

Chapter 10

Municipal Housing Strategies for Refugees. Insights from Two Case Studies in Germany



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10.1 Introduction

Germany is the destination for many refugees from different parts of the world, where political or economic conflicts cause people to leave their home countries. More than one million refugees sought asylum in Germany in 2015 and 2016. Their integration is an essential political task, especially since further migration from conflict areas can be expected in the years to come.¹

Regarding the accommodation of refugees, there are different regulations and competencies within the national administration during an asylum process. Arriving in Germany, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees is responsible for granting asylum or another protection status. However, the states (Bundesländer) are in charge of the accommodation and the social assistance of asylum seekers. In practice, the states partially leave this task to the municipalities. After the recognition of refugee status, refugees are allowed to move from municipal accommoda-

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tion into a private apartment (§ 53 Abs. 2 AsylG; see also Robert Bosch Stiftung 2016). However, due to the domicile requirement that aims at regulating the distribution of refugees within the federal territory and the federal states, refugees in North Rhine-Westphalia are not authorised to move from the municipality where they were registered to another municipality during the first three years after refugee status has been granted.²

In this chapter, we will analyse the conditions of accommodating refugees upon arrival and their transition from municipal accommodation to the housing market. In addition, we will explore how local policies shape the process of housing and consequently influence the opportunities for the integration of refugees. Furthermore, we will clarify how different spatial contexts affect the housing situation of refugees, assuming that there are different underlying conditions in larger cities compared to small and medium-sized towns. Whereas housing markets in thriving cities are subject to continued pressure, and refugees face tough competition from other low-income households, the underlying conditions are supposed to be more favourable in smaller towns.

In the following Sect. 10.2 we will highlight housing as a dimension of the integration process of refugees and integration policies that have been developed in the last years in Germany. Our methodological approach will then be described in Sect. 10.3. In Sect. 10.4, we will depict to what extent the municipalities had already dealt with the topic (accommodation of refugees) before immigration strongly increased. Furthermore, we will illustrate the experiences of municipal actors concerning accommodation upon arrival and refugees' transition to the housing market. In the conclusion (Sect. 10.5) we will elaborate and explain apparent differences and similarities in integration policies in the case study areas. Furthermore, we will depict some consequences of apparent policy gaps on the integration process of refugees at a local level.

10.2 Housing of Refugees as a Central Precondition for Integration

The housing situation is a central aspect in the integration process of migrants. In the following section, we will first reflect on the role of housing within concepts of integration as well as the role of the state in integration processes. Afterwards we will outline the housing policy in Germany. Focusing on refugees, we will refer to international studies on their housing situation and depict the conditions for their accommodation in Germany. We will then argue that housing strongly affects refugees' integration and that the preconditions for their integration differ significantly, depending on where they live.

²This requirement does not apply to refugees who received their status before 6th August 2016, who are employed and earn a specified minimum income, who study or who pursue vocational training.

10.2.1 *Integration: Concept and Policy*

Integration is a contested concept that encompasses widely different meanings. However, structural integration, in terms of social positions within the housing and the labour market, plays a major role in classical as well as in more recent concepts of integration (Gestring 2014). The significance of structural integration is also reflected in political programmes in Germany (e.g. the National Integration Action Plan, *Nationaler Aktionsplan Integration*), which define the participation of migrants in society as one main objective (Die Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Migration, Flüchtlinge und Integration 2011). Accordingly, Gestring (2014) suggests an integration concept that focuses on migrants' access to the core areas of the host society, such as housing, work, education and health. He points out that integration is a process that involves migrants as well as society and the state.

States pursue integration policy e.g. through laws and the funding of programmes and provisions (Favell 2001: 351). However, policy does not easily translate into outcomes. Czaika and de Haas (2013) identify three policy gaps with regard to migration policy. Their notion of policy gaps can also be applied to integration policy. Firstly, they describe a gap ('discursive gap') between public policy discourses and actual policies on paper (e.g. laws, regulations and measures). Secondly, they identify a gap between policy documents and their implementation. This 'implementation gap' can be caused by constraints such as budgetary constraints. Moreover, it is particularly significant when policy implementation is based on subjective assessments (e.g. in the asylum process) that give leeway to the decision-makers. Thirdly, there is a gap between implementation and outcomes, i.e. whether and to what extent implemented policy documents have the intended effects. Structural factors, and policies not related to migration and integration, play a major role in this 'efficacy gap' (Czaika and de Haas 2013).

Integration policy shapes the living conditions of migrants at different administrative levels. In Germany, with its federal system of government, the federal level, state level and municipal level each have different responsibilities in regard to integration, according to their political competencies (Bommes 2009). The federal level has the power of legislation and can therefore regulate matters of immigration and integration. The state level is responsible, inter alia, for education. The municipalities implement integration policies that have been enacted at the federal or state level (e.g. accommodation of refugees). However, they can also develop local integration policies, such as integration guidelines (Filsinger 2009).

In this chapter, housing is considered as a central aspect in the integration process of refugees because it is a basic need that has to be addressed first when refugees arrive. In a long-term perspective, other aspects become crucial as well, such as language skills or networks. The importance of language skills for the integration process of migrants has been investigated in publications focussing on other groups of international migrants (e.g. Föbker and Imani 2017; Imani et al. 2014). In this book, the meaning of language skills will be discussed in Chap. 9 by Birgit Glorius and Anne-Christin Schondelmayer with regard to refugees.

10.2.2 Housing Structure and Policy in Germany

Germany's housing market is characterized by different submarkets. Condominiums are to be distinguished from rental apartments. In 2017, approximately 46% of households lived in owner-occupied buildings (Deutscher Bundestag 2017). Compared to other European countries this is rather low. Regional differences in the rate of residential property can be seen between urban and rural areas. In urban areas the share is only around 30%.

In 2011, of the approx. 40 million apartments in Germany, 22 million were rental apartments (Deutscher Bundestag 2017). In contrast to most other European countries, Germany's housing stock is characterized by a high percentage of private owners. 65% of the rentals are owned by private landlords. Only a small percentage of the rental housing stock (around 10%) is owned by municipalities. Another almost 10% are organized as cooperatives, while private companies offer 13% of all rental apartments.

Germany's housing policy has been characterized by the privatization of the municipal housing stock, the transfer of social housing from the federal government to the states as well as an emphasis on subsidizing low-income households instead of social housing in the past years (Pätzold 2017). Low-income households receive housing subsidies or are reimbursed for costs of housing. Investments in the fixed-price rental apartment stock have been rather low. Especially in Germany's major cities an increased demand in the housing market faces an unbalanced supply of apartments in the lower to mid-price segment. Social housing has become scarce due to the expiration of rent and occupancy control (Mietpreis- und Belegungsbindung). The reduction of such controlled apartments as well as the increase in prices for private housing has caused shortages in low-income households in growing major cities (Held and Waltersbacher 2015). To limit the rise in rent of re-letting in certain cities with shortages, the tool of a cap on rent increases (Mietpreisbremse) has been used for several years.

The current shortages in public subsidized housing elevate the risk of homelessness. Government statistics on this phenomenon throughout the whole of Germany do not exist. For 2016, the National German Association on the Assistance for Homeless People estimates that 860,000 people in Germany lack housing and that this number rose by about 150% since the increasing immigration of refugees. Homeless people are those who are permanently without housing and who live on the streets or in shelters, where their stay is limited. The number of people living on Germany's streets is estimated at 52,000 (Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Wohnungslosenhilfe 2017).

All this shows that refugees put additional pressure on the demand in a very limited housing market segment.

10.2.3 Housing of Refugees

The housing situation of refugees differs significantly between countries as well as within groups of refugees, and is highly determined by their legal status (Murdie 2008). Studies from Europe, North America and Australia document that most

refugees start in transitional housing. There are great variations in the kind of provisional accommodation provided, as well as in the period of time that refugees are allowed or obliged to stay there. In a second step, refugees move to the rental market (e.g. Flatau et al. 2015; Fozdar and Hardley 2014; Francis and Hiebert 2014; Borevi and Bengtsson 2015; Murdie 2008). This transition proves difficult. Thus, friends, family and people of the same ethnic background as well as volunteers and staff in transitional housing play an important role as a source of information and support (Francis and Hiebert 2014; Murdie 2008).

A major problem in the search process is the low income of most households in a context of housing markets that offer only a limited amount of affordable rental housing. Further barriers arise when the locally available housing stock does not fit refugees' household structure that is comprised of large numbers of single refugees. In addition, large families often face difficulties in finding appropriate accommodation. The search and application process is further complicated by language problems and limited experience in the local rental market (BBSR 2017; Foroutan et al. 2017; Johansson 2016; Flatau et al. 2015; Fozdar and Hardley 2014; Francis and Hiebert 2014; Murdie 2008). In search of better accommodation, many refugee households move several times before they finally find appropriate housing (Ager and Strang 2008).

In Germany, with its federal system of government, newly arrived refugees are first allocated to the states (*Länder*) and then further allocated to municipalities (Aumüller 2018). In the state of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), where our study is based, the municipalities are obliged to accommodate asylum seekers (Flüchtlingsaufnahmegesetz NRW § 1). However, accommodation differs significantly between municipalities. The federal asylum law (Asylgesetz §53, 1) states that foreigners who have applied for asylum *should* be housed in group accommodation. This 'should' rule at the federal level gives leeway to the other administrative levels. Therefore, the type of accommodation provided very much depends on political opinion and structural constraints within the municipalities (Schammann and Kühn 2016). The debate on the pros and cons of group accommodation as compared to private apartments mainly refers to its size, location and quality (e.g. Aumüller 2018; BBSR 2017; Schammann and Kühn 2016).

After refugee status³ is granted it is possible to move to a private dwelling (§ 53 Abs. 2 AsylG; see also Robert-Bosch-Stiftung 2016). Refugees are eligible for welfare benefits paid by the 'Jobcenter', which covers rental costs as long as they do not significantly exceed the local rents (Schammann and Kühn 2016). A representative survey, conducted in 2016, shows that 67% of refugees who had been granted

³German law distinguishes different forms of protection (BAMF 2017): entitlement to asylum, refugee protection and subsidiary protection. The weakest form of protection, a national ban on deportation, does not allow a person to move out of group accommodation. Regulations vary between the *Länder* with some states defining statutory periods of stay in group accommodation. In any case, people with this form of protection first need to obtain an official approval from the municipal authority before they are allowed to move to a private dwelling (Schammann and Kühn 2016). Hence, the majority (55%) of this group is living in group accommodations (Baier and Siegert 2018).

protection status were living in private dwellings, whereas the majority (62%) of refugees still in the asylum process was living in group accommodation (Baier and Siegert 2018).

As in NRW the place of residence is, for the first three years, restricted to the municipality a refugee has been allocated to (cf. Sect. 10.1; Wiegandt 2017), the local housing market situation is a crucial factor in refugees' opportunities to rent a private apartment. As mentioned before, the social housing stock in Germany has been decreasing over the last decade (Prognos 2017). Consequently, in municipalities with tight housing markets, refugees might not be able to leave group accommodation even after refugee status is granted (Foroutan et al. 2017).

10.2.4 Housing as a Precondition for Integration

A successful move from municipal accommodation into the rental market can be interpreted as an indicator of progress in a refugee's integration process. Housing in turn affects refugees' access to other core areas of the host society. For example, living in group accommodation makes learning difficult (Aumüller et al. 2015), and being housed in remote accommodation centres without public transport complicates daily life and labour market access (Söhn et al. 2017, Baier and Siegert 2018). Moreover, the type and size of dwelling affects society's perception of refugees. For example, large group accommodation fosters negative attitudes towards refugees among local inhabitants (Aumüller et al. 2015). Establishing group accommodation in residential neighbourhoods often results in conflicts between the local administration and local inhabitants (Doomernik and Glorius 2016).

The living environment is the subject of a controversial debate around the effects of segregation on refugees' (and, more generally, migrants') integration. Two lines of argument can be distinguished—both of which refer to the social capital (Putnam 2000) that is created in everyday interaction in the living environment (Borevi and Bengtsson 2015). One is based on the meaning of social bonds with family and co-ethnic groups that supply (newly arrived) migrants with information and support. Proximity to family and people of the same ethnic background in a segregated area is viewed as promoting integration. The other line of argument refers to bridging social capital that connects migrants with the host society. It suggests that segregation obstructs contact between migrants and the host society and thus undermines integration (Häußermann and Siebel 2001). This argument is particularly strong in the political debate. However, empirical evidence to support this latter hypothesis, that spatial segregation has negative effects on migrants' integration, is scarce, at least in Germany (Dangschat and Alisch 2014).

As described above, there are major differences in municipal accommodation policies and practices. Furthermore, refugees' opportunities to rent their own apartment vary greatly between local housing markets. In contrast to many other studies investigating the national situation in general, our analysis considers the local context, which has been recognised as a crucial factor for the integration processes of

migrants (Aumüller and Bretl 2008; Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2011). The number of inhabitants, the local population structure (especially the size and number of ethnic communities), the structure of the local labour and housing market as well as the local policies around the admission of refugees are considered as highly relevant for integration (Aumüller et al. 2015). Given the dispersal system for refugees in Germany, we argue that refugees are confronted with significantly different initial conditions for their integration. In our paper we focus on local policies and practices regarding the housing of refugees and analyse how local integration policy is implemented against the backdrop of different local opportunities and constraints. Furthermore, we discuss to what extent the implemented policies have the desired effects.

10.3 Methods: A Comparative Analysis of Two Case Study Areas

Regarding this gap in research on a local level, we have chosen two different spatial contexts in North Rhine-Westphalia: a large city on the one hand, and small and medium-sized towns in one district on the other. The selection of two contrasting contexts aims to identify similarities and differences in integration politics as well as specific local opportunities and constraints for the integration of refugees (Tilly 1984; Pickvance 2005). Each of the local contexts is represented by a case study: the context of a large city by Cologne, and the context of small and medium-sized towns by the district of Heinsberg, which is located between the city of Düsseldorf and the city of Aachen, next to the border with the Netherlands.

With a population of 1.08 million as of 31/12/2016, *Cologne* is NRW's largest and Germany's fourth largest city. Cologne has positive net migration, with foreigners and people aged 18–20 years accounting for the largest share of immigrants. 19.3% of Cologne's population have a foreign nationality, and 18.5% are Germans with a migrant background (Stadt Köln 2017). Turkish passport holders make up the majority (22.5%) of all foreigners. People with Syrian, Iranian or Iraqi nationality account for 6.9% of all foreigners (Stadt Köln 2017). Cologne has an international character in many respects. There are a variety of migrant infrastructures that could facilitate the integration of refugees. As early as 2004, the council of the city of Cologne passed guidelines on the accommodation and support of refugees, which became a leading example for German municipalities (Stadt Köln 2004). In 2011, some "Guidelines to strengthen the Integrated Urban Society" (Stadt Köln 2011) were developed (cf. Sect. 10.4). At the beginning, the city's residents gave a warm welcome to the arriving refugees. However, the atmosphere changed not least because of sexual assaults committed mainly by migrants from North African countries on New Year's Eve 2015.

The district of *Heinsberg*, with a total of 260,000 inhabitants, encompasses 10 municipalities counting between 9000 and 44,000 inhabitants. Five of the municipalities are medium-sized towns with more than 20,000 inhabitants, whereas five

municipalities are small towns of less than 20,000 inhabitants. In total, the district of Heinsberg has a positive net migration that considerably rose in 2015. 14.7% of the population have a foreign nationality. The numbers vary between different municipalities, from 8.4% up to 38.8%. People from the nearby Netherlands and from Turkey dominate (IT.NRW 2017). In 2017, the district of Heinsberg hosted 3600 refugees dispersed almost proportionally among the ten municipalities. Due to the former recruitment of labour migrants in the mining sector, the local communities have many years of experience in the integration of foreigners from Muslim countries. In contrast to the city of Cologne, a guideline of integration was only introduced in 2014 (cf. Sect. 10.4). Although in most communities the atmosphere was welcoming, more reserved and rejecting reactions of the administration were reported in the media as well. Out of the ten cities and towns, we selected five for the fieldwork: the capital of the district, two towns that were mentioned as best practice examples in the media and two towns where issues between the municipality, residents and refugees were reported.⁴ Therefore, when analysing the perspective of the district of Heinsberg we have to distinguish between the perspective of the district administration on the one hand, and the perspectives of the different municipal administrations on the other.

The aim of this paper – to understand the meaning of the local context and of local policies for the integration of refugees on the housing market – is reflected in our methodological approach. We have chosen a comparative case study in order to identify commonalities across the two cases despite the different contexts (Baxter 2010). The short characterisations of our case study areas given above already reveal the differences as well as the complexity of the cases that we will examine. We designed a multidimensional qualitative approach to consider documents as well as perspectives of local governmental and non-governmental organisations that are concerned with the situation of refugees. Therefore, we analysed existing guidelines and integration plans in order to highlight the extent to which refugees and their accommodation was already taken into consideration prior to the arrival of more than one million refugees in Germany. Moreover, in 2017, we conducted expert interviews with representatives from local governmental as well as non-governmental organisations that are more closely involved in the neighbourhood, like welfare or voluntary aid organisations. The representatives were chosen due to their responsibility for the accommodation and care of refugees (Table 10.1).

In these guided interviews, we explored the experts' daily work experience with regard to the integration of refugees, discussing their successes and failures in working with refugees as well as the most important needs of refugees. In our analysis, we will draw upon the interviews with institutions that are particularly engaged with the housing situation of refugees.

⁴For reasons of data protection, the names of the towns are not mentioned in this paper, but entitled A-town, B-town, C-town, D-town and E-town. The names of urban neighbourhoods in the case study area of the city of Cologne are anonymised as well, as A-neighbourhood and B-neighbourhood.

Table 10.1 List of governmental and non-governmental interview partners

Institution	City of Cologne	District of Heinsberg
Governmental	Municipal Integration Centre	Integration Centre of the district of Heinsberg
	Refugees' Coordination Centre	Municipal Integration Centre of A-town ^a
	Department of Housing ^a	Municipal Administration of B-town ^a
	Municipal Integration Council	Municipal Administration of C-town ^a
	Integration Point	Municipal Administration of D-town ^a
	Chamber of Crafts	Integration Point of the district of Heinsberg
	Municipal Housing Company ^a	Job centre of the district of Heinsberg
	Relocation Coordination Centre ^a	
	Adult Education Centre	Adult Education Centre of the district of Heinsberg
	Primary school in the A-neighbourhood	
Non-governmental	Caritas (Christian welfare work)	Caritas of the district of Heinsberg (Christian welfare work) ^a
	In Via (Christian welfare work)	Diocese (Christian welfare work)
	Cologne Council of Refugees	
	Citizens' Initiative in the B-neighbourhood	Citizens' Initiative in D-town ^a
	Education Association in the B-neighbourhood	Citizens' Initiative in E-town ^a
	Tenants' Union of North Rhine-Westphalia ^a	

^aInstitutions concerned with the housing situation of refugees

In addition to document analysis and expert interviews, we organised two workshops during the research process to discuss our findings with the previously interviewed experts. Asking for feedback from the interviewees aimed at validating our results, broadening our understanding and updating our knowledge on crucial issues in the case study areas.

10.4 Housing and Integration from the Perspective of Local Experts

In 2015 and 2016, when approximately 1.2 million refugees applied for asylum in Germany, cities and districts such as Cologne and Heinsberg had to manage their accommodation (BAMF 2017). In some areas, it was an enormous challenge to meet the needs; in other areas, it did not cause major problems. In the following sections, the accommodation situation upon arrival and the transition from group accommodation into private apartments will be described and explained.

10.4.1 Accommodation upon Arrival

Regarding the guidelines on housing of refugees, the case study areas started with different bases. In 2003, the “Round Table for Refugee Matters” in Cologne developed a concept for the accommodation and support of refugees. The Council passed this concept as “Guidelines for the Accommodation and Support of Refugees” in 2004 (Stadt Köln 2004). The aim of the concept is to increase the public acceptance for refugees as well as to encourage a peaceful togetherness of all population groups in the urban society. As stated by the guidelines, assigned refugees should be accommodated in accordance with a three-stage model. New residents should initially live in a municipal reception centre. A residence time of maximum three months should give the municipality the opportunity to gain an overview of the situation and allocate people to group accommodation as soon as possible. According to the guidelines, group accommodation is characterised by self-contained dwellings and a limit of 80 people per building. However, in the political and societal integration discourse, group accommodation is viewed critically, due to the psychological stress for the residents, limited contact possibilities with the host society and rejection by the local population (Baier and Siegert 2018). Hence, after a maximum of three years, refugees should be placed in private rental apartments. Families should obtain an apartment in the same neighbourhood as the former group accommodation to avoid a change of daycare facility or school (Stadt Köln 2004).

Although the Municipality of Cologne was prepared, the Department of Housing in Cologne was overtaxed by the high amount of refugees coming into the city, especially between September 2015 and March 2016 when the number of refugees increased from 8003 to 12,431 (Stadt Köln 2018a). The capacity limit was reached rapidly and it is hardly surprising that the municipality could not abide by the guidelines. Avoiding homelessness was the priority, thus refugees were placed in sports halls, hotels, containers and lightweight-structure buildings during peak times. A representative of the city of Cologne admitted in their interview that although it had a strategy available, in practice, the administration was not prepared to accommodate the high number of refugees. This evidence indicates that an ‘implementation gap’ (Czaika and de Haas 2013) existed in the city, caused by the extraordinarily high influx of refugees that significantly exceeded the existing accommodation resources.

In response, the municipality devised a four-phase model for the placement of refugees in 2015. Above all this provided for the expansion of temporary accommodation. In order to return the sports halls to their original purpose, the municipality would build lightweight building constructions for up to 400 people (80 people per building). As accommodation intended to be temporary, albeit with more privacy, residential containers would be set up. Even though these containers were planned for a transition period, they are now considered as a lasting solution. Temporary accommodation also included hotels, in which rooms are usually occupied by several people. As permanent buildings, group accommodation would be extended with quick-build housing units. In order to achieve greater flexibility in

capacity utilisation, the accommodation would be rented out to students as long as it was not needed for refugees. Finally, the construction of regular apartments formed the last phase of this model.

Despite this model, the last of the 27 sports halls used for the accommodation of asylum seekers could only be cleared in June 2017, and in March 2018, 3872 out of 9674 asylum seekers were living in emergency shelters, lightweight-structure buildings and hotels (representative of the Department of Housing, city of Cologne). The figures clearly show that a residence time in emergency accommodation of maximum three months, which is set out in the guidelines, could not be met (Ottersbach and Wiedemann 2017).

In 2016, the Municipality of Cologne devised minimum standards for the accommodation and support of refugees, including structural and social conditions (Stadt Köln 2016a, b). Especially people with a particular vulnerability (e.g. refugees with disabilities, pregnant women, unaccompanied minors) should be placed in alternative accommodation. However, according to an employee of Caritas Cologne, the agreed-upon minimum standards were not met. During peak times, the needs of refugees with special vulnerabilities were not taken into consideration when placing them in sports halls or other group accommodation without proper psychological care. Hence, the emergency placement was described as “*chaotic*” and “*lacking occupancy management*” (interview with a representative of the Cologne Council of Refugees). This points to another implementation gap.

Referring to the aforementioned guidelines, it can be concluded that they were helpful in the beginning since group accommodation already existed (although not sufficient). However, the guidelines have subsequently served little purpose since the housing market situation has hampered the aim of accommodating the extraordinarily high numbers of refugees in apartments. Nonetheless the guidelines reflect a consensus of the local actors on the preferable accommodation of refugees.

In contrast to Cologne, the integration guideline of the district of Heinsberg, which was passed in 2015, does not deal with the issue of accommodating refugees, although the accommodation of refugees is a municipal obligation (Flüchtlingsaufnahmegesetz NRW §1; Stadt Köln 2011; Kreis Heinsberg 2014). This is due to the fact that the communities in the district of Heinsberg had only been affected to a minor extent by the influx of refugees before. Accordingly, the issue of their accommodation was not a matter of urgency for years and the strong increase in immigration in 2015 and 2016 was not foreseeable for local actors. This indicates that an implementation gap also existed in the district of Heinsberg. In the district, 3600 refugees were living in apartments and group accommodation in 2017. Since the guideline does not deal with the issue of accommodation, each municipality pursued its own strategy to house the refugees. Our interviewees mainly emphasized their efforts to accommodate the refugees as decentralized as possible in order to avoid conflicts and obstacles to their integration. This refers to the social and political discourses regarding the negative consequences of segregated housing on integration processes. According to Aumüller (2018), municipalities can draw on different, flexible scopes regarding the provision of housing. If municipalities possess land and apartments or cooperate with public housing

Table 10.2 Numbers of refugees in group accommodation and apartments (data from the municipalities)

Municipality	Refugees in total	Refugees in group accommodation	Refugees in apartments
A-town (Jan 2018)	821	53	768
B-town (Dec 2016)	684	n.s.	n.s.
C-town (Nov 2017)	614	173	441
D-town (Dec 2016)	379	n.s.	n.s.
E-town (Mar 2018)	123	110	13

companies, their opportunities for action increase and the dependence on private providers falls. Smaller municipalities usually have better opportunities for decentralised housing of asylum seekers than large cities (Aumüller 2018). The different strategies of the municipalities in the district of Heinsberg encompass a broad spectrum. Only one municipality needed to set up emergency shelters (sports hall, commercial hall); the others were able to use group accommodation, containers, or even individual apartments. The number of refugees in group accommodation and apartments varies from municipality to municipality (Table 10.2). Whereas in E-town nearly 90% of the refugees are accommodated in group accommodation, only 6.4% of the refugees in A-town live in such accommodation. In the municipalities of A-town and B-town a sufficient amount of municipal as well as private apartments were vacant in winter 2016–2017. This shows the different possibilities of emergency accommodation within one district. Some municipalities needed to arrange group accommodation while others were able to use residential vacancies. An expert from B-town stresses the possibility of renting apartments to refugees: *“In the meantime, we have rented up to 80 apartments; I was surprised that it was even possible to rent so many, but it was possible.”* However, another expert from the district of Heinsberg admits that many of these apartments were of a low quality and were overoccupied. In contrast to Cologne, the mediation of private apartments seems to have a greater significance in the district of Heinsberg.

In 2016, the Refugee Council of the district, founded by charitable organisations and the Municipal Integration Centre, agreed to take greater account of the housing needs of particularly vulnerable women and children. In contrast to Cologne, the municipalities of the district mostly arranged accommodation for people with special vulnerabilities or special groups (e.g. families in apartments, single mothers with children in their own corridor, single men in their own group accommodation). Nevertheless, there were also cases of single women being placed next to single men, again showing an existing gap between planning and implementation.

When setting up group accommodation its location is a major issue for a municipality, neighbours and the refugees themselves. An expert from D-town refers to phone calls from residents *“who are not delighted about the accommodation, especially about the size of accommodation”*. He also relates to some incidents when young male asylum seekers have followed young women from the neighbourhood. In Cologne, neighbours express concern regarding the construction of group

accommodation, since they fear the devaluation of their properties and a growing competition for childcare facilities (Stoldt 2014).

Regarding group accommodation locations in small towns, some experts of the district of Heinsberg emphasise the difficulties of access to public transport and other infrastructure, such as language and integration courses or supermarkets. A former barrack, a group accommodation in E-town, is located at the edge of the town within a forest. There is no direct bus connection so the refugees need to walk 20–30 min to the next shopping facility and bus stop. Such isolated dwellings that cause a spatial segregation of refugees were not found in Cologne.

Other issues, in both case study areas, are a noisy environment, small space and a lack of privacy in certain emergency and group accommodation facilities, which has negative effects on social atmosphere and well-being. Moreover, refugees attending a language class or school find it difficult to concentrate on their homework. People of diverse backgrounds are forced to live together in a confined space. Different religions and nationalities may lead to social tensions and conflicts (Christ et al. 2017). According to Aumüller et al. (2015), the consequences of this prevalent confined space and lack of privacy may be psychosocial disorders. Regarding emergency accommodation, an expert from Caritas Cologne stresses that there are “*women who cannot take off their headscarf, since there is no private room.*” According to Christ et al. (2017), not only women and children but also men do not feel safe in group accommodation. This is also related to shared showers, which do not offer sufficient protection, since they are not lockable.

In summary, there are considerable differences regarding the accommodation situation upon arrival between and within our two case study areas. While many refugees arriving in Cologne in 2015–2016 had to be placed in emergency shelters or temporary accommodation, many refugees arriving in Heinsberg, especially families, were housed in private or municipal apartments from the beginning. In the following section, we will focus on the transition from municipal accommodation to the rental market.

10.4.2 Transition to the Housing Market

The Cologne guidelines for accommodation of refugees and the expert interviews in Cologne and Heinsberg have shown that in both case study areas the public policy discourse considers living in a private home as the long-term goal of housing policy for recognised refugees. After refugee status is granted, it is possible to move to a private dwelling (see Sect. 10.2.3).

Since some municipalities in the district of Heinsberg received many offers from private landlords, they could rent these apartments and use them for the accommodation of refugees. Some municipalities in Heinsberg are now transferring the rental agreements from the municipality to the refugees themselves, if the landlords agree. Thus, at least some families in the district of Heinsberg can stay in their first dwelling and do not need to move to another apartment after receiving their status. For the

refugees this solution allows a very smooth transition to the rental market (BBSR 2017). For the municipalities this solution is attractive since they can reduce additional expenses like incidental and clean-up costs.

10.4.2.1 Search for New Housing

Despite the fact that the public policy discourse in both case study areas aims at refugees' accommodation in rented apartments, our interviewees in both case study areas mostly describe the implementation of this policy as very difficult to almost impossible. They name several factors as decisive:

Landlords' Reservations Experts in the city of Cologne and in the district of Heinsberg state that landlords' reservations about refugees (due to legal status, source of income, country of origin, religion) are a severe barrier to transition in the housing market (see also Flatau et al. 2015; Murdie 2008). In both case study areas, the willingness especially of private landlords to accept refugees as tenants has decreased. Some experts assume that this development is strongly influenced by the media discourse about the sexual assaults in Cologne on New Year's Eve 2015.

Shortage of Affordable Housing/Supply Does Not Meet Demand In both case study areas the above-average demand for affordable housing is not matched by a corresponding supply. Rents of vacant accommodation often exceed the limits set by the Jobcenter (see also BBSR 2017). The housing market in Cologne has been tight for many years, and the increased immigration of refugees has reinforced this situation. There is a strong demand for affordable housing, not only from refugees but also from students and households with lower incomes. The lowest rents are demanded for apartments in high-rise buildings and older, unrenovated apartment buildings, partly on the outskirts (KSK Immobilien 2018). This results in neighbourhoods with a strong influx of refugees. Often these are areas that already had a higher proportion of foreigners (see Stadt Köln 2018b).

In contrast, the housing market in the district of Heinsberg was rather relaxed at the beginning of the increased immigration of refugees. In some municipalities, sufficient municipal as well as private apartments were vacant. However, these reserves have now been widely used up by the municipalities that rented them for the accommodation of newly arriving refugees. Hence, there are hardly any apartments left for refugees to move into after leaving group accommodation. Additionally, the apartment sizes often do not meet the demand. While in Cologne, especially families with several children looking for dwellings with more than three rooms face problems in finding new accommodation, in the district of Heinsberg, this mostly applies to young male refugees looking for single-person apartments. In the interviews, the experts point out that moving to a shared flat could be a solution for these young men. However, after living for several months in group accommodation, many refugees desperately want to live on their own and have privacy again. In addition, some landlords have even more reservations about letting their apartments as shared flats.

Language Barriers/Lacking Information About Search Techniques Some refugees do not (yet) have sufficient language skills and information about the best way to search for an apartment (see also Foroutan et al. 2017; Fozdar and Hardley 2014; Francis and Hiebert 2014; Baier and Siebert 2018).

Territorial Restrictions Due to the introduction of the domicile requirement in NRW, refugees facing problems in finding an affordable apartment in their municipality are not allowed to move to municipalities with less pressure on their housing markets. Some interviewees in the district of Heinsberg evaluate this critically. They point out that refugees living in the small municipalities are restricted in their search, as housing offers, integration offers (e.g. integration courses) as well as job opportunities are limited there. Experts in the city of Cologne refer to the fact that the domicile requirement prevents families with several children from searching outside the city limits, where large apartments are more affordable.

It becomes clear that the difficulty of actually achieving and implementing the desired goals (e.g. refugees' transition to the housing market) is due to an interaction of various factors, including refugees' limited economic and cultural resources, the limited number of locally available apartments, and the conflicting interests of potential landlords. Accordingly, solutions must also be found at various levels, e.g. housing construction, financial resources for the municipalities, and campaigns against discrimination. Furthermore, the example of the domicile requirement shows that the implementation of measures can have ambivalent consequences. For example, the domicile requirement enables cities and municipalities to better plan the integration infrastructures they need. At the same time it represents a severe barrier to the housing market integration of many refugees, as their search radius is significantly reduced.

10.4.2.2 Strategies to Face Housing Shortage

Our findings show two different ways of how governmental and non-governmental organisations in the city of Cologne and in the district of Heinsberg try to face the housing shortage.

Mediation of Vacant Apartments In both case study areas, refugees receive support in their search for accommodation from different actors. Often there is a need for basic information about housing as well as support in finding a suitable apartment, contacting the landlord and signing the lease. Hence, in some communities voluntary initiatives, welfare organisations, housing companies as well as municipal administration staff are involved and are ideally in close contact. This is the 'municipal leeway' in implementing compulsory tasks (e.g. accommodation of refugees, see Sect. 10.2.1; Schammann and Kühn 2016) when some municipalities initiate the establishment of voluntary tasks (e.g. support in finding housing). However, if the refugees' integration into the housing market is not

important to municipal politicians, this may also have an impact on the commitment of the administrative staff, as an expert in the district of Heinsberg stated:

If the man at the top does not want to [support refugees' integration], it has an effect further down. There are social welfare office managers or employees in social welfare offices who euphorically helped me one year ago, (...) today they shrug their shoulders.

An important institution in the city of Cologne is the Relocation Coordination Centre, developed by the Municipality of Cologne, the Cologne Council of Refugees, the German Red Cross and Caritas in 2011 (Ottersbach and Wiedemann 2017). This Centre aims to help refugees in their search for apartments in order to enable a move out of municipal group accommodation. Social workers from the Department of Housing provide access to the project. They use criteria such as special vulnerability, asylum status and 'positive social prognosis' to select those refugees who will be supported. However, these criteria are in some cases incomprehensible for affected persons (BBSR 2017). According to the Relocation Centre, 842 people (237 families) were mediated into private living space in 2016. However, there is a waiting list of up to 3600 parties. This clearly shows that against the background of tight housing markets in large cities, municipal support measures to find housing for refugees (or other needy/vulnerable groups) are only of limited effectiveness (efficacy gap; Czaika and de Haas 2013).

Since 2015, the Relocation Coordination Centre has cooperated with the Municipal Housing Company, which has committed to providing 150 apartments per year for refugee accommodation (BBSR 2017). However, since this housing company mainly has apartments with two or three rooms in its stock, the demand from families with several children as well as single-person households can hardly be satisfied. Additionally, the refugees are only one group of several (vulnerable) groups seeking affordable housing. A representative of a municipal housing company observed increasing competition:

The refugee organisations are always only one part of the demand and we must take care of as many interests as possible. And, of course, there are one or two organisations for homeless people that say, after the refugees have arrived, the homeless are left out.

New Constructions The second way to tackle the housing shortage is by new constructions. Since new conditions for financing subsidised housing were introduced at the state level in 2015, construction activity is increasing. This refers to the fact that not only traditional integration policies influence local integration processes but also policies not usually seen as integration policies, like housing policy (Czaika and de Haas 2013).

In the district of Heinsberg, representatives of different municipalities point out that there is far too little public housing. However, at the time of our interviews only one municipality had decided to invest in the construction of new housing for refugee families. By settling refugees with children in declining villages, a representative of B-town hoped to prevent the closure of primary schools:

We have deliberately chosen these locations. In [village name] it is not possible to maintain a two-track primary school and in [village name] even the closure of the primary school will be imminent if we cannot place more children. Of course, this works relatively well with the accommodation for refugees.

This project is a good example of the efforts made by declining localities to mitigate some negative consequences of decline through the permanent integration of refugees.

In Cologne, as in some other places, the Municipal Housing Agency is investing in the construction of new housing. In 2017, they aimed to build 350 housing units. According to the Department of Housing, approx. 1000 publicly subsidized residential units are constructed annually. However, although the conditions for the financing of subsidised housing have been optimised, private investors are still more likely to focus their construction on single-/multi-family homes as well as condominiums in the upscale price segment, so predominantly expensive residential property is emerging. The municipality has tried to prevent this via new guidelines for developers. In 2013, a building land model (Kooperatives Baulandmodell) was passed, which obliges investors to develop at least 30% of a housing project as subsidised apartments. Additionally, the municipality does not sell municipal real estate to the highest bidder any more, but rather rates on the basis of an evaluation matrix (Stadt Köln 2016c). The new guideline identifies the “best concept” according to factors such as the planned number of subsidised apartments (Hendorf 2017). Hence the winning bidder is not necessarily the one with the highest bid, but rather the one that best fulfils and implements the requirements of the municipality (Attenberger 2016). These measures are examples of how the public and political discourse on the importance of affordable housing for social integration, which has intensified in recent years, is reflected in municipal housing policy approaches.

10.5 Conclusion: “Integration Only Starts When People Live in an Apartment”

To conclude, we will elaborate and explain apparent similarities and differences concerning the accommodation and integration of refugees into the regular housing market of our case study areas.

The legal framework conditions were the same in both case study areas because of national laws and laws at the federal state level that aim at regulating the distribution and reception of refugees. In principle, these laws standardise structural conditions of the integration of refugees to a high degree (e.g. the obligation to accommodate refugees, the amount of welfare benefits given to refugees). Nevertheless, we could identify differences among local strategies and policies and the underlying contextual conditions.

Firstly, this concerns the very different relevance of the topic before 2015 in the two case study areas, not least because of the different experiences with the immigration and integration of refugees. Many years before the long summer of migration, there was a political and social discussion in Cologne about the accommodation and integration of refugees. Hence, the city was prepared in a more comprehensive way, since it had developed policy documents and implemented measures for the accommodation and integration of refugees. However, the fast increase of refugees greatly exceeded existing possibilities to accommodate them according to the guidelines. With regard to the policy gaps (Czaika and de Haas 2013) that were emphasised in Sect. 10.2.1, in the city of Cologne we found evidence of an existing implementation gap and an efficacy gap. In response to the fact that the previously developed guidelines could not be implemented, new policy papers were developed which were adapted to the changed realities. However, the general policy discourse, namely the goal of decentralised accommodation in apartments, was not questioned.

In contrast to the city of Cologne, the accommodation and integration of refugees in the district of Heinsberg before 2015 was not a relevant political or social topic. Hence, the district lacked any kind of guideline with regard to refugee immigration. We consider this situation as an implementation gap, since the municipalities were not sufficiently prepared to fulfil their obligations. Against this background, the communities within the district had to develop different accommodation strategies spontaneously, sometimes under great time pressure. Although policy papers on “good accommodation practices for refugees” did not exist in the district, measures were often influenced by superordinated policy discourses concerning negative effects of mass accommodation and targeted at decentralised housing of refugees.

When comparing housing strategies for refugees within the district of Heinsberg, the municipalities show a big variation. Some of the investigated municipalities had large facilities at their disposal where they could easily accommodate a high number of refugees. In contrast, municipalities that could not draw on apparently “simple solutions” had to develop other strategies.

This points to a second aspect of the very different starting positions in the two case study areas, namely the situation on the housing market. While the housing market in Cologne was already tense before 2015 and the first accommodation of the refugees took place in sport halls, hotels and containers, the situation in most municipalities in the district of Heinsberg was initially calm. Accordingly, refugees were often placed in rented apartments upon arrival, and accommodation in large group accommodation was mainly avoided. However, the offer of vacant apartments in the district of Heinsberg was in most cases exhausted after accommodating the refugees upon arrival. Meanwhile, demand in the low-price segment exceeds supply not only in the city of Cologne but also in the district of Heinsberg. Accordingly, the transition into the housing market is now proving difficult in both case study areas. In fact, this is the case not only in our case study areas, but nationwide. The demand for affordable housing has increased further due to the number of refugees searching on local housing markets (Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Wohnungslosenhilfe 2017).

With regard to the subject of integration, one representative of a welfare organisation stated: “*Integration only starts when people live in an apartment*“. Our study has shown that the central actors in both case study areas share this view and are trying to achieve long-term housing for refugees. However, our study has also shown that the transition into the housing market has become problematic in both case study areas. Hence, in many cases integration processes have not yet started although refugees arrived years ago because many of them are still living in group accommodation, which affects not only the well-being but also the ability to learn the new language. Especially the large-scale facilities that are located in the local periphery turned out to be a constraint for the integration of refugees. A few municipalities created an isolated and spatially segregated situation for the refugees. In these isolated and segregated large-scale facilities refugees suffer disadvantages in reaching everyday life infrastructure, language courses and workplaces. Furthermore, these locations neither allow the development of bridging ties to the host society nor the development of bonding ties to possibly existing local ethnic communities.

In terms of the generalisation and transferability of the results of the two case study areas, it must be emphasized that our findings cannot be applied to all large German cities and small towns. In particular, the political situation, the housing market situation, the migrant history as well as the social acceptance in former West and East Germany (Glorius and Schondelmayer 2017) differ greatly, so that the transferability of our results is limited to former West German communities.

However, we can state that a similar situation as in Cologne can be transferred to other prosperous west German cities, since these too are characterised by a tight housing market and can look back on decades of immigration (also of refugees). Accordingly, the pressure to act is comparable and similar difficulties are to be expected for the transition into the housing market (Friedrichs et al. 2017), although the concrete strategies for dealing with the exceptionally high immigration of the years 2015–2016 may have differed (e.g. with regard to the type of accommodation). The results from the district of Heinsberg also show that different strategies have been developed in small and medium-sized towns and that large differences may even exist in neighbouring communities within one district. The transition into the housing market may be easier in peripheral small and medium-sized towns, due to less competition on the market, and less dependence on measures to support the transition. At the same time, we expect that access to housing in these areas will also largely depend on local discourses and policies for integrating refugees.

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