

Innovative ideas: Housing

This briefing provides an overview of innovative approaches to housing in the field of migrant¹ integration. It is one of four² which MigrationWork CIC has produced to inspire and inform readers about what has worked well and why in the run-up to our MiFriendly Cities social innovation³ workshops that we are hosting in the West Midlands. The approaches outlined below do not represent an exhaustive list.

Innovative approaches - Introduction

Here are some examples of housing projects from across Europe which we hope will inspire you. We looked at projects that:

- **Tackle Discrimination:** because migrants and others often face discrimination in housing which may be difficult to prove
- **Provide housing for new migrants:** such as spare rooms for refugees or housing with support for new arrivals
- **House migrants who cannot get benefits or work:** to prevent homelessness and sometimes to help migrants who need to appeal against immigration decisions
- **Build housing:** by refurbishing or building, often bringing communities together to do it and learn skills
- **Offer “housing aid”:** advice and advocacy and information about rights
- **Help people live together:** sometimes supporting more vulnerable migrants

But housing innovation is not so easy:

- You could do some projects like this from scratch, but some may need partners to make them work well.
- Some of the most exciting projects in other European countries would simply be impossible in the UK because of planning rules, the way the housing market is structured and the roles played by the benefits system and exclusion from it.

¹ In this context we define this as a person who was born outside of the UK.

² On the topics of housing, employment, active citizenship and healthcare.

³ Innovation is broadly defined here as a new approach that the sector can learn from, or an approach which builds on previous insights to offer something new, to deliver effective results.

Innovative approaches

Tackling discrimination

Recent migrants tend to live in worse housing than others in the community. Sometimes this is due to lack of information or immigration status-based restrictions on access to housing, but discrimination is also a factor. There are laws to prohibit housing discrimination that should protect migrants, but they are rarely used. So, what can be done?

- In France, [Espace Solidarité Habitat](#) (ESH) de la Fondation Abbé Pierre offers help and legal advice to people facing discrimination and accompanies them through the legal process to challenge it.
- In Spain, [Provivienda Association](#) had a programme to combat housing discrimination including research, public information campaigns and help to those affected.
- In France, the city of Villeurbanne set up tests, [sending pairs of migrant and non-migrant applicants to local accommodation agencies](#). When this showed significant discrimination against the migrant applicants they used this evidence to bring together 12 agencies to work to develop non-discriminatory policies.
- In the same city, a local NGO campaigns against discrimination in all housing, social and private, sending a [regular newsletter](#) about housing discrimination to housing professionals and officials.

Providing housing for new migrants

- The awareness of the arrival of large numbers of refugees in Europe has prompted many initiatives to offer spare rooms to new migrants. [Refugees at Home](#) is the best known example in Britain, and [CALM](#) in France provides a similar service which has housed over 500 refugees in the two years since it was set up.
- In France, since 2004, the [House of Journalists](#) has offered up to six months accommodation to persecuted journalists. It also offers advice, employment support and legal help, cultural activities and practical help to them and to non-resident refugee journalists. The house is a centre to promote press freedom and human rights and organises talks and conferences and runs a website.
- [Ashley Community Homes](#) was started in Bristol in 2008 by a Somali refugee, and now also works in the West Midlands. It provides safe, secure and comfortable housing combined with culturally sensitive support and employability skills training, and works with over 2,000 people a year.

Housing those who cannot get welfare benefits or work

In the UK, many people cannot access welfare benefits and are not allowed to work, so face homelessness and destitution.

- [The Hope Projects](#) in the West Midlands provide housing, legal advice and crisis grants for asylum seekers whose applications have been rejected but need to appeal against this. They use accommodation donated or rented at low cost.
- [The Praxis NRPF project](#) houses families with no recourse to public funds referred by local council social services departments (who pay Praxis for this service) and also women who, because they do not have children, do not get help from social services and would otherwise be street homeless.

Self-build housing

Many migrants arrive with skills that could help them build their own homes, and the self-build housing movement is growing in the UK. Within this are people building for rent mobilised by organisations committed to the direct involvement of local people, including migrants, in the building or renovation of the homes they may then move into. Giroscope in Hull and Canopy in Leeds are [two such organisations](#), which won the World Habitat Award in 2015.

Self-help housing can also meet wider aims. [The Salus W space](#) in Bologna aims to build a new refugee reception centre that will also be a think tank and have a neighbourhood centre, educational gardens, artistic workshops, coworking, a multi-ethnic restaurant and accommodation facilities, for refugees and others. It hopes to foster micro entrepreneurship through this use of abandoned areas in the city, and to use the whole refurbishment and building process as opportunities to train refugees in useful skills.

Housing Aid

Housing aid includes providing advice and advocacy to get migrants into decent homes; mediating between tenants and landlords when needed; developing suitable housing, and sometimes working in areas to head off potential conflict between new arrivals and settled communities.

- In Lombardy in Italy the [interdisciplinary Home Project](#) looked for cheaper homes, made abandoned homes habitable, provided information about where to get housing help and organised meetings and round tables to promote harmony between migrants, housing providers and local communities.
- In Rome, [the AMAR project](#) set up help desks in council offices to provide information and advice about housing, provided training for migrants, landlords and local people on the rights and duties of tenants, intercultural

communication and local resources, and then published the material in a multilingual guide.

Living together

One way to promote integration and community cohesion is actually to live together. Some projects promote this.

- [The Utrecht Refugee Launchpad](#) has set up a refugee reception centre within which local young people are also offered modern high-quality accommodation. Courses in entrepreneurship and business English and follow up help are offered to refugees and local people together.
- In Athens, many refugees find themselves in limbo, insecure housing and high unemployment (alongside many local residents). [Curing the Limbo](#) offers them affordable living spaces (with incentives for owners) and training in return for voluntary work supporting the needs of the local community and participating in citizen-led activities that improve quality of life in Athenian neighbourhoods.
- The City of Antwerp was worried about what happens to its unaccompanied child refugees when they turn 18 and faced huge risks as “adults”. So it set up [Curant](#) where they can share accommodation with Flemish buddies and get other help.

Summary

The types of innovative interventions described in this briefing highlight the following key lessons for others looking to design similar interventions/ projects:

- Tackling discrimination is an effective approach which may improve many migrants’ housing conditions. It needs to involve non-migrants to help with testing and to help migrants pursue their rights.
- In the UK context, providing housing directly, setting up self-build projects or setting up co-housing projects is likely to need partnerships with existing housing providers, but could benefit greatly from the skills and knowledge migrants bring.
- Migrants in the UK desperately need housing aid, as do many other people. There are [resources](#) to support this and holistic projects providing this may be very effective.