



# SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT & REFUGEE HOUSING



**EFL** EUROPEAN FEDERATION  
FOR LIVING

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

On 17-18 November 2016, EFL and Eurhonet members of the Topic Group Social Domain were hosted by housing company EFL member Vilogia for a two-day visit in Lyon, France. The Working Group is focused on the exchange of knowledge and experiences in the field of neighborhood development, integration and enhancing life chances of people in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Central to the Lyon meeting was social integration of vulnerable groups in society and refugee populations and the different roles of housing companies across some European countries. The purpose of the meeting has been to further build on the findings and experiences of the previous meeting in Dortmund.

As the current migratory impact is still at crisis level, it is greatly inflaming the general issue of the growing housing demand all across Europe. Vulnerable groups are strongly affected by these demographic changes, which not only increase further housing shortage but can also be the cause of social exclusion and disadvantage. Stimulating integration and active communal involvement is part of a credible social component of improving disadvantaged neighborhoods. A comprehensive and joint approach is in place to tackle these borderless issues, which are recognizable by most cities and housing associations. During the meeting, Vilogia shared their own principles and methodology used to keep up with the additional housing demand generated by rising immigration and life expectancy, as well as the growing number of vulnerable households in general.

The members of the Topic Group not only disseminate strategies and best practices, but also create effective instruments and tools for own use. All information gathered during our meetings is covered in EFL brochures and made available via the EFL website. We hope that this will help housing associations to advance and develop their practices on these important themes.



## 2. SOCIAL AND URBAN INNOVATION IN LYON

**Lyon has asserted itself as one of the most thriving and dynamic metropolitans of Europe. With a population of over two million people, France's second largest city continues to foster economic and social growth, responding adequately to key challenges and developments beyond their control. French frontrunner housing association Vilogia shared their best practices during the Topic Group meeting, discussing the wider context in which they operate nationally and on a European level. Throughout France, they operate as landlord, developer and manufacturer. They are a close partner of local authorities and heavily involved in urban renewal and the city policies. With nearly 2,000 new homes delivered each year, Vilogia is one of the most dynamic real estate players in the sector.**

**Rental:** The social housing sector in France accounts for about 17% of the stock. In larger cities in France, a minimum of 25% of the stock must be reserved for social housing. Furthermore, 20% of social dwellings is dedicated to fragile groups. Housing is provided by so called 'HLM' (Habitation à Loyer Modéré) organisations. These organisations are specific actors entrusted by the state to fulfil a mission of general interest. They provide housing at moderated rents. Generally, three classes of social housing with different rent levels and corresponding income levels are distinguished. The French financing system bases on these 3 classes and provides a higher or lower (direct) subsidy. A total of almost 70% of the French population can make claim on a social dwelling when just income is taken into account. Water and electricity and service charge is not included in the rent.

**Rent to Buy:** Vilogia accommodates both economic and social responsible renting. They makes use of a so called 'Rent to Buy system': a 4 year rental time period before buying the house to the market price by the tenant. The sale price of the property is fixed at the start so if the property increases in value, the difference is in favour of the tenant. During the rental period, the rent is adapted to prevent financial shock. Complete exoneration from property taxes is available. Tenants will own their own flat in the dwelling. The salary of the tenant has to be three times the rent at a minimum. Vilogia remains

executing the property management of the building, even after the apartments are sold. Owner cooperations are formed and managed by Vilogia. Vilogia has their own staff, sometimes costumers become employees. 25% of Vilogia's tenants are unemployed or have a temporary job.

**Social actions:** Vilogia conducts timely research and analysis to help inform an evidence-based neighborhood improvement agenda. The collaborative includes partnerships with the local voluntary sector, as well as local authorities. Actions are carried out mostly laboratory of previous experiments, to guarantee the ascending process of social innovation. In some cases Vilogia takes the lead in initiatives, other times they have an executive role in projects set up by third parties. In both cases, the successful actions are mapped out. Vilogia has partnerships with museums and theatres to take tenants to engage in cultural activities. Furthermore, Vilogia organizes special workshops to activate consciousness to social responsibility and their own homes among the tenants. An example is supported self-retrofitting: a system in which tenants moving into their rental apartment do some basic maintenance work themselves (painting, placing the kitchen, small repairs etc.).

**Fetes des Voisins:** 'Fetes des Voisins' or 'Festival of neighbors' is a yearly national day held to improve contact between neighbors. It is an opportunity to meet ones neighbors and develop friendly relations in order to break the anonymity and isolation that often prevails in large cities. 'HLM' organizations support this initiative which has developed throughout France.



### 3. EXPERIENCES FROM THE FIELD VISIT

**Three major urban projects were highlights of the meeting: Vilogia's intergenerational project "La vie grande ouverte (=Life opened wide)", Cité Création's urban design project 'La Valloniere' and Lyon's largest urban project "Confluence". Each of the individual projects have a close bearing with relevant themes for European urban housing companies, such as sustainability and green cities, demographic developments, housing shortage and inclusion. All three projects were subject to an informative and inspiring field visit.**

#### **La vie grande ouverte (Life opened wide)**

In the heart of the city center, adjacent to the Catholic University of Lyon, a building with a special history became home to new residents after extensive renovation by OGIC and Habitat et Humanisme. The old 'Saint-Joseph' prison, once housing over () detainees, now contains 110 housing units where students live together with isolated and fragile individuals. The dwellings have a large shared garden, as well as spacious communal living rooms and kitchens that serve as spatial focal points for older adults and younger generations to meet, interact, build trust and friendships. Students provide daily services and personal support such as shopping assistance, help in the kitchen or simply to keep one company. The aim of this intergenerational project is to create a place of openness and transparency, with a focus on the challenge of creating community spaces that engender an important dimension of social connectedness, i.e., intergenerational engagement.

#### **La Vallonière**

Lyonnaise world leader in monumental wall design, CitéCréation, has signed more than 650 monumental mural paintings since its creation in 1978. The variety of frescoes is endless, but mostly serve as a valuable testimony of the history of the neighborhoods, the tenants and their personal stories. The murals are designed especially to display the identities of the people living inside the dwellings. In 2007, CitéCréation received the label "Entreprise du patrimoine vivant", awarded by the Ministry of the Economy of Finance and Employment. Since May of last year, Vilogia and Cité Création have been working with the inhabitants of the Vallonnière neighborhood to create three

mural works. The three works of monumental mural design represent a coherent journey while respecting the identity and the history of the inhabitants of each building.



#### **Confluence**

Highlight of the field visit was "Confluence", the largest urban project in progress in Lyon. Confluence is a district in the heart of Lyon, situated on the narrow peninsula that marks the meeting point of the Rhone and Saone rivers. For decades, the largest part of the peninsula has barely been in use. Only the northernmost area was inhabited, where charming old building blocks surround church "Sainte-Blandine." The southern part was long dedicated to industry and transport, but is now undergoing unprecedented urban renewal. The ambition of the Confluence district is extraordinary: to double the city-center in accordance with the European Climate Change Programme!

The project is unprecedented in the city's history, both in scope and cost. It is affecting the other inner-city districts, covering a total of 150 hectares (41 for the first phase). A total of nearly 5000 housing units will be built in the near future. 860 companies are already established in this new district. It is thus an urban enterprise of unusual scope in Europe, a great challenge for the metropolitan area, and an opportunity for its residents. An important consultation is undertaken with the population throughout the duration of the project.

In light of the developing migration situation in Europe in 2016, the Topic Group has brought the urgent issue of refugee housing to the forefront of its operational activities.

### 3. EXPERIENCES FROM FIELD VISIT



Several of our members have also pointed out that cooperation on this issue is needed. This has led to the agreement on a joint project related to housing and integration of refugees. First step of this was to send out a survey aiming at gathering an overview of the national policies and local governmental actions about the different tasks of different organizations, authorities etc. Research on the matter of integration of migrants in the neighborhood should help assess the current refugee housing situation. The aim is to identify the challenges and solutions for the permanent and adequate housing of refugees in the EU.

#### Figures:

European Refugee and Migrant Crisis

- Nearly 370,000 refugees and migrants have arrived in Europe this year, most of them by sea.
- More than 173,000 have arrived in Greece and more than 167,000 in Italy.
- The main nationalities are Syrian, Afghan, Nigerian, Pakistani, Iraqi and Eritrean.
- More than 75,500 refugees and migrants are stranded in Greece and the Western Balkans after Hungary and other countries shut their borders, closing off routes to central and western Europe.
- Numbers crossing from Turkey to Greece fell sharply after the European Union struck a deal with Ankara in March to stem the flow.
- At least 4,690 migrants have died in the Mediterranean this year while trying to reach Europe, compared to 3,777 in 2015. Most have died while crossing from North Africa.

(Source: UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM)

#### Migration and legal aspects

Large groups of displaced people are turning up at Europe's borders every day. Although the legal proceedings will determine whether or not an individual may remain in Europe, housing organizations can not sit still in the meantime. Housing for refugees poses specific challenges due to the conditions of their arrival, their often preliminary stay in reception centers or accommodation, prolonged insecurity until final recognition as beneficiaries of international protection, and their limited resources and networks. Up to 90% of Syrian and other asylum seekers who make it to the EU face homelessness, which is an undesirable and unacceptable scenario. Social housing organizations can offer advice, support – and homes.

One of the major challenges is the procedure that determines the status of each third-country national requesting international protection. Before a person can receive asylum, he/she must be recognised as a refugee or as a beneficiary of subsidiary protection. In April of 2016, the European Commission launched the process for reforming the current Common European Asylum System. The amendments aimed to simplify and shorten asylum procedures, ensure common guarantees for asylum seekers, impose stricter rules to combat abuse and harmonize rules on host countries. In addition, the Commission included proposals for establishing a sustainable and fair Dublin system, a new allocation system that is not connected to the “first country” rule and an emergency mechanism allowing to suspend transfers in cases of particular pressure on the asylum system.. >

## 4. PROVIDING HOUSING

Across Europe, urban demographics change in unpredictable and fast ways. It is required that housing is built at a faster pace to match demands. The challenges for housing organizations are high requirements for new buildings versus affordability, as well as the expected high rate of wear (extensive use). Also the scarcity of land for new buildings is troubling. Considering the actual construction of housing units, the role of regulation to enable fast, cheap and adaptive housing units was questioned during the topic group. Many European countries cannot cope with the production of housing. They are burdened by administrative, bureaucratic and regulatory elements (lengthy process for building permits, finding appropriate neighborhoods). In Sweden and Finland for example, it is unlawful to gain new land for the construction of refugee housing. For this reason they must be integrated in existing buildings and neighborhoods. This causes for a regional structural imbalance: there are rural areas which have many empty houses, but there is no work and there is no place to integrate them. In larger cities, there is work but no housing. Another important aspect is the distribution of housing. Affordable housing is needed for various target groups. At a social level, a common report is tension between those on waiting lists and newcomers getting priority housing. Many parts of society will resent preferential treatment.



## 5. MAPPING THE INTANGIBLE: DISCRIMINATION ON THE HOUSING MARKET

### Figures:

- Discrimination on the housing market negatively impacts the already disadvantaged position of migrants. It reinforces segregation and undermines social and spatial inclusion. Discriminatory attitudes towards migrants in relation to housing have been reported by the European Social Survey ESS in the 2002 and 2014 rounds. The 2011 EU-MIDIS study surveyed migrants' discrimination experience at large and found that :
  - North Africans are most affected by housing discrimination. When asked whether they were discriminated against by housing services, agencies or landlords in the past 12 months, 11% of North Africans, 7% of Sub-Saharan Africans and 7% of Turkish confirmed such an experience.
- There are differences between EU member states. Among North Africans living in Belgium, France, Italy, Netherlands and Spain, the highest rates of perceived housing discrimination in the past 5 years were recorded in Italy (48%) and the lowest in the Netherlands (9%).
- Reporting rates and awareness of legal redress remain low. Only 10% of persons experiencing housing discrimination reported the incident to the competent body and 44% of respondents were not aware of legislation forbidding ethnicity-based discrimination when renting or buying.

*Source: European Commission*

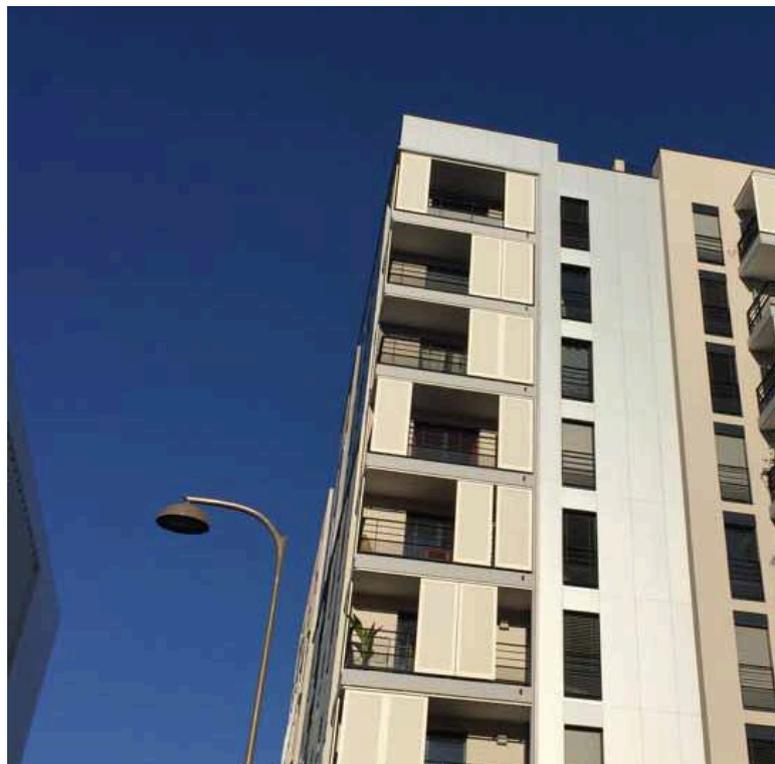
## 6. PERSONAL GUIDANCE OF REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

**Housing associations are not just a provider of housing, but also support in services and integration. Long-term social support services for refugees is needed, as the process of integration needs to start as soon as migrants start living in the neighborhood. For this reason, newcomers need assistance in how to adapt to a new environment. For many housing organizations, this means a new task in training for employees and building up of internal structures: intercultural skills, legal knowledge and building a network with local partners.**



## 7. INTEGRATION IN NEIGHBORHOODS

Integration is a complex and gradual process with legal, economic, social and cultural dimensions. It imposes considerable demands on both the individual and the receiving community. Policymakers have tended to emphasize national models of integration and citizenship. They have paid insufficient attention to the local level and to the relationship between social capital and social control. The Topic Group aims to assess intergroup relations and migrant integration at a neighborhood level in Europe. Can one common point be found how integration is best performed? It is evident that there is no 'one size fits all'. Nevertheless, housing for refugees could be a comprehensive and collaborative process of development, capitalizing in the social resources for community building, neighborhood regeneration and integration of migrants into society. A current project by Topic Group member EBZ (Germany) called "Integration in local urban neighborhoods" has shown that decentralized accommodation in existing neighborhoods offers best chances for integration.



## 8. THE DEVELOPMENT AND TESTING OF AN INTEGRATION TOOLKIT AND EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

During the period Dec 16- Jan 17, EFL and Eurhonet's Social Domain and Social Integration group members participated in a baseline survey, inquiring into the state of refugee housing provision across Europe. This included the mapping of how each provider responds to the housing needs of new arrivals and status holders and the provision of longer term housing solutions and neighbourhood practices to better understand shared areas of interest and opportunities for further investigation.

From the baseline findings and follow-up video conferences with interested members we identified the key strengths and challenges of improving the engagement of both migrant residents and host communities to ensure integrated, successful and sustainable communities.

The specific lines of inquiry included the following:

- The extent to which providers are legally obligated to house both new arrivals and status holders.



- What are the key issues and challenges when accommodating new arrivals and status holders and how these are being tackled by providers.
- The level of support and advice given by staff to new arrivals by providers
- The type of neighbourhood delivery models/approaches currently being used to assist with the integration process
- The level of skills and knowledge required for staff working directly with migrants.
- Suggested focus of a collaborative project and key deliverables to be achieved.

## 9. LIST OF PARTICIPANTS



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