

Housing for Migrants and Refugees in the UNECE Region

Challenges and practices



UNECE

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Preface

Major global phenomena, including international migration, have had a critical impact on the capacity of the housing sector to deliver adequate and affordable housing for all. With governments working to meet the housing need of the local population, migration is often seen as adding further pressure on public budgets.

The *Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing*, endorsed by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) in 2015, is one of the key policy documents that guide the work of the UNECE Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management. In line with the main goal of the Charter to support member States in ensuring universal access to decent, adequate, affordable and healthy housing, especially for vulnerable groups like migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons and stateless persons, the Committee adopted a decision in 2016 to prepare a study on how countries are addressing the migration crisis through the provision of affordable housing.

The development of the study *Housing for Migrants and Refugees in the UNECE Region: Challenges and practices* began in 2016 and after a series of consultations and revisions, it was finalized in 2020. The Committee approved the study and its contents at its eighty-first session in October 2020 (ECE/HBP/206, para 41).

The study is a compendium of best practices and illustrates that housing for migrants and refugees can positively support local communities and economies, and facilitate their integration. Furthermore, the study highlights the key role of cities and local administrations in housing provision.

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Definitions

There is no universally agreed upon legal definition of “migrant”. The United Nations International Organization for Migration provides the following definition¹:

Migrant - An umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons. The term includes a number of well-defined legal categories of people, such as migrant workers; persons whose particular types of movements are legally defined, such as smuggled migrants; as well as those whose status or means of movement are not specifically defined under international law, such as international students.

States may distinguish between regular and irregular migrants². It should be noted that the term “migrant” in this publication refers to the migrants holding the legal right to stay on the territory of another State, unless otherwise noted. This report focuses on the migrants in positions of vulnerability, for example, due to low income levels. This is not necessarily the case for all migrants.

Refugees are defined and protected under international law. The Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (1951)³, as modified by the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees⁴, provides the following definition:

Refugee – Subject to certain exceptions, a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinions, is outside of the country of his or her nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.⁵

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