

Case Study Profile: Vienna

Vienna's population development can certainly be described as dynamic in recent decades. The city has been characterized by growth - primarily through immigration from abroad. Currently, Vienna has about 1.9 million inhabitants (37% foreign born). Immigrants form a very diverse social group in terms of countries of origin, individual economic and legal resources, or intended length of stay. Thus, people moving to Vienna include refugees as well as seasonal workers, students, employees of international corporations and organizations, care workers and other labor migrants. However, they share one commonality: They all need housing, but they encounter a tight housing market consisting of submarkets characterized by very different and sometimes rigid access requirements. The question remains, whether and how the interplay between immigration, housing and integration works.

Vienna's housing market predominantly consists of rental apartments, which mainly belong to the social housing submarket: Around 43% of the main residential accommodation is municipal or cooperative housing. Depending on their legal status, however, immigrants often have to wait many years before they gain formal access to this hegemonic rental segment. On the contrary, the private rental housing market is immediately available to all housing seekers. However, economic resources must be available for deposits and other fees. Immediate availability within the private rental market leads to strong competition, especially among low-income households with and without migration histories. Living in a condominium or in one's own house is reserved for those who have a more than solid economic basis, which applies only to a small proportion of immigrants.

Basic Facts and Figures

	Vienna	Austria
Total population abs.¹	1,920,949	8,932,664
Foreign citizens abs. <i>Foreign citizens in % of total population</i>	604,435 31.4	1,531,027 17.1
Born abroad abs. <i>Born abroad in % of total population</i>	711,983 37.1	1,797,573 20.1
Share of people at risk of poverty in %²	22	14
Main residences by legal status in %³	100	100
Private rental	32	18
Municipal	22	7
Cooperative	21	17
Ownership	20	48
Other	4	9
Average housing costs (€) of main rental apartments⁴	576	552
Housing cost share of income in %⁵	26	20
Average rent (€, incl. operating costs) of main rental apartments⁶		
2005	355.5	351.7
2020	575.6	551.6

¹ Population Register, Statistics Austria

² EU-SILC 2018-2020, Statistics Austria

³ EU-SILC 2020, Statistics Austria

⁴ Microcensus 2020, Statistics Austria

⁵ EU-SILC 2020, Statistics Austria

⁶ Microcensus 2020, Statistics Austria

Core developments related to the Nexus of Housing and Integration

The City of Vienna draws upon impressive achievements in housing policies. While the city remains (still) affordable citywide and especially in international comparison, the local urban housing market is not affordable to everyone. Vienna's capacity to adapt to current new needs - including more diverse people being in need for housing - remains underdeveloped. Transformative historical events such as the Fall of the Iron Curtain, the migration phase from Ex-Yugoslavia or the "Long Summer of Migration" in 2015 have been shaping the need for housing in Vienna, ever since. Up to today, Vienna is the largest "arrival city" for migrants in Austria. While the hegemonic discourse on housing in Vienna evolves mainly around social housing, affordability and socially mixed neighbourhoods, the public and political debates run risk to miss out the aspect of "housing quality". Housing includes more than "affordability" and "social mix". While adequate housing is mostly given with regard to renovation standards, material and physical quality, living space includes even more dimensions, e.g., apartment size, private open space (e.g. balcony, terrace, access to green space) or community spaces. On this point, more inclusive and socially-oriented housing projects could serve as "enablers" for more social interaction, but also for participation in social life and in society.

Potentials

GOVERNMENT-DRIVEN: Policies, subsidies and services provided by the city administration to ensure and increase inclusiveness

- Available to all residents: services on legal advice as well as semi-public institutions supporting "living together", e.g., fair rent calculator⁷, tenants' protection⁸, Urban renewal office⁹;
- Smart apartments available to young people and starter households¹⁰;

PRIVATELY-DRIVEN: Practices by private actors to increase inclusiveness

- "Social sustainability" as one out of four pillars in public competitions for architecture and urban planning¹¹;
- Target development areas for "Baugruppen" (co-housing) in urban development areas to develop a sense of community and to provide semi-private spaces to the public¹².

Challenges

- The City of Vienna has no distinct policies, projects or initiatives in the field of housing targeting specific migrant groups except for asylum seekers, who receive subsidies for housing.
- As social housing is an option only after a certain period of residence, refugees and other low-income migrant groups are forced to enter a "competition of the deprived" in which they have to prevail against other local low-income groups on the private rental market.
- Homelessness in Vienna, from a structural perspective, is not any longer a male-dominant phenomenon. Rather, and particularly since the financial crisis in 2008, the entrance of new Eastern European member states as well as after the long summer of migration in 2015, the number of homeless families, female-headed families and women is growing significantly.
- Experts warn that the Covid-19 pandemic will reinforce the problem. Currently, there is the risk of people not being able to pay the rent because of unemployment. Some might lose their flats in the foreseeable future.

⁷ <https://www.wien.gv.at/wohnen/wohnbau technik/pruefen/mietzinsberechnung.html> [last access: 21-12-2022]

⁸ <https://mieterhilfe.at/> [last access: 21-12-2022]

⁹ <https://www.gbstern.at/> [last access: 21-12-2022]

¹⁰ <https://wohnberatung-wien.at/wohnberatung/smart-wohnungen> [last access: 21-12-2022]

¹¹ http://www.wohnfonds.wien.at/gsb_beurteilung [last access: 21-12-2022]

¹² https://www.aspern-seestadt.at/lebenswelt/wohnen-arbeiten/baugruppen_ [last access: 21-12-2022]