. This is not applicable to Sweden.
4. <https://theconversation.com/ukraine-refugee-crisis-exposes-racism-and-contradictions-in-the-definition-of-human-179150>, Howard et al. (2022) or <https://www.asileproject.eu/receiving-ukrainian-refugees-in-the-eu-a-case-of-solidarity/>. (accessed on 15 Feb 2023)
5. <https://www.medico.de/en/selective-solidarity-18594> (accessed on 15 March 2023), Karageorgiou and Noll (2022); <https://www.asileproject.eu/receiving-ukrainian-refugees-in-the-eu-a-case-of-solidarity/>. (accessed on 20 March 2023)
6. For Germany see <https://www.akp-redaktion.de/kommunalpolitik-und-der-ukraine-krieg/> and <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/innenpolitik/container-fluechtlinge-101.html>. (both accessed on 24 March 2023)
7. On the school situation of Ukrainian refugees, see: <https://eurocities.eu/latest/ukrainian-children-are-back-to-school-in-eu-cities/>. (accessed on 7 Nov 2022)
8. COUNCIL IMPLEMENTING DECISION (EU) 2022/382 of 4 March 2022, establishing the existence of a mass influx of displaced persons from Ukraine within the meaning of Article 5 of Directive 2001/55/EC, and having the effect of introducing temporary protection. (accessed on 5 June 2023).
9. <https://gchumanrights.org/gc-preparedness/preparedness-migration/article-detail/selective-solidarity-and-discrimination-in-the-eu-response-to-refugees.html>. (accessed on 15 March 2023)

Acknowledgements

This article is based on research that was financed by the project HOUSE-IN, a European project on challenges at the intersection of housing and integration of migrants in cities funded within the JPI Urban Europe Call ‘Urban Migration’. Full title: The Housing-Integration-Nexus: shaping exchange and innovation for migrants’ access to housing and social inclusion (June 2021–Nov 2022); <https://jpi-urbaneurope.eu/project/house-in/> (accessed on 20 Oct 2022).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Annegret Haase  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8492-9161>

Giovanna Astolfo  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8719-3479>

Yvonne Franz  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7905-931X>

Karlis Laksevis  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6674-1931>

References

- Astolfo, G., H. Allsopp, M. Duszczyc, Y. Franz, A. Haase, K. Laksevic, B. Nasya, I. Raubisko, U. Reeger, and A. Schmidt 2022. "Now and Then. Precariousness, Double Standards and Racism in Housing Refugees." UCL The Bartlett Development Planning Unit. Accessed June 2, 2023. <https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/dpublog/2022/06/20/now-and-then-precarioussness-double-standards-and-racism-in-housing-refugees/>.
- De Coninck, D. 2022. "The Refugee Paradox During Wartime in Europe: How Ukrainian and Afghan Refugees are (Not) Alike." *International Migration Review* 57 (2): 578–586. Accessed November 7, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01979183221116874>.
- Duszczyc, M., and P. Kaczmarczek 2022. "War and Migration: The Recent Influx from Ukraine into Poland and Possible Scenarios for the Future." <https://www.migracje.uw.edu.pl/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Spotlight-APRIL-2022.pdf>.
- Fuszara, M. 2023. "Die Unterstützung der polnischen Bevölkerung für Geflüchtete aus der Ukraine." *Polen-Analysen 2 vom 7* (305): 2–6. Accessed March 29, 2023. <https://www.laenderanalysen.de/polen-analysen/305/PolenAnalysen305.pdf>. <https://doi.org/10.31205/PA.305.01>.
- Haase, A., H. Allsopp, I. Arroyo, Y. Franz, K. Laksevic, V. Lazarenko, B. Nasya, I. Raubisko, U. Reeger, B.Saadeh, A. Schmidt, and U. Stevens. 2022. "Refugee Migration from Ukraine to Other Parts of Europe – Challenges with Regard to the Housing-Integration Intersection at the City Level, *Radical Housing Journal*." Accessed March 29, 2023. <https://radicalhousingjournal.org/2022/refugee-migration-from-ukraine-to-other-parts-of-europe/>.
- Haller, L., T. Uhr, S. E. Frederiksen, R. Rischke, Z. Yanasmayan, and S. Zajak. 2022. "New Platforms of Engagement. Private Accommodation for Forced Migrants from Ukraine, DEZIM Insights No. 5." https://www.dezim-institut.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Demo_FIS/publikation_pdf/FA-5396.pdf.
- Howard, P. S., B. C. Y. Johnson, and K. Ah-Sen. 2022. "Ukraine Refugee Crisis Exposes Racism and Contradictions in the Definition of Human, In: *Conversation*." Accessed March 29, 2023. <https://theconversation.com/ukraine-refugee-crisis-exposes-racism-and-contradictions-in-the-definition-of-human-179150>.
- Karageorgiou, and Noll 2022. Accessed March 20, 2023. <https://www.asileproject.eu/receiving-ukrainian-refugees-in-the-eu-a-case-of-solidarity/>.
- Mieńkowska-Norkiene, R. 2022. "Ukrainische Geflüchtete in Polen." 1: (11) *Polen-Analysen* 301. Accessed March 7, 2022 www.laender-analysen.de/polen.
- Näre, L., D. Abdelhady, and N. Irastorza. 2022. "What Can We Learn from the Reception of Ukrainian Refugees?." Accessed June 2, 2023. <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1703221/FULLTEXT01.pdf>.
- Pötzschke, S., B. Weiß, A. Hebel, J. P. Piepenburg, and O. Popek. 2022. "Geflüchtete aus der Ukraine – Erste deskriptive Ergebnisse einer Onlinebefragung in Deutschland und Polen." *Gesis Blog* 6. <https://doi.org/10.34879/gesisblog.2022.60>.
- Schmidt, A., and A. Haase. 2023. "Ankommen und Wohnen von Migrant*innen in europäischen Städten: Einblicke in den transdisziplinären Austausch innerhalb des Projekts HOUSE-IN und die Fallstudie Leipzig." *PoWine, Bd* [3/2023]. <https://doi.org/10.24352/UB.OVGU-2023-005>.
- UNHCR Operational Data Portal: Ukrainian Refugee Situation. Accessed October 20, 2022. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>.