![PERCEPTIONS]

Policy Brief

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Mismatched: Migrant Housing

How the realities of migrant housing mismatch with migrant perceptions of Europe & what to do about it

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• Executive Summary

Migrants across the world arrive in Europe to seek better lives from civil wars and economic and political instabilities, often perceiving the continent as a beacon of prosperity, health, and safety. However, the realities of migrant housing mismatch with their optimistic ideals. In comparison to EU nationals, foreign migrants are disproportionately exposed to poor living conditions - such as mould, inadequate fire safety, and overcrowding - and face exploitation in the housing market with overburdening rent prices and abrupt evictions.

Through a combination of government allocation policies and economic pressures, migrants are commonly forced to live in underserved neighbourhoods where lack of investment in public infrastructure, healthcare, and education, as well as high petty crimes rates, often take place. These neighbourhoods tend to be characterised by poor public transit connectivity, spatial segregation and ghettoization processes, which severely impact migrants' access to social and economic opportunities as well as their right to vote. As such, this policy brief discusses how inadequate housing conditions result in a mismatch between migrants' expectations of Europe and their lived experiences, and what can be done about it.

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● Introduction

As prolonged civil wars, political instability, and economic insecurity plague nations across the world, migrants seeking a better and safer life continue to arrive in Europe at record levels. Migrant perceptions of Europe generally indicate positive expectations, ones that are symbolic of economic opportunity, safe living conditions, and peaceful future prospects. However, numerous aspects of Europe mismatch with their expectations; among other arenas, arriving migrants face difficulty accessing education, medical care, and employment.

Data from researchers show that all these challenges correlate with inadequate housing (Meer et al., 2021, p. 4). As such, while mismatches between migrant expectations and their realities of Europe also occur with relation to numerous other services, it is because of these spheres' consequential socio-economic correlations to housing that the mismatch regarding their living conditions remains the exclusive focus of this policy brief. Since undocumented migrants have particular circumstances, varying from country to country, this brief will exclusively focus on migrants who hold legal status and therefore are recognised the right to both public and private housing.

The PERCEPTIONS D3.5 Multi-perspective Research Report depicts how it is difficult for many migrants to find a job, which leads to many living in very poor housing conditions and some ending up on the streets (D3.5, Bermejo & Carrasco, 2021, p.54), further negating their ideas of Europe as "a canon of happiness and human rights" (D3.5, p.25). Newcomers often resign to lower-quality accommodation in run-down "ghetto" neighbourhoods, (Mazzaglia, 2022, p. 67) posing additional security risks. Furthermore, the lack of effective urban planning and infrastructure exacerbates their woes and amid a European housing market that has never been more insecure (EESC, 2022), migrants are also more likely to face exploitation.

Because the right to housing is among the pillars of adequate living standards recognized by the UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (UNHCHR, 2009, p. 3) and is considered one of the key indicators for migrant integration - as well as a means to accessing other social services - this policy brief addresses how the unavailability of safe and well-connected accommodation exacerbates migrants' socioeconomic marginalisation and restricts opportunities for a better life (European Commission, 2016). This policy brief, therefore, asks **how do inadequate housing circumstances result in the mismatch between migrants' expectations of Europe and their lived experiences?**

Key Issues:

- *There exists a mismatch between migrants' expectations of Europe and their lived experience in relation to their housing realities.*

- *Adequate housing is a central instrument for facilitating other social services, such as education, employment and healthcare.*

- *Migrants face numerous health and safety concerns, including overcrowding, crime, and a lack of effective urban planning. Due to discrimination in the housing market and an unavailability of adequate living spaces, migrants must settle for squalid accommodations.*

● Inadequate Housing Services

o   Living Conditions

Migrants may perceive Europe to be the cornerstone of wealth and equality, but the poor state of their living conditions hinders the socio-economic integration that would materialise these expectations. Most migrant housing in Europe is in lower-income neighbourhoods, where existing infrastructure poses severe health and safety risks and vulnerability to external factors, such as natural disasters and pandemics (UN Economic Commission for Europe, 2021). Poor quality housing, often in undesirable "shanty town" areas, is also particularly overcrowded and lacks basic amenities like clean water, bathrooms, ventilation, and heating generally available to the rest of the population (UN Economic Commission for Europe, 2021).

Just as in the past, large numbers of migrants in some European countries had no access to hot water and suffered from dampness and mould (Harrisson *et al*, 2005), mould and pests continue to be seen in migrant accommodations in Germany and the Netherlands as recently as 2022 (MacGregor, 2022). Another instance of poor infrastructure in migrant housing is the 2017 Grenfell Tower Fire in London, which cost the lives of 72 migrants. While most of the victims had arrived in the UK expecting a safer life, their insecure living conditions - marked by flammable exterior cladding, non-fire-resistant windows and the neglected health and safety concerns of residents - were a result of unregulated housing conditions (BBC, 2019).

In contradiction to their ideals of "an easy access to housing" (D3.5, p. 28), migrants continue to be exploited by private landlords through higher rent prices and insecure contracts like sub-tenancies, which further exacerbates their impoverishment and integration into society (Mouzourakis, Pollet, & Ott, 2019, p. 26-28). The insecurity of renting private housing is also aggravated by cases of forced evictions of migrants – for example, in Denmark - and excessive police surveillance of migrant communities and camps in some EU countries (Burnett, 2021; Ozkan & Stevens, 2021).

Furthermore, the shoddy state of living conditions is amplified by external factors, such as pandemics; COVID-19 transmission rates among European migrant communities have been particularly exacerbated by overcrowding, a reality that non-migrant communities mostly do not have to face (Migration Policy Institute, 2021). This challenges migrants' pull factor for Europe as a safe haven, as expressed in the following quote, "Europe they [value] health and education" (D3.5, p.18). In reality, health risks due to poor quality housing, lack of sanitary facilities, and external factors are significant challenges for migrant safety, security, and integration.

Key Findings:

- *The poor state of migrant housing - both in the quality and location of residence - mismatches their expectations of Europe.*

- *Instances of poor infrastructure and lack of basic amenities could be found all throughout Europe, with stark instances in Spain and the UK.*

- *The exploitation of migrants by private landlords further subjugates them and impedes their social integration.*

- *Insecure living conditions are exacerbated by external factors, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and emphasize the discrepancies in housing between migrant and non-migrant communities.*

Social Environment Factors

The results of recent surveys conducted among migrants and first-line practitioners, as backed by academia, also highlight how mismatches concerning migrants' perceptions of the accessibility of social services - including healthcare, education, and employment opportunities – and their unfortunate reality can be traced to inadequate housing circumstances (D3.5, p.24-69, 77). For instance, 33% of migrant parents said that their children's education was a strong pull factor to Europe (UNHCR *et al*., 2019, p.3), but due to their living conditions, migrant children face barriers that disrupt their learning. In numerous European states, such as Portugal and Spain, migrants find themselves, whether by government allocations or economic pressures, in less-desirable neighbourhoods with poor public transit connectivity (Abkr *et al*., 2019, p.12).

Amid poor transit connectivity, the only schools located near the homes of migrant children tend to have limited enrolment spots and "comparatively lower academic standards and performance levels" (UNHCR *et al*., 2019, p. 9), forcing some migrant children to quit their schooling early. Schools frequented by migrant children, by nature of their low funding, also struggle with diversity-centred curricula and teachers, which worsens stereotyping and hinders their social integration into the fabric of society (UNHCR *et al*., 2019, p. 13). While there are other schools that are more hospitable to migrant children, they are located relatively far away from isolated migrant housing complexes - which themselves are in transit deserts without easy access to public transport networks (UNHCR *et al*., 2019, p. 13).

Isolated migrant housing complexes and sparse public transit connectivity also impact the accessibility of healthcare throughout Europe. Nearly 11% of asylum-seekers in Cyprus, 33% in Malta, and 23% in Romania cited transportation problems as the reason why they struggled with accessing healthcare in 2011 (Collantes *et al.*, 2011, p. 53-173). This trend continues to this day, with migrants in both Italy and Malta complaining of how alongside the lack of transit connectivity restricting access to education, it also creates "barriers […] to health services" (Abkr *et al*., 2019, p. 11; Lebano *et al.,* 2020, p.6). While the Dutch government makes concessions for migrants with health problems - providing them housing in locations where healthcare is more accessible - these residences are in areas where few Dutch families reside, amplifying ethno-spatial segregation and stifling migrants' inclusion into their host country (Abkr *et al*., 2019, p. 11).

Access to the job market is important for migrant integration as work is one of the main pull-factors to Europe for migrants (D3.5). Upon their arrival, however, migrants struggle with employment opportunities, as more than

Key Findings:

- *Living in less-desirable neighbourhoods with poor public transit connectivity leads to insecure access to education, healthcare, employment, political participation, and other social services.*

- *Most of the schools available to migrant children struggle with their academic performance levels and making diversity a focus of their curriculum.*

- *Poor public transit connectivity in migrant residential communities impacts access to healthcare and potential solutions come at the cost of ethno-spatial segregation.*

- *Despite the fact that some migrants come to Europe for economic mobility, they face challenges like unemployment and low wages, which in turn leads to lower quality housing and overburdening rents.*

45% non-EU migrants on average remain unemployed, whereas 39% of newcomers live in relative poverty (European Commission, 2022). Migrants report that insufficient income results in the poor provision of social services, which translates into lower quality housing and a rent overburden disproportionate to their wages (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 2021). The intersectionality of accommodation and work also manifests itself spatially, where housing in isolated neighbourhoods necessitates longer commutes - which, due to aforementioned challenges for migrant social mobility and transportation - severely limits employment opportunities in most urban sectors (Carta and Neidhardt, 2022, p.3). Furthermore, migrants view Europe as a haven for safety but are often forced into dangerous manual labour in agriculture and construction; these job fields are often inaccessible due to their spatial remoteness, causing newcomers to also seek unaffordable and insecure housing in physically-segregated areas of the country (D3.5).

> • *The isolated location of migrant homes also keeps most job opportunities inaccessible, and out of a desperation for income, migrants are forced to relocate to even more spatially remote areas to perform dangerous manual labour.*

Due to their housing circumstances, migrants also deal with numerous socio-political consequences, such as difficulties with expressing their political views. Many migrants who are eligible to vote in their host and home countries "consider not even casting their ballot" (Szulecki *et al.*, 2021, p.1002) because of the distance to the select few polling stations. Similarly, migrants endure spatial segregation - driven by economic inequality, the labour market, and government welfare allocations - that inhibits them from assimilating into their host countries, reduces their participation in labour, political, and educational systems, and impedes cross-ethnic communication and interaction that would lead to their greater social inclusion (Cretan, 2019, p.189).

> • *The spatial segregation and poor transport connectivity of migrant housing challenges their access to voting, as well as hinders their cross-ethnic interactions and furthers their exclusion from society.*

Another housing concern that migrants face is the high crime rates in their neighbourhood. First-line practitioners note that petty crimes, such as theft and robbery, necessitated by low incomes and inaccessibility to welfare, are common occurrences among deprived, spatially-segregated neighbourhoods (D3.5). In addition, newcomers also face xenophobic hate crimes which diminish their feelings of safety and their social integration into the host country (D3.5). Meanwhile, human trafficking, forced labour, and various forms of human rights exploitation creates modern-day slavery in impoverished neighbourhoods (D3.5). Segregation of these areas also leads to the ghettoization of migrants; for instance, since 2010, Denmark annually compiles a 'ghetto' list, which contains a compilation of migrant neighbourhoods deemed "irremediable urban disasters" (O'Sullivan, 2020) due to their high crime rates and lack of basic social institutions. As mentioned previously, forced eviction is legalised for neighbourhoods on the ghetto list, dehumanising migrants and further coercing them into privately-rented, lower-quality housing despite their low incomes.

> • *Migrants are also affected by high crime rates in their neighbourhood, primarily concerning theft and robbery driven by low incomes and inaccessibility to welfare. Migrants are also vulnerable to hate crimes, human trafficking, forced labour, and ghettoization.*

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• Recommendations

Recommendation 1: **The European Commission should institute new regulations that can ensure better enforcement and monitoring of living standards in public and private housing.** All Member States should be encouraged to implement public housing programs and require residences to contain basic amenities - such as safe water, heating and ventilation, washing facilities, sanitary accommodations, and fire safety - in new and existing buildings. **Living conditions can be improved in conjunction with the European Regional Development Fund, InvestEU, and other social development firms that finance urban regeneration** (Carta and Neidhardt, 2022, p.7).

Recommendation 2: **The European Commission should encourage the implementation of regulations, such as the Racial Equality and Employment Equality Directives, in all its member states.** It **should also improve access to the reporting of discrimination through the provision of anonymous reporting platforms**, where migrants could share their experiences regarding living conditions, access to social services and experiences with exploitation within the housing market.

Recommendation 3: The **European Commission should connect Erasmus+** - the EU's education revitalization fund - **with schools near migrant residences to improve their typically poor scholastic performance**. To streamline the integration of migrant children in their host societies, **educators teaching in these schools should attend diversity training** by governmental or non-governmental entities that provide services to migrants.

Recommendation 4: **European institutions should conduct feasibility studies to improve transit connectivity** in segregated neighbourhoods hosting significant migrant populations to **streamline their access to healthcare, employment, education, and other social services**. Further work on **infrastructure development can be done in conjunction with the aforementioned European Regional Development Fund and InvestEU**.

Recommendation 5: **European urban housing agencies should pursue options like voucher subsidies** to tackle the ethno-spatial residential segregation that inhibits migrants' inclusion into their host societies. Such options will allow migrants to relocate into higher opportunity neighbourhoods.

Key recommendations:

- *Improve monitoring of living standards for migrant communities with an effort to facilitate the provision of basic amenities through social investment funds.*

- *Implement anti-discrimination regulations in all EU Member States, as well as encourage migrant reporting of inadequate housing services.*

- *The academic performance of schools in migrant residential communities must be improved through Erasmus+, with additional focus on diversity training for educators.*

- *Improve transport connectivity and infrastructure in migrant neighbourhoods in order to ameliorate access to social services.*

- *Voucher subsidies should be considered to increase migrants' access to higher opportunity neighbourhoods, enhancing their inclusion into host societies.*

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