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# Housing entry pathways of refugees in Vienna, a city of social housing

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## ABSTRACT

This article presents the findings of an empirical study investigating refugees' difficult entry into Vienna's 'tight' housing market. Arguing that newcomers' access to housing can be better understood by a closer look at the actors involved in the housing search process, an actor-centred approach is used. Complementing the constructivist pathway framework with a model of search based on Bourdieu's theory of practice, four types of housing entry pathways could be identified. This study draws on semi-structured in-depth interviews with forced migrants who arrived in Austria in recent years. The analysis of newcomers' housing entry pathways not only sheds light on the coordination structures at work in a city of social housing, but also on 'good' and 'bad' rental housing submarkets that have emerged in the course of the recent refugee movement. The paper concludes that a high proportion of social housing does not provide any indication that newcomers are granted better access to secure affordable housing.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

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Urban refugees; housing pathways; housing access; social housing; Vienna; Austria

## Introduction

Although access to housing is the general focus of existing literature addressing immigrants' and, in particular, refugees' early housing careers (e.g. Flatau *et al.*, 2015; Francis & Hiebert, 2014; Murdie, 2008; Robinson *et al.*, 2007), little attention has been paid to the search process itself. Newcomers' search activities as well as the diverse actors involved in the process of finding housing have been of little concern to date. Using the example of refugees in Austria's capital Vienna, this paper aims to contribute to the study of refugees' housing pathways with a more detailed analysis of newcomers' search practices and a closer look at the diverse actors providing formal and informal support with finding housing. It is argued that the mechanisms of how newcomers access housing in different housing sectors can be better understood by a closer look at the practices and interactions underpinning the housing search process.

To investigate forced migrants' entry into a local housing market, a more nuanced pathway approach is used. Bringing together the constructivist pathway framework (Clapham 2002, 2005) with a concept of search based on Bourdieu's theory of practice, this article

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examines how the formation of newcomers' housing pathways is influenced by various intermediaries and forms of formal and informal support. To apply a Bourdieuan view to housing access (see also Boterman, 2011; Hochstenbach & Boterman, 2014) is not only to refrain from simplistic explanatory models (access to housing is often explained by accounts of housing demand and supply), but also to reject methodologies and analyses that begin with the assumption that preferences or ethnic networks are key in migrants' access to housing. In line with migration researchers arguing for thinking 'beyond the ethnic lens' (Raghuram *et al.*, 2010; Ryan, 2011; Schiller & Çağlar, 2013), this article seeks to consider the various forms of support newcomers receive from diverse people with finding housing.

Research on refugees' housing access is of particular relevance in cities characterized by a high inflow of asylum seekers and a significant shortage of affordable housing. This is particularly the case in Austria's capital, Vienna. Austria is among those European countries recording the highest numbers of asylum applications in the course of the recent refugee movement,<sup>1</sup> which has brought around four million asylum seekers mainly from Muslim-majority countries (such as Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan) to Europe between 2012 and 2016. Like other European cities, Vienna is of immense appeal for newcomers. Between 50 and 70 per cent of those who have been dispersed across national territory, move to Vienna after receipt of a positive asylum decision (Austrian Integration Report, 2016; *Der Standard*, 11 August 2016). Against this background, the question arises of how, i.e. with the help of which actors, networks and intermediary instances, do newcomers manage to solve their housing need.

To answer this question, fieldwork was conducted between 2016 and 2017 among successful asylum seekers (recognized refugees and people granted subsidiary protection) who arrived in Austria in the previous five years. On the basis of individual housing biographies and with a focus on significant actors providing help with housing, four types of housing entry pathways (ideal types in the sense of Max Weber) could be identified. Other studies using the concept of housing pathway – the term is also interchangeably used with 'housing career' or 'housing biography' – usually focus on and compare ethnic minority groups (e.g. Bolt & van Kempen, 2002; Murdie, 2002; Özüekren & van Kempen, 2002), but there are also comparative studies using immigrant status (type of visa) as a starting point (Murdie, 2008; Robinson *et al.*, 2007). By contrast, this Vienna study does not attach great importance to ethnicity, focuses only on one immigrant group – (successful) asylum seekers – and uses the pathway approach to gain a more nuanced view of the possible ways in which forced migrants access housing in different sectors of a local housing market.

As Vienna is renowned for its long tradition in socially oriented housing policy, beginning in the 1920s – also known as 'Red Vienna' (Eigner *et al.*, 1999; Marcuse, 1986) – as well as for its high share of social housing (45%), it might be assumed that newcomers are better off in a 'city of social housing'. This study queries this assumption and attempts to find out what coordination structures are at work and how refugees' access to permanent housing is actually organized and performed in Vienna.

## Theoretical framework

The question of how people find housing has a long tradition in housing market research (e.g. Brown & Moore, 1970; Clark, 1982; Maclennan, 1982). Search for housing is considered here as a goal-directed individual decision-making process. Standard models of housing

search following implicitly or explicitly neo-classical economics and rational action theory have not only been criticized for simplistic assumptions on human behaviour, but also for the excessive emphasis given to choice – a criticism that is particularly relevant for forced migrants entering a tight housing market. Also a constrained choices perspective, which has dominated analysis of the housing situation of ethnic minority groups over the last few decades, has been criticized for focusing on constraints on choice rather than on the choice process itself, and for ignoring the fact that apartment seekers are also creative agents who are able to develop strategies to overcome access barriers established by the dominant society (Clapham, 2002; Harrison & Phillips, 2003). Although the constructivist pathway approach (Clapham, 2002, 2005) was used to help overcome these concerns (e.g. Robinson *et al.*, 2007), the practices of search and the impact of diverse actors involved in the process of finding housing so far have received insufficient attention.

This study contributes to filling this research gap and applies, based on Bourdieu's theory of practice (1977, 1984, 1986, 1990, 2005), an actor-centred approach to the study of refugees' housing access. Rather than focusing on factors, which aggravate access to housing or limit choice in the search process, the emphasis here is on practices and actors, the relationships and interactions underpinning newcomers' search for housing. In this approach, apartment seekers are not considered as rational actors making conscious decisions but as agents following a 'practical sense' which, 'on the basis of experience acquired in practice, engages in [housing search] strategies that are "practical" in the dual sense of implicit – i.e. non-theoretical – and expedient – i.e. adapted to the exigencies and urgent pressures of action' (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 9). To apply a Bourdieuan view to housing access also means considering housing 'choices' the product of a dynamic interplay between two (structured and mutual structuring) structures: an individual's structure, referred to as *habitus* by Bourdieu – comprising embodied dispositions and the amount of different types of *capital* (economic, cultural, social, symbolic), i.e. resources at one's disposal and usable at a specific date and place; and the structure of a specific housing context (in Bourdieu's terminology *field*) with the constraints and possibilities in different market sectors (housing *sub-fields*) at a specific date.

As agents enter a specific housing field by practical action and interaction, the individual apartment-seeker or household in need of accommodation is not seen in isolation but always in relationship to others. The process of search may involve a number of actors (such as friends, relatives, real estate agents, solicitors, landlords, social workers and civil servants) who all may co-shape and direct people's housing outcomes and settlement paths. As pointed out in research stemming from network analysis (Ryan, 2011), success (or failure) in obtaining a scarce good (whether a job or a flat) may be better understood by focusing on the relationship between the actors, their relative social position and their available and realizable resources. In other words, the resources of both sides the apartment-seeker and the helpful others are to be taken into account. Furthermore, the dynamic character of newcomers' resources needs to be borne in mind. In contrast to traditional conceptualizations of search (e.g. Clark & Flowerdew, 1982), this model not only takes into account that others can take over search activity,<sup>2</sup> but also that wider social structures – through which opportunities are constrained or liberated, supported or undermined – can be located (if not all of them) in micro-level interactions.

To capture the dynamics of immigrants' housing experiences in the first few years after arrival, a constructivist pathway approach has already proved its worth (e.g. Robinson *et al.*,

2007). Although a housing pathway can simply be defined as ‘the sequence of dwellings that a household occupies during its history’ (Pickles & Davies, 1991), the constructivist pathways approach goes beyond a plain enumeration of housing situations (defined by tenure, location and physical characteristics of the dwelling). It seeks to capture ‘the continually changing set of relationships and interactions’ that an individual or household ‘experiences over time in its consumption of housing’ (Clapham, 2002, p. 64). As consumption of housing gets started with the search process, also the diverse interactions and relationships with people involved in finding housing as well as the practices of information acquisition, the use of diverse sources and channels (word of mouth, online real estate portals, social media etc.) are to be taken into account. In this sense, the focus on search constitutes a further development and refinement of the pathways framework. This refined analytical tool can be useful for housing studies in general. In this study, it will help us to discriminate between different housing entry pathways of (successful) asylum seekers, who are far more deserving of help than others. Housing assistance provided by different actors form the basis for the construction of path types presented in the main section.

### The Austrian asylum system

As refugees’ initial housing experiences are strongly shaped by state policies, an examination of newcomers’ early housing careers in Vienna first requires brief information about the Austrian asylum system. This is followed by a short description of the present structure of the Viennese housing system (adopting Bourdieu’s terminology henceforth also ‘housing field’).

Persons who have applied for asylum in Austria (only possible on national territory) are termed *asylum seekers*. Needy asylum seekers are entitled to *basic welfare support* (‘Grundversorgung’), a kind of second-class welfare assistance consisting of board and lodging, medical care, counselling and monthly ‘pocket money’ (40 Euros).<sup>3</sup> During the admissibility procedure, which serves to determine Austria’s responsibility for a given application (according to the Dublin II Regulation), asylum seekers are sheltered in an initial reception centre. Once people in need are admitted to the determination procedure, they are transferred from the reception centre to one of the nine federal states (*Bundesländer*, henceforth also *Länder*).<sup>4</sup> Following a no-choice dispersal policy, the majority are accommodated in mostly small-scale collective facilities, so-called *organized accommodation* (either run by the federal states, NGOs or private sector actors, the latter mostly owners of run-down pensions and inns). Alternatively, asylum seekers can also be accommodated privately (*individual accommodation*).<sup>5</sup> Vienna, capital and federal state at the same time, shows a comparatively high proportion of asylum seekers accommodated privately: 69% (2.723 of 3.980 asylum seekers) in 2008 (König & Rosenberger, 2010, p. 278) and about 50% (10.500 of 21.000 asylum seekers) in April 2016.

On successfully being granted protection according to the criteria of the 1951 UN Convention, asylum seekers are redefined as *recognized refugees*. As such they have the same rights as nationals (except the right to vote), have access to the labour market and are eligible for a means-tested minimum benefit (comprising health insurance and cash benefits, 837 Euros for a single-person in 2016).<sup>6</sup> They are also entitled to social housing, rent allowance and child benefit. After receipt of a positive asylum decision people are forced to leave state-sponsored organized accommodation within four months. This is the most critical and challenging moment, as they are prompted to find an apartment, to apply for

a job, to learn German and to meet bureaucratic obligations at the same time. Those who fail to meet the criteria of the UN Convention are required to leave the country or receive a temporary (but renewable) residence permit. If given subsidiary protection or protection on humanitarian reasons, people have access to state social benefits, but find themselves in a more disadvantaged position (Frey, 2011), e.g. they are not entitled to social housing. Vienna is one of the four *Länder* which provide people granted subsidiary protection higher financial support; like recognized refugees, they receive means-tested minimum income.

Austria, as a conservative welfare state (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Matznetter, 2002; Matznetter & Mundt, 2012) is characterized by a strong position held by the Church and a close cooperation between local governments and church relief organizations in terms of refugee welfare. The leading Catholic relief organization Caritas takes care of about a third of vulnerable persons eligible for basic welfare support in Austria. In Vienna, Caritas also serves as the first contact point for asylum seekers on behalf of the City of Vienna. Financed by the public social welfare office (Fonds Soziales Wien/FSW), the Caritas asylum centre is responsible for the processing of services for asylum seekers who are individually accommodated during basic welfare support, but also provides information and housing counselling for recognized refugees in their first four months after recognition.

### The structure of the Viennese housing field

In the ‘tenant-city’ Vienna (about 80% rented and 20% owner-occupied dwellings), newcomers are traditionally forced to seek an apartment in the *private rental sector*, which makes up 33% of all housing units (classified as main residence; Statistik Austria, 2016). Whereas people from former immigration flows – over the past half-century Austria looks back to the (desired) immigration of ‘guest workers’ from Turkey and the inflow of refugees from Yugoslavian civil wars – could find low-cost accommodation in Vienna’s desolate old housing stock relatively easily (Giffinger, 1998; Giffinger & Reeger, 1997; Kohlbacher & Reeger, 2006), the recent group of (undesired) forced migrants from non-European countries faces huge problems with finding affordable housing. There are several reasons for this stemming from structural changes to both the demand and supply side of Vienna’s housing market.

Not only population growth (from 2006 to 2016 the city’s population grew by 11%; current forecasts predict Vienna, presently 1.87 million inhabitants, to exceed the two million mark in 2022), also the rise of single-person households, flexible labour markets, stagnating and declining real incomes of broad levels of the population have boosted the demand for affordable rental housing. Although, in comparison to other West European cities, Vienna’s housing system has shown greater resistance against broader market liberalization trends, several market-promoting policy changes (investigated in detail by Kadi, 2015; see also Novy *et al.*, 2001) have contributed to make living and access to affordable housing for poor and low-income households more difficult than in the past. Between 2000 and 2010 rents of new contracts in the regulated private rental sector (units built before 1945, roughly two thirds of the private rental sector) rose by 66.8% (Trockner, 2012). New entrants of the lowest income group in 2014 and 2015 spent 42% of their income on rent costs in the private rental sector and paid about a third more than in the social housing sector (Trockner, 2017).

Vienna’s *social (public) housing*, with about 45% of all housing units (classified as main residence; Statistik Austria, 2016), is traditionally out of reach for needy newcomers – at least

in their first years after arrival. Although recognized refugees are entitled to social housing immediately after the receipt of a positive asylum decision (EU and non-EU nationals have to be in work and habitually resident for at least five years), they face barriers in both subfields of social housing: In the sub-segment of *council housing* (about 220.000 units) they have to fulfil, like all other groups entitled to social housing, *inter alia* the access requirement to have lived continuously for two years at a Viennese address. Moreover, a change in allocation policy in 2015 – the city government implemented a bonus system for long-term residents with the introduction of the Vienna housing-ticket (‘Wiener Wohn-Ticket’) – has worsened recognized refugees’ access to council housing.<sup>7</sup> In the sub-segment of *subsidized rental housing* (about 200.000 units), apartment seekers have to pay a down payment (consisting of a share of construction and land costs), which is a veritable barrier for poor households. Even if the City has acknowledged the problem and now provides further subsidized loans (‘Superförderung’) to decrease the down payment, a certain exclusion effect remains. Although a considerable share of non-profit units has been added to the social housing stock in recent years, the supply could not keep pace with the increasing demand. This is also mirrored in waiting lists getting longer and longer. At the beginning of 2016 about 29.000 persons were waiting for a council flat in Vienna (*Der Standard*, 14 July 2016); during the last five years, the number of applicants for non-profit units grew by 50% (Wurm, 2016).

It should be noted that besides the ‘regular’ social housing sector, which favours the middle-class and only marginally addresses the really poor and needy, a further subfield of social housing has emerged over the past few decades. This third field, also referred to as ‘very social housing sector’ (Lévy-Vroelant & Reinprecht, 2014), addresses those who cannot meet the access requirements of regular social housing. Dominated by actors from the field of social work, this sector is characterized by intensive local networking between key private organizations (above all the church-relief organizations Caritas and Diakonie) and public actors (Fonds Soziales Wien/FSW). An increasing number of organizations have become involved, many of them address particular target groups (such as homeless people, disabled people, single mothers and unaccompanied minor refugees). Located between emergency shelters and regular social housing, this segment consists of a stock of ‘social residences’, ‘social hostels’ and ‘integration-houses’ operated by private organizations (NGOs, charities etc.), but also dwellings from the private housing sector (e.g. derelict houses made available for interim use), hired and sublet to asylum seekers or recognized refugees by NGOs can be added to this stock. The sector is characterized by low housing standards, access control by housing commissions and, as temporary contracts are made, less security of tenure than in regular social housing. Just like in the field of regular social housing, demand currently outstrips supply.

## Research design and data collection

To find out how, and with the help of which actors, newcomers find accommodation under these unfavourable conditions in the Viennese housing field, detailed interviews with forced migrants were carried out. Interviewees should have lived between one and five years in Vienna, should have gone through the asylum procedures and successfully entered the local housing market. In the course of a research seminar held at Vienna University of Technology between October 2015 and June 2016, students of architecture were prepared for conducting

in-depth interviews. To get in touch with interview partners, some students visited events, meeting places and restaurants set up for or by migrants. Others recruited their interviewees with the help of friends, relatives or staff from relief organizations.

The study follows a retrospective research design, meaning that respondents were asked to report on their individual housing and housing search experiences in Austria in retrospect. Interviews lasted at least one hour and covered a number of themes, including arrival in Austria (where respondents spent their first night), housing experiences in federal reception centres and organized facilities, apartment-search after (or also during) basic welfare support, employment, social contacts and networks, respondents' former housing situation in their home country and their housing visions for the future. Not only detailed information of each housing situation (apartment size, occupancy, duration of occupancy, rental costs, lease period, location, type, tenure and physical characteristics of the dwelling), also information on landlords, intermediaries and searching activities was collected. The conversations (with one exception) took place in the respondents' current homes and were conducted in German and English as well as in Arabic or Dari (Persian language) – the latter was made possible by students with a migrant background who were able to talk with refugees in their mother tongue. A translator was involved in two out of a total of 25 interviews. Four outliers, who did not meet the specifications, were excluded from the sample (21). The semi-structured interviews were recorded, transcribed, made anonymous and, if conducted in Arabic or Dari, translated into German. The interview data were supplemented by socio-demographic information and visual data.<sup>8</sup> In some cases, subsequent interviews were conducted in 2017 by the author.

To facilitate the interpretation of data, refugees' housing pathways were represented graphically (such as Figures 1–4). Shades of grey in the timeline refer to different types of accommodation: Light grey indicates accommodation during basic welfare support (reception centre and organized accommodation); gradations from medium to dark grey refer to the degree of security in private dwellings. Intermediaries, landlords and significant events (such as eviction and family reunion) were also mapped. Graphics as well as illustrative quotations are attributed to numbered interviewees (e.g. 'IV19' for interview number 19). As the sample is small and also may be biased, this is an exploratory study and, thus, makes no claim to being representative in a quantitative statistical sense.

## The sample

The respondents of the sample (21) come from a wide range of non-European countries: Syria (8), Afghanistan (6), Pakistan (2), Somalia (2), Iraq (1), Chechnya (1), Armenia (1); the distribution corresponds generally to immigration statistics. Three quarters were entitled to asylum and one quarter have been granted subsidiary protection. With the exception of a Syrian family who came to Austria with the assistance of the UNHCR (in the course of a limited Humanitarian Admission Programme of the Austrian Government),<sup>9</sup> all asylum seekers arrived without government support. All respondents (including the Syrian family) applied for asylum after having crossed the Austrian borders. The sample comprises 14 men and 7 women. Three quarters of the men arrived alone; the women – with one exception – entered the country with family or within the legal framework of family reunion. Three quarters of respondents had no contacts in Austria before arrival. The majority



of respondents, 16 in number, were younger than thirty on arrival; three quarters of the younger group were men. The youngest participant was 18 years old, the eldest 53 years.

There are no official figures concerning the length of stay in Austrian federal facilities for initial reception, but looking at our sample, the average stay was 33 days, three days at the shortest and four months at the longest. All respondents were temporarily accommodated at first in Austria's largest reception centre Traiskirchen, approximately 20 km south of Vienna. After their stay in the reception centre, about two thirds had been transferred to the *Bundesländer* during basic welfare support and moved to Vienna after having received a positive decision; about one third resided in Vienna from the outset. On average, the respondents had to wait 1.6 years for their asylum decisions. With two days the Syrian resettlement family waited shortest, with five years in consequence of an objection against the first decision of asylum authorities an Armenian longest.

With respect to socio-economic status, 11 respondents had a university education (completed or unfinished), 7 persons had secondary school qualifications, one person had basic education and a woman from Afghanistan was illiterate. At the time of the interview, 10 respondents were unemployed and received needs-based minimum benefit, three persons were employed in the low-income sector (as a porter, as a caretaker in a refugee house and as a kindergarten teacher), three persons attended apprenticeship training and received a remuneration (about 500 Euro), five persons were in a school or university. As students in Austria are not eligible for needs-based minimum benefit, they made their living with occasional jobs or were reliant on family members receiving welfare support.

## Findings – a brief overview

With a view to the housing outcomes, the results of this study are alarming. After an average stay of 2.5 years in Austria, only about a quarter of the respondents have obtained secure housing conditions. Whereby 'secure' – here defined by tenancy of at least three years – does not mean decent: A five-person family from Syria, the only case of UNHCR-support and which was assigned more permanent accommodation immediately after two days in the reception centre, lived in a tiny 38 m<sup>2</sup> (409 ft<sup>2</sup>) starter apartment (3-year fix-term contract) provided by the Protestant relief organization Diakonie; a seven-person family from Somalia lived in a self-organized two-room apartment with 54 m<sup>2</sup> (581 ft<sup>2</sup>).

In view of the relatively high rental prices on the private rental market, sharing was used as a common strategy to secure housing. Eight of 12 persons who had found accommodation on the private rental market shared a flat with migrant companions at the time of the interview. Two respondents occupied a room in a flat-sharing community with Austrians (students and other young people). Four respondents were accommodated in the (very) social housing sector (two in council flats, two in temporary starter apartments rented out by NGOs). A further four participants stayed with a Viennese host family; one participant stayed transitionally with his brother's family. Except for two persons, all respondents lived in rental arrangements with a valid rental contract. The interviewed persons had on average 14 m<sup>2</sup> (150 ft<sup>2</sup>) of living space per capita at their disposal – this is less than a third of the space available for the Viennese non-migrant population (48 m<sup>2</sup>/517 ft<sup>2</sup>), and about half of the space (26 m<sup>2</sup>/280 ft<sup>2</sup>) available for immigrants having arrived since 1998 (Vienna Integration Monitor, 2014). None of the respondents has achieved a satisfactory housing situation. All persons, even the two respondents in 'secure' council housing, were in a mode of search.

Focussing now on the housing entry pathways of our sample, it should be noted that none of the respondents – not least due to the relative good public financial support – had experienced (primary) homelessness. No significant differences could be found between the early housing careers of recognized refugees and people granted subsidiary protection. Whereas Syrians in our sample showed relatively short stays in facilities during basic welfare support, other respondents who appealed against a negative first instance decision stand out for a long stay in organized accommodation.

Although the housing experiences and individual paths vary considerably, it is possible to identify some patterns and to distinguish different path types. The mediation work and assistance provided by different actors is used as the main criterion for the construction of the following types.

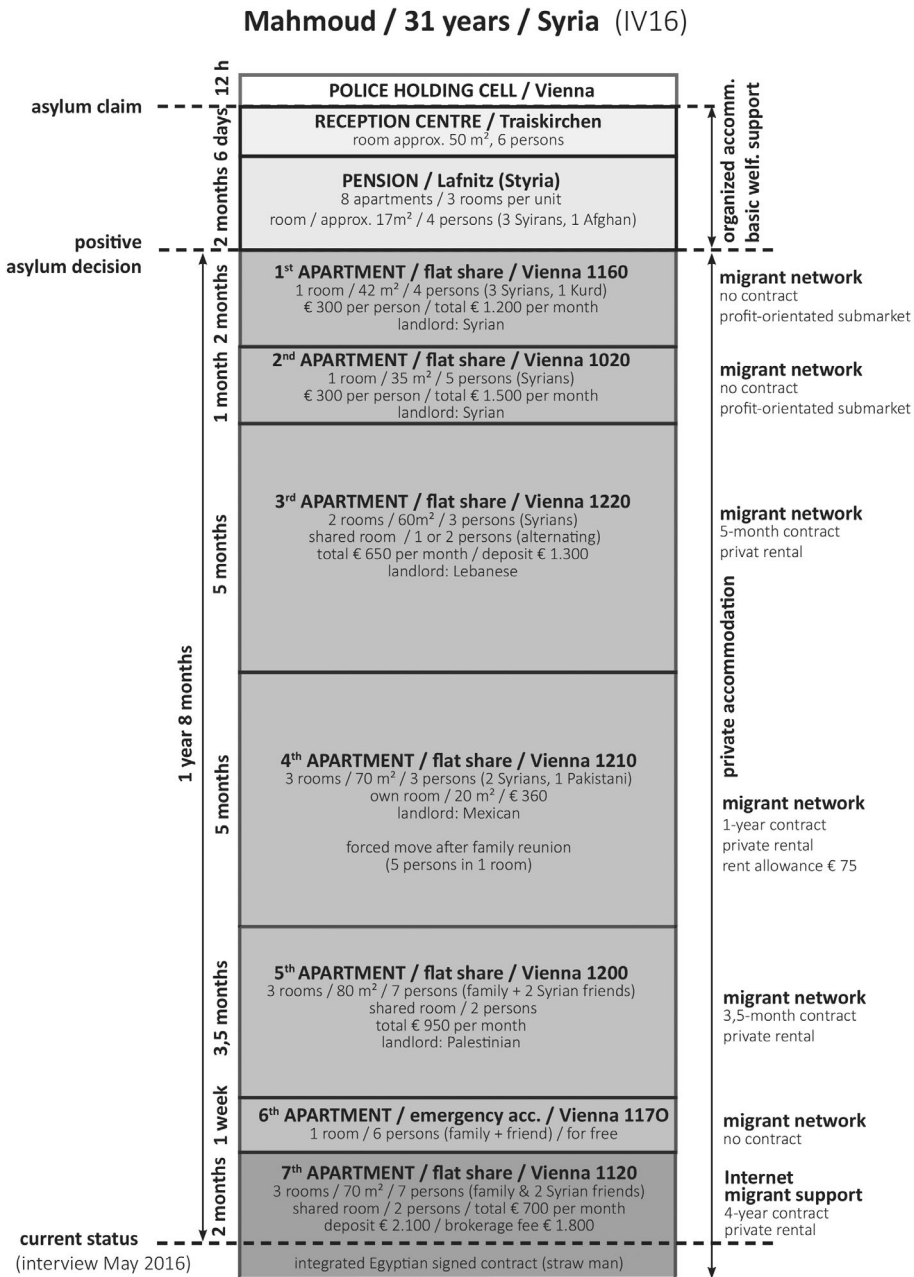
### **The migrant-assisted path – migrant networks and profit-driven informal rental submarket**

Some paths of young men stand out for their frequent moves and their reliance on other migrants acting both as informal intermediaries and landlords. This entry path can be referred to as *migrant-assisted pathway*. Mahmoud, a 31-year-old Syrian (Figure 1), is a representative of this path type. He moved seven times within a period of one year and nine months. Six of his seven private accommodations he found with the help of migrant friends. With his last apartment he resorted to an online-search, but involved an elder, already integrated migrant of Arabic descent as a straw man to sign the lease agreement. In all his rental arrangements, landlords had a migrant background; all his room and flatmates were forced migrants, almost all from his home country Syria. Like other single men who turned to their migrant network for assistance in finding housing, he first found a place to sleep in overcrowded flat shares rented out by migrant profiteers and then rented apartments together with countrymen. After insecure short-term accommodation and one week in a bridging flat, he found a secure three-room apartment for him and his subsequently immigrated family. Using the straw man, Mahmoud may have shown agency to overcome the access barriers on the ‘free’ housing market but, as he had to share the flat with four male family members and two further friends, his housing situation after almost two years had hardly improved. Like others who felt trapped in overcrowded flat shares, he suffered from a lack of privacy and dreamed the modest dream of having a private room to himself.

For most young men in our sample, relationships built during flight, the stay in the reception centre or in organized accommodation, as well as the contacts of these contacts, were crucial to finding a first place to sleep. Fellows may have been torn apart during the process of dispersal but those who had arrived first in Vienna became key contact persons. They not only helped newcomers to come to terms with Austrian bureaucracy, they first and foremost assisted in finding accommodation. At the best they were able to provide accommodation in their own flat share, otherwise they acted as intermediaries or provided knowledge on how to access relevant sources of information.

–How did you find accommodation?

Always through contacts, my friends helped me. No idea how they found the apartments, I never asked them, but probably they had contacts to other countrymen who sometimes have their own apartments, which they rent out. I always visited the apartment and moved in



**Figure 1.** Migrant-assisted entry path (based on an interview of Gehad Bondok).

immediately. I never complained, the only important thing for me was to have a roof over my head. (...) We only rented flats from Arab men. (Mahmoud, 31 y., Syria, IV16)

In some cases, information acquisition was limited to ‘ask friends’ (word-of-mouth communication), but thanks to the popularity of smartphones the use of social media networks was also common. Besides private networks on WhatsApp or Facebook, publicly accessible

group pages were also used, which brought together apartment seekers and private suppliers who were entirely unaware of each other's existence. As Facebook pages for accommodation exchange (of which some in Vienna have more than 30.000 members) mainly offer temporary accommodation (mostly rooms in flat shares) and were created to bypass fee-based agency services, they are very popular not only among students, but also among migrants. Because offers and pages can be created in migrants' mother tongues, social media networks have become a popular means for the coordination of affordable accommodation within migrant subcultures.

–How do new arrivals get this information?

There are a lot of pages and groups on Facebook. You search for example 'Syrians in Vienna' or 'flat share Vienna' and you will find a dozen or twenty. If you join these groups you will get postings. If a room is vacant private people will post this. You see a posting immediately on your smartphone and then you can send the link to your friends, on WhatsApp for example. But you can also find furniture and other useful information on some pages. (Nabil, 19 y., Syria, IV23)

The first private accommodations found with the help of migrant friends were, as a rule, overcrowded flat shares consisting exclusively of men. Here, respondents never rented a room, but only a bed. Some young men reported to have lived in two-room apartments shared by eight or nine persons; in tiny studio apartments up to five persons lived together. The stay in such overcrowded shared apartments was usually short-term and varied from 1 to 10 months. However, overcrowding in such initial flat shares was less the result of solidarity help but rather of profiteering. Landlords charged between 250 and 350 Euros for a place to sleep. Mahmoud's migrant-assisted path clearly illustrates this entry situation. His first two landlords, both originating from his home country Syria, charged 300 Euros per month for a bed. For a one-room flat in an old building (35 m<sup>2</sup>/378 ft<sup>2</sup>), occupied by five persons, the landlord pocketed 1.500 Euro, which is four times the current market price or about three times the rent for sublease permitted by law. Although respondents were well aware that profiteers had taken advantage of their plight, some expressed certain gratitude towards their landlords ('Finally he was good for us. If he didn't exist, I would have been homeless'); but others also felt ashamed of their countrymen.

I am ashamed but renting is a business. I know a Syrian who currently rents out twelve apartments and makes a lot of money with subletting. But there are also guys from other countries, most of them have lived in Vienna for years, some also own apartments. (Nabil, 19 y., Syria, IV23)

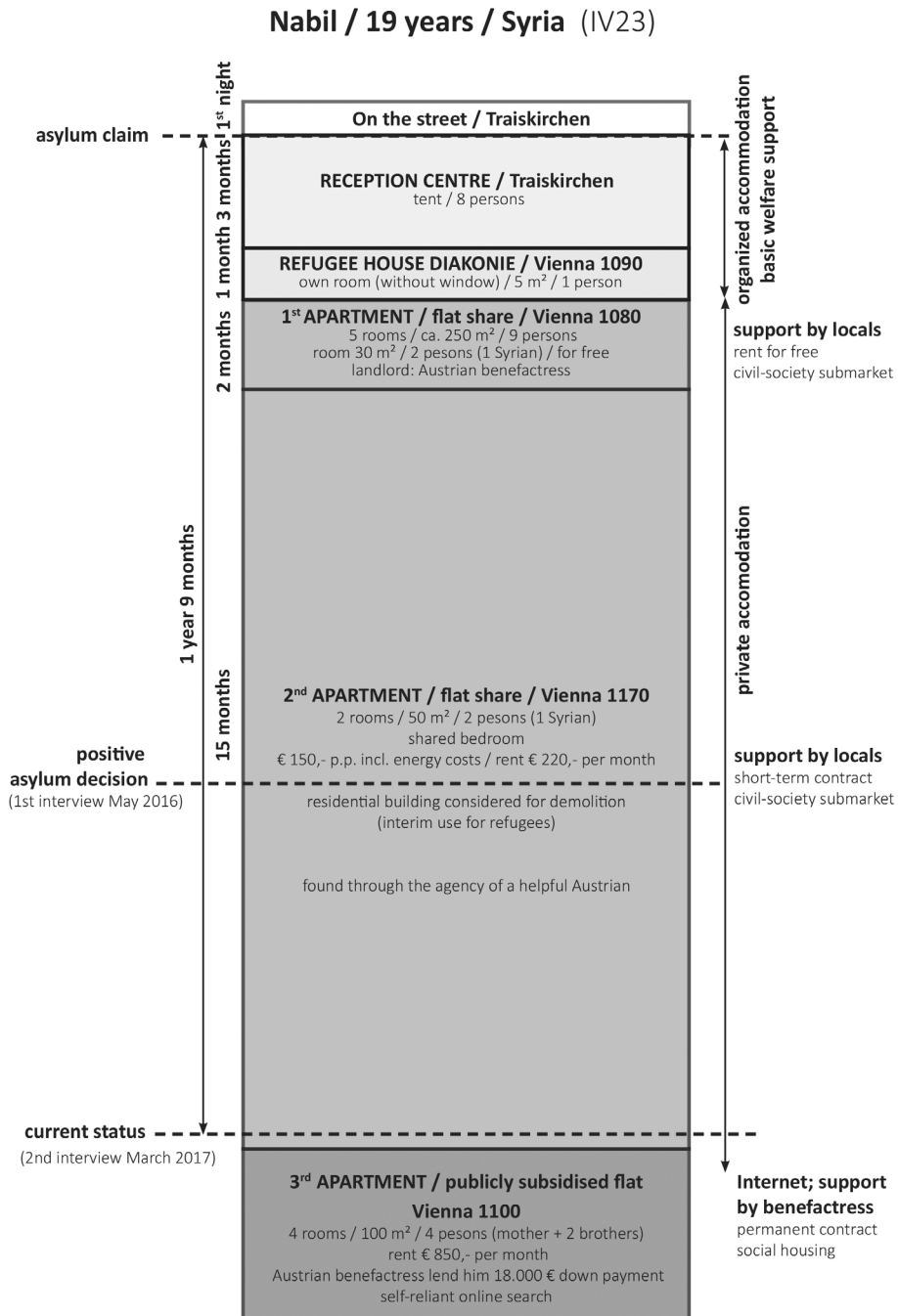
Our empirical data suggest that in Vienna a *profit-driven informal rental submarket* has emerged over the course of the recent refugee movement. In this sub-economy, already settled migrants make a living from subletting and act as landlords for countrymen and other new arrivals. They may provide some entry aid for newcomers, but this help is in no way selfless and, above all, accompanied by insecurity and lawlessness. As newcomers do not get a lease contract but just residence registration (necessary for the application for social benefits), they cannot exercise their rights as tenants and are, without knowing it, in constant danger of losing their accommodation. According to the Austrian Rent Act, unauthorized sublease, overcrowding and extortionate rent are reasons for termination and eviction. In three cases respondents lost their accommodation because owners fought illegal sublease and overcrowding.

Especially young single men with the least resources (little education, little or no German language skills, no contacts to helpful locals, no job) were heavily reliant on migrant profiteers. What for those with more resources was a transitional situation for the most deprived also became a permanent condition. With four years and without hope of improvement, an Iraqi found himself in overcrowded exploitative housing conditions for the longest. In such cases, where people got stuck in flat shares rented out by migrant profiteers, migrant networks have not proved to be a social capital (in a Bourdieuan sense). Ethnic-specific networks may have helped newcomers not to end up on the street, but they did not enable them to achieve improved living conditions and life chances.

### **The local-assisted path – help by local residents and civil society rental submarket**

More than a quarter of the respondents (6) reported having received help from locals with finding accommodation, most of them already during basic welfare support. This group benefited from home stay and vacancies provided from helpful locals for free or at low rental price. Nabil, a 20-year-old student coming from a formerly well-to-do Syrian family, benefited from support of diverse ‘Austrian friends’ and shows a typical *local-assisted pathway* (Figure 2). Like other asylum seekers who participated in some kind of volunteer work (mainly interpreting for new arrivals), he built up contacts early with Viennese who got actively engaged in refugee support. A socially engaged journalist, whom he had already met in the reception centre, not only found him a place in a centrally situated bourgeois 5-room apartment (250 m<sup>2</sup>/269 ft<sup>2</sup>) provided for free by an older wealthy lady. She also arranged an internship for him in the City’s building authority and a job in a restaurant. A professional caretaker from Caritas, also an acquaintance from the reception centre, then established the contact to a property owner who provided for him and his Syrian friend a cheap two-room apartment. As the end of his contract and the family reunion were close, he started looking on the Internet for decent permanent housing. He responded to an unusual advert on an online estate portal – a tenant in a dwelling of a non-profit building company was looking for a tenant to take over his subsidized flat. In the meantime, well informed about the local social housing system, Nabil saw this offer as an extraordinary opportunity and asked the wealthy lady who provided the first private accommodation to lend him the down payment of 18.000 Euros. Thanks to the generous help from this benefactor, the signing of the contract was just around the corner. Nabil’s path may be extraordinary as he was the only person with a prospect to access the non-profit housing sector, but his case also shows what at best is possible if newcomers build relationships with residents who have resources at their disposal (unused living space, contacts, knowledge, money) which they are willing to share.

Contacts and relationships between locals and forced migrants usually developed in a field of professional as well as voluntary welfare work. In three cases contacts were also established via civil society associations and help-networks (Connecting People, Interface, Lobby.16). Like Nabil also Aroud, a 23-year-old Syrian, was addressed in the reception centre by a volunteering journalist who arranged contact to a befriended colleague willing to host asylum seekers. Without having shown search activity, he was picked up by the 56-year-old lady from a collective facility near the Slovakian border. She hosted him in her spacious 5-room apartment located in the centre of Vienna.



**Figure 2.** Local-assisted entry path (based on an interview of Julian Edelmaier and an interview by the author).

She owns the apartment and I rented a room. Actually, it was not a rent, I had a written contract that I'm paying 120 Euros but actually I only paid one Euro a day. That was so generous. I had my own room! It was the room of her son who moved out. It was really nice, finally privacy! I had no rest since I left Syria; I was always under stress. I cooked many times for her and she loved Syrian food. (...) After a while the lady gave me the hint that it's time to move out. So I started looking for something on the Internet, a room or a flat, but a flat is a dream. (...) The room in this flat share I found with the help of David, the guy who bought me the clothes when I was in Traiskirchen. I was looking and he was looking also for me. One day he texted me on WhatsApp: 'Hey look, there's something!' He sent me the address and said that I have an appointment next day. (Aroud, 23 y., Syria, IV14)

The willingness to host needy newcomers is undoubtedly a phenomenon related to class and social position: In three cases educated middle-aged single women, disposing over the resource of unused space (partly after children have moved out), hosted one or two younger persons in their private home; in two cases well-to-do families, both possessing a spacious house in a noble district of Vienna, opened their doors to asylum seekers. If 'Austrian friends' did not act as hosts, they activated their social networks and arranged accommodation in apartments rented out by friends or acquaintances. The stay in such initial private accommodation was usually short-term, rarely longer than one year. Compared with accommodation provided from migrant profiteers, economic interests hardly played a role. Occasionally the rooms were free of charge, otherwise the rent ranged between 30 and 200 Euros per room and month. Also the quality of housing was better: newcomers usually had their own room or even a separate residential unit in a private house.

It seems obvious to consider the local-assisted pathway as a merit of Austrians' civil society engagement. But the making of inter-ethnic relationships is also thanks to the agency of newcomers. Especially respondents with higher formal education and English language skills showed a pronounced willingness to contact locals ('I try to have less contact with Arabic people and more with Austrians, so I can improve my German'). In the context of volunteer work young men like Nabil were able to use their (otherwise worthless) language skills. This commitment in turn created social recognition and another valuable resource: contacts with helpful locals. Following Granovetter (1973) and Bourdieu (1986), social ties 'pay off' the most when they bridge social distance and grant access to those who have more resources and knowledge. Looking at our respondents, those who have made contacts or even made friends with locals not only showed better and cheaper initial accommodation, but also received support with learning German, finding permanent housing and accessing the job market. In such cases, where locals helped newcomers to secure advantages and overcome access barriers on the housing market, contacts can be considered a 'social capital' in a Bourdieuian sense (Anthias, 2007).

Framed as an attribute of collectives (Coleman, 1988; Blokland & Savage, 2008; Putnam, 2000) 'social capital' can also be identified in the numerous civil society associations and help-networks, many of which popped up in the course of the great influx of asylum seekers in 2015. Not only NGOs (such as Austrian Red Cross with IWORA/Integrationswohnraum, Volkshilfe with Wohndrehscheibe and the Diakonie refugee service), also civil society help-networks (such as Respekt.net, Helfen.WIE WIR, Flüchtlinge Willkommen, menschen.leben and heimatsuche.at) act as commission-free intermediary agencies aiming at bringing together forced migrants with social landlords. Grown out of the idea to bypass and overcome newcomers' access barriers on the 'free' market, also online search portals (such as heimatsuche.at) and Facebook pages were created which expressly welcome

recognized refugees as tenants. Seen together, these help-networks created a further rental submarket. As the market principle of profit maximization is suspended, this *civil society rental submarket* can be seen as a non-profit market. Following the logic of cooperativeness and solidarity, flats are provided free of charge or at a reasonable rent. Compared with the profit-orientated informal rental submarket, tenants enjoy enhanced security as lease or prekarium<sup>10</sup> contracts are concluded. However, as supply is far from meeting demand, this 'good' submarket can mitigate newcomers' housing problems only to some degree.

### **The non-assisted path – estate agents and entry barriers on the 'free' private rental market**

Newcomers without advantageous formal and informal support were forced to search alone on the private rental market. Taking the weakest position in the struggle over the scarce good 'affordable housing', they experienced the full programme of repeated refusal and discrimination in their interactions with estate agents and private landlords and frequently became victims of exploitation. A representative of this *non-assisted pathway* is Narek (Figure 3), a 53-year-old Armenian. As he had more problems to persuade asylum authorities that life and limb was threatened in his home country and appealed against a negative first instance decision, his path with 5 years in diverse Caritas refugee houses also stands out for an extremely long stay in organized accommodation. Although he would have met requirements to apply for a council flat, Caritas caretakers advised him to look for an apartment on the Internet. His sole friend Ibrahim, another migrant loner with few resources, may have provided emotional support, but actually could not help him to overcome access barriers. After numerous unsuccessful calls and flat viewings, ('It was so difficult. Nobody helped me') Narek could finally sign the rent agreement for a tiny studio apartment – not least because he was able to negotiate in German and could present regular income with his job as a porter in a Caritas refugee home. As he was unhappy with the dwelling's location and also planned to apply for family reunification, he was looking for a larger apartment in a district near to his friend.

Respondents in general tried to avoid agency services in order to save commission. But in the absence of alternatives, when NGOs could not help, transitional private accommodation provided by countrymen or host families were no longer available or acceptable (e.g. in the course of family reunion), the use of formal intermediaries, online-search on real estate search portals (such as willhaben.at and immodirekt.at) and interaction with agents was inevitable. Already the first contacts, usually telephone calls, turned out to be a shattering experience. Some agents already deemed poor German skills a sufficient reason to refuse a viewing appointment. But in most cases unemployment or, still better, non-recognition of transfer payments as income was decisive for refusal.

I was searching every day and called the agents, but they told me: 'No, if you can't speak German, you can't take this apartment', the second said: 'No, if you don't have a job here in Austria, you can't take it', the third said: 'Yes, but you must pay 5.000 Euro deposit if you take this apartment'. (Ali, 24 y., Syria, IV2)

I searched much in the Internet and visited a lot of apartments. But the result was always 'No'. Some agents did not even call me back. I called again and again, but there was no response. They didn't consider it necessary to give a reason for cancellation. (Narek, 53 y., Armenia, IV24)



### Narek / 53 years / Armenia (IV24)

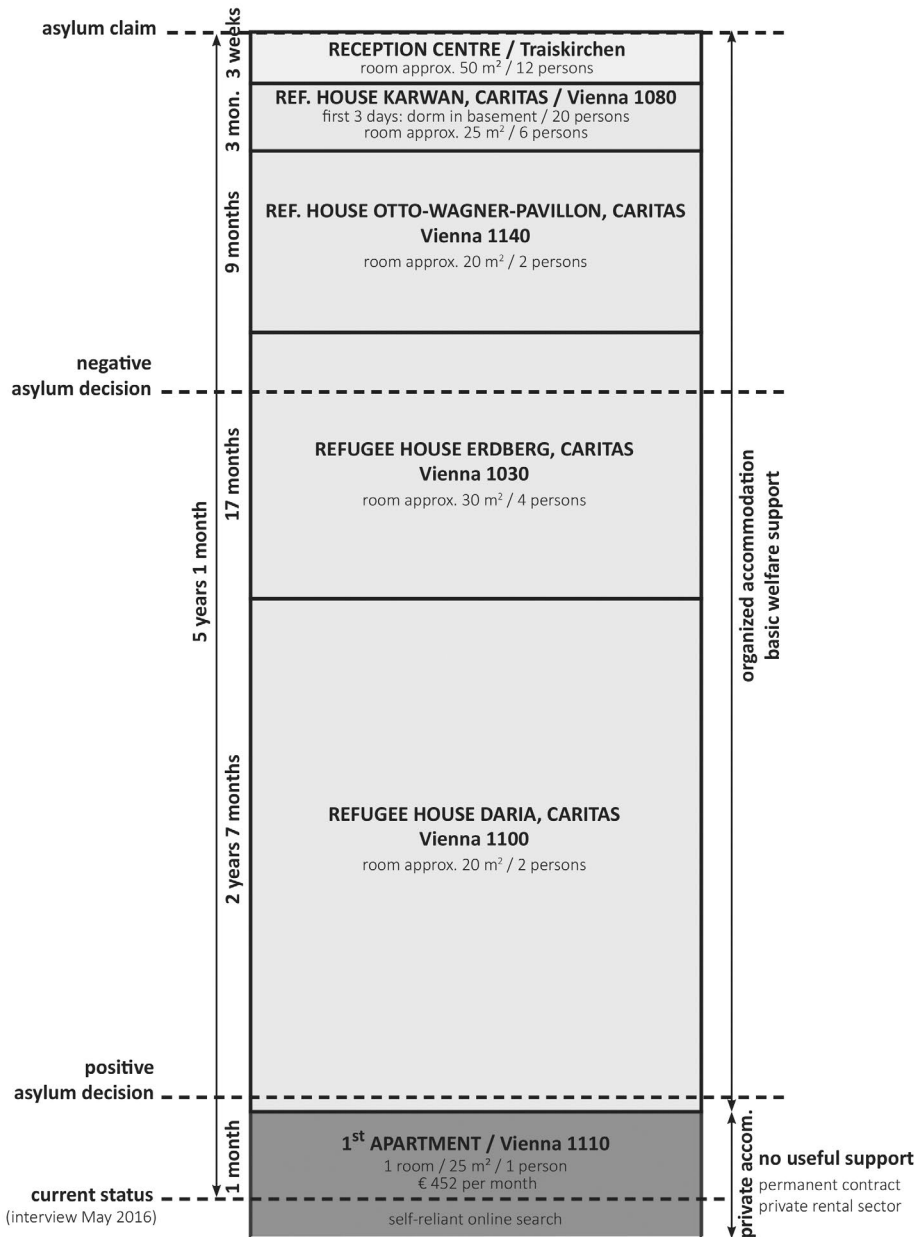


Figure 3. Non-assisted entry path (based on an interview of Monika Furtner).

The first thing they ask for is a proof of your income for the last three months at least, and also, when they see that you are black, they will not help you. (...) It's terrible. If you try to find an apartment on the Internet, for example, and if you find somebody who wants to rent you his apartment – when they see you, they will not give you their apartment. (Siad, 37 y., Somalia, IV13)

In addition to discrimination on the basis of language, colour and origin, apartment seekers also faced financial barriers. In particular, the additional costs arising with the conclusion of a tenancy proved to be a hurdle. In the light of high demand private landlords not only have adopted a strategy to secure rental incomes and require applicants to provide proof of income and evidence of employment or request a guarantor (until recently unusual practices in Austria). To exclude financially weak households and to target only solvent tenants, they also (legally) demand deposits up to six months' rent. Furthermore, it is common practice in Austria that agents charge their commission fee from the tenant (not from the landlord): a two months' rent for an unlimited contract or a fix-term contract for a period of more than three years, a month's rent in the case of a fix-term contract up to three years. Taken together, the accompanying costs for signing a lease are considerable – to rent a modest flat for 750 Euros per month can amount up to 6.000 Euros. Although solidary help among newcomers (mutual support with raising money for deposit and commission) in two cases helped to overcome this hurdle, the extra costs for most respondents were unbearable, particularly right after basic welfare support.

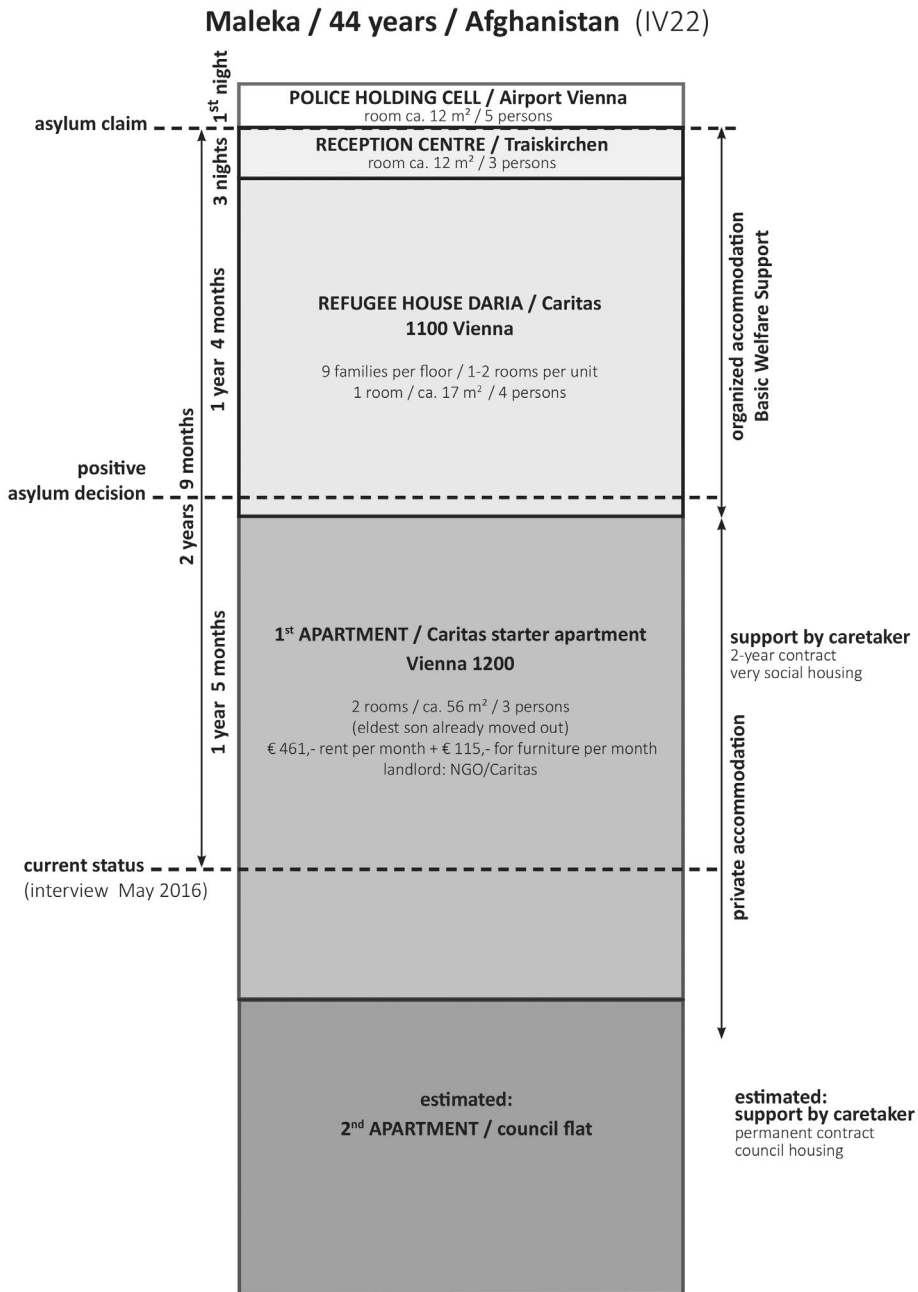
Respondents also reported to have experienced negative attitudes towards migrants in rent advertisements on real estate search portals. With rejecting statements like 'No pets, no refugees' or 'No asylum seekers or the like!',<sup>11</sup> private landlords openly expressed their resentments against new immigrants. In this regard, respondents experienced the online real estate market not simply as a place of vacancies but also as a place of rejection and xenophobia. What in telephone calls and viewing appointments remained unspoken out of politeness, was manifested here with harmful directness.

I looked only on the Internet, on 'Willhaben'. (...) At that time I really hated being a refugee. I saw something, so I called the guy and we talked about the apartment. When he found out that I am a refugee and I come from Syria he cancelled the appointment. I even saw advertisements where it was written: 'Please no welfare recipients' or 'no refugees'. But I kept looking and even wrote emails in German [laughs], I could do it somehow. Because if you write in English your chances will be less because they will know that you are not from here, they will be afraid, I don't know why. (Aroud, 23 y., Syria, IV14)

Their inferior position on the private rental housing market not only forced newcomers to accept excessive rents but also made them feel gratitude towards everybody willing to conclude a contract. In two cases for flats located in less desirable neighbourhoods (in Vienna's 11th and 16th district) the double of the current average market price was paid. Nevertheless, the two tenants (one of them Narek) experienced this bad deal as good fortune; a profit-driven landlord was even considered as a 'social person' who 'wanted to help'. But a more severe problem seems to be that both tenants did not know that their flats are subject to rent control and that they can apply for a legal review of their rent agreements by municipal authorities free of charge. Due to a lack of knowledge about tenant protection, respondents were not able to defend themselves against excessive rent or loss of deposit.

### **The welfare path – professional caretakers and allocation of social housing**

In contrast to single men, families and single mothers in our sample got more formal help. All respondents with small and school-age children received assistance from professional caretakers and showed a *welfare pathway*. This entry path is characterized by a more or less direct transition from an NGO-assisted living facility to the social housing sector.



**Figure 4.** Welfare entry path (based on an interview of Kiana Sardari-Iravani and an interview of the author with the interviewee’s personal caretaker).

Maleka for example (Figure 4), an illiterate single mother from Afghanistan, lived one year and four months in a Caritas refugee house and moved after receipt of her positive asylum decision into a two-room starter apartment. As she did not possess the resources required for a self-reliant search on the ‘free’ market, her personal caretaker organized one

of the few starter apartments owned by Caritas for her. Because the contract was limited to two years, the 44-year-old mother of three sons was afraid of the near end of the lease ('I don't want to move. After eight years of flight I only want to have peace'). She did not know, however, that this temporary accommodation (under the present circumstances) constitutes an indispensable necessity on the road to social housing. NGOs are currently forced to accommodate their most vulnerable clients who do not meet access requirements for social housing (main residence of two years at one address) in temporary homes for a period of at least two years. As Maleka will fulfil the requirements after this transitional solution, she has (according to her caretaker) good prospects to be allocated a council flat.

In contrast to Maleka, whose welfare path shows a detour via the 'very social housing' sector, two further cases – a further single mother from Pakistan with two children, and a four-person family from Iraq – were able to move directly from a refugee house to secure council housing. Both cases were processed within 'social allocation' ('soziale Wohnungsvergabe'), a procedure where caretakers make an application for their clients and only council flats of the lowest category (usually refused by other applicants) are assigned. In contrast to the centrally organized 'regular' procedure (performed by Wiener Wohnen), which is an elaborate process involving years of waiting, this procedure, reserved for emergencies, allows a faster access to (a very limited number of) council flats. The key actors in this shortcut allocation procedure are professional caretakers. They possess intimate knowledge about the social housing system and its accessibility rules, work in admission commissions and have a professional help-network including *inter alia* persons from the public housing administration. Where social workers took over search activities and paperwork, respondents perceived the process of allocation as an effortless undertaking. Poor living conditions, however, also quickly spoiled their joy about having achieved secure housing.

We had luck with housing search. My personal carer asked me in which district we want to live. I told her that I like the third district. After three weeks we had an apartment in the third district (laughs). All worked out very easily. We only had to sign the contract and to move. I am very grateful to her. But the two-room apartment is too small for us four, and after renovation of the building it has become increasingly expensive. The base rent is now 578 Euros for 54 m<sup>2</sup>. We want to move but we cannot afford a larger apartment at the moment. (Lya, 38 y., Iraq, IV8)

On the road to social housing, social workers act as 'door openers' – but at the same time they are 'gatekeepers'. In view of the current shortage of social housing, housing commissions have to assess the needs of recognized refugees against a series of priority need categories. In this evaluation process, single people seem to be treated less favourably than families. While single mothers and parents of small or school-age children in our sample were channelled in a secure social housing path, single persons like Narek (Figure 4) were guided towards the private rental market. For those who were thrown on their own resources for finding housing on the 'free' market, only housing counselling was provided. Respondents who used the Caritas counselling service, however, did not perceive it as being a great deal of help – not least because they expected the allocation of an apartment.

They tell you 'OK we will print one paper and you will search alone'. On this paper there are five or ten real estate websites, but you can't understand any word of this page. This is no real help, absolutely nothing. (Ali, 24 y., Syria, IV2)

It is worth noting, that no single respondent reported to have made use of the counselling services provided by the Municipal Housing Authority ('Wiener Wohnen'). This striking disengagement from formal procedures to access (regular) social housing not only bears

witness to ‘self-exclusion’ stemming from a lack of knowledge about the social housing system and how access to its different subfields is organized in practice. Some respondents who were aware of social housing also refrained from applying for a council flat because they did not want to wait for years and, due to frequent moves, could not fulfil the access requirement to have lived continuously for two years at a Viennese address.

## Conclusions and discussion

This paper started out from the question of how, with the help of which actors, networks and intermediaries, do recently arrived refugees from non-European countries meet the challenge to find permanent housing in the increasingly constrained housing context of Vienna. Arguing that the mechanisms providing access to the scarce good affordable housing can be better understood by a closer look on the practices and interactions underpinning the housing search process, an actor-centred approach was used. Complementing the constructivist pathway framework with a Bourdieuan view on search and housing access, this paper demonstrates that also non-financial resources, mainly social contacts and cultural capital (language skills, educational background, the ability to construct and maintain advantageous relationships) play an important role in newcomers’ access to housing. It could be shown that not only the disposability of various forms of capital lead to different search strategies, resulting in access to different housing subfields, with different levels of security. Also, different intermediaries and supporters have a marked influence on the formation of newcomers’ housing entry paths. On the basis of individual housing biographies, four types of housing entry paths could be identified (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Housing entry pathways and their specific characteristics.

Housing path	Intermediaries	Housing subfield	Security	Resources/capital
<i>Migrant-assisted</i>	Migrants	Private rental, informal migrant sub-market	Low	Contacts to countrymen
<i>Local-assisted</i>	Helpful locals	Private rental, civil society sub-market	Medium	Contacts to locals, language skills
<i>Non-assisted</i>	Estate agents	Private rental	Medium	Employment, savings, language skills
<i>Welfare</i>	Social workers	Social housing, ‘very social housing’	High	Having children, good relationship to personal caretakers

Contrary to the widespread assumption that newcomers quite naturally receive selfless help within migrant networks, the migrant-assisted path points towards the limitations of migrant support. This is partly due to the fact that first arrivals from new regions of origin cannot draw on well-established communities in Vienna. Not surprisingly, help from kith and kin was found to be insignificant. Networks made up of migrants with similar low resources were also found to be of little value for gaining access to secure permanent housing. This confirms the view of others (e.g. Murdie, 2008) that reliance on migrant friends is not necessarily a viable long-term strategy for acquiring good-quality permanent rental housing. Without downplaying solidary forms of migrant help (such as mutual support with raising money for deposit; acting as a straw man when signing a lease contract), migrant support was also revealed to have taken the form of selfish profit-driven assistance and has created a ‘bad’ informal rental submarket in Vienna, coupled with insecurity, overcrowding and exploitation. The finding that migrants are exploited within immigrant subculture

supports the view that ethnic-specific contacts do not necessarily constitute a social capital for newcomers (Anthias, 2007; Cederberg, 2012; Ryan, 2011).

Whereas the non-assisted pathway confirms the findings of numerous studies reporting on the hardships and hurdles that newcomers face when searching on the private rental market (financial and language barriers, discrimination, xenophobia), the local-assisted pathway points towards a remarkable difference to existing studies and, thus, is likely to trigger more discussion. In existing literature addressing refugees' housing experiences, local citizens hardly receive mention, and if, then mainly in the negative context of discrimination, racial harassment and neighbourhood conflicts. Individual cases of support might occasionally be reported, e.g. solicitors who facilitate newcomers' engagement with key institutions of a housing system (Robinson *et al.*, 2007), but citizens' readiness to help does not seem to play a significant role. By contrast, this Vienna study presents solid evidence for notable informal help with housing provided by the majority population. As voluntary support from locals in Vienna has resulted in the formation of well-organized help-networks and online-platforms for housing mediation, a 'good' civil-society rental submarket could be identified. Since it cannot be assumed that civil-society help only exists in Vienna, the question arises whether in existing studies data on voluntary help from local population was not collected or whether helpful residents were subsumed under the support-category 'friends'. This ambiguity calls for further systematic research into whether and to what extent informal support by citizens and NGOs is provided.

It might be assumed that in a city of social housing (where almost half of the population lives in council and subsidized rental housing) forced migrants not only receive formal state support with initial accommodation during basic welfare support, but also with allocation of permanent housing once they have received their asylum status. This study, however, indicates the opposite. Recognized refugees may be entitled to apply for allocation of social housing, but in practice – due to strict access requirements, frequent moves, lack of knowledge and waiting time – they are widely excluded from social housing, at least in the first years after arrival. Only a few people with children showed a welfare path, where caretakers took over paperwork and acted as door-openers for council flats within a shortcut ('social allocation') procedure. Although it may be difficult to compare Austria with liberal welfare states with a long tradition in refugee resettlement such as Britain, Canada and Australia – *inter alia* because the latter have developed different schemes of support for different groups of humanitarian entrants<sup>12</sup> –, liberal welfare states appear to have a more newcomer-friendly access regime in the field of social housing. This is particularly true for Britain where refugee welfare (provided by the National Asylum Support Service/NASS) includes formal support with finding secure long-term housing. Robinson *et al.* (2007), who mapped in their Sheffield-study the housing trajectories of four different immigrant groups, found that almost all Liberians in their sample who had arrived with government support were allocated permanent accommodation in council housing within two months; also, the majority of asylum seekers from Liberia (who had applied for asylum on national territory) found long-term housing in social housing, albeit after an average of 13 months. The proportion of social housing may be smaller or even marginal (in Canada and Australia below 5%), but liberal welfare states prioritize social housing to those who are most vulnerable and in greatest housing need. By contrast, Vienna's well-developed system of social housing favours the middle-class, employed persons and locals, while destitute migrants and other groups at risk of poverty are being disadvantaged.

Issues of affordability and homelessness may be more pressing in cities where mainly the ‘invisible hand of the market’ reigns (such as Toronto and Vancouver; Francis & Hiebert, 2014; Murdie, 2008), but this study shows that under the conditions of housing shortage in all subfields of affordable housing forced migrants are hardly better off in a city of social housing. Here, too, newcomers experience tremendous difficulties with accessing secure, affordable and adequate housing, are forced to move frequently and mostly live in inferior and cramped housing conditions. Nevertheless, some particularities have been revealed that can be considered as characteristic of a conservative welfare regime: the dominant position of the Church in refugee welfare; newcomer-unfriendly access regime in public housing (also known as ‘welfare-chauvinism’); pro-family (familialist) bias in housing provision; solidarity and help beyond the state and the market. Even though civil-society help can be seen as a positive element facilitating newcomers’ housing integration, the lack of formal state support with finding permanent housing can be identified as the weak point of Austria’s refugee welfare system.

In conclusion, the analysis of newcomers’ housing pathways in Vienna shows that neither the market nor hierarchy/state bureaucracy (understood as models of coordination; Thompson *et al.*, 1991) have ensured access to housing. Instead, networks in various forms and at various levels – ranging from inter-ethnic friendship networks, social media networks, civil-society help-networks, professional networks of caretakers to networks between NGOs and authorities – have enabled newcomers’ transition from initial organized accommodation to (temporary or permanent) private accommodation. Both submarkets which have emerged under the current conditions of insufficient supply, the ‘bad’ informal profit-orientated submarket and the ‘good’ de-commodified civil-society submarket, have created their own network-based coordination structures separate from the ‘free’ market and its intermediary agencies. Both fill a void left by the market and the state.

## Notes

1. The number of first time asylum applicants in Austria more than doubled in 2015 from last year’s level to 88.098 (Asylum statistics 2015, Austrian Ministry of the Interior), that is 10 asylum seekers per 1000 of population – significantly more than in Germany with 5,4 or in the UK with 0,6 (Eurostat press release 44/2016, 4 March 2016). The recognition rates are significantly lower: Austria in 2015 showed a rate of 71% positive first instance decisions; for comparison, Germany 57%, UK 37% (Eurostat press release 75/2016 20 April 2016).
2. Stressing that others can take over the task of finding housing, the objection could be raised that some forms of allocation contradict the notion of ‘search’. This is particularly true for forced migrants being at the mercy of bureaucratic regimes governing the allocation of (temporary or permanent) housing. But a lack of agency (for whatever reasons) should not conceal the fact that most people in housing need are objectively involved in a process of search. As there are search activities (such as recreational online search or ‘property porn’; Botterill, 2013), which, although they do not aim at finding housing, are conceptualized as search, also situations where others take over search activities can be considered as search.
3. The support of vulnerable newcomers is regulated in the Basic Welfare Support Act (Grundversorgungsgesetz GVG-B 2005). The dispersal of asylum seekers over the territory and the financing is regulated in the Basic Welfare Support Agreement (Grundversorgungsvereinbarung GVV Artikel 15a B-VG). A critical analysis of the adoption and implementation of minimum reception standards, laid down in the EU Directive 2003/9/EC, was presented by Rosenberger & König (2012).

4. Until July 2015 asylum seekers were obliged to present themselves, respectively, assigned to one of the two federal centres for initial reception (Traiskirchen or Thalham); since then the admission procedure takes place in seven federal distribution centres ('Verteilerquartiere').
5. Welfare benefits depend on the type of accommodation and the provisions of the specific laws of the *Länder*. In Vienna, the financial support for organized accommodation amounted to 570 Euros per person and month in 2016 (19 Euros per day for the facility operator if full board is provided; in the case of self-catering asylum seekers get 5 Euro thereof). For individual accommodation significantly less money is provided, a single person received only 320 Euro (120 Euro rent subsidy and 200 Euro meal allowance) in 2016.
6. In Vienna support for couples amounts to 628 Euros per person, 419 Euros for adult children, 226 Euros for minor children; see website of the City of Vienna: <https://www.wien.gv.at/gesundheit/leistungen/mindestsicherung/mindeststandards.html> [15 June 2017].
7. The new allocation system allows applicants to move forward in the waiting list for three months per five years of residence in Vienna (up to nine months for a maximum period of 15 years). This change, which in public discourse is termed as 'home advantage for Viennese', can be seen as a soft version of welfare chauvinism, i.e. a politics, which wishes to reserve welfare-state services for locals and those who have paid into the national social insurance system for a certain period of time. As in the first year after introduction, 69% of the applicants have received the maximum bonus of nine months (*Der Standard*, 14 July 2016), structural disadvantage for recognized refugees can be assumed.
8. The collected visual data include photographs of respondents' present homes and city maps showing interviewees' residential stations and whereabouts in Vienna.
9. According to statistics published by the Ministry of the Interior 388 resettlement refugees were admitted in 2014 and 758 in 2015 – that corresponds to about one per cent of the total of asylum claims in Austria. As application for international protection in Austria can only be made on national territory, government assisted refugees also have to visit the reception centre but are not transferred to organized accommodation. Having received asylum status within a few days, they are directly accommodated in the sector of 'very social housing'.
10. Prekarium is a contractual basis for using a flat or a room free of charge but includes the right of withdrawal.
11. The quotations stem from own investigation, taken from the real estate website 'Willhaben' (15 August 2016).
12. Following the comparative overview of Flatau *et al.* (2015), asylum seekers in these three countries experience a more difficult pathway to housing than sponsored/offshore refugees.

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