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strategies, policies, dwellings and governance

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1. Summary

This report consists of a presentation of the process and results of a stakeholder workshop with activists conducted on 22 September 2023. The results are then related to recent scholarship in the field as well as published reports by MERGING. The report concludes with recommendations for new institutional and policy frameworks for the governance of housing for newcomers (and other people in vulnerable conditions). The three recommendations are 1) Implement housing market regulations. Legislate against commodification of housing. 2) Create inclusive legal frameworks for newcomers and implement rental intermediation. 3) Create a narrative of solidarity with newcomers to resist racism and far-right sentiments.

1. Introduction

This report consists of a presentation of the process and results of a stakeholder workshop conducted on 22 September 2023 with activists from Sweden, France, Spain, and Italy. The purpose of the workshop was to discuss experiences as well as to brainstorm innovative ideas for making housing accessible and affordable for migrants. The workshop drew inspiration from the co-creative methodology called design thinking (Janik-Hornik & Lipczak, 2019; Liedtka et al., 2017; Pachocka & Proczek, 2020). The results are presented and discussed in this report and put in relation to relevant scholarly literature and summarised as recommendations to politicians for the creation and implementation of more inclusive and just housing policies and practices. Nevertheless, the report is also relevant for practitioners and civil society. The overall objective of the report is thus to promote alternative practices of integration through housing among policy makers, policy users and civil society in European countries.

Activists are crucial actors in our societies when it comes to creating housing opportunities for the most vulnerable people, such as newcomers. If the right to affordable and decent housing was granted by state authorities, there would be no activists or social movements fighting for housing justice. Activists provide essential support services (juridical support, food, housing etc) where state

authorities fail to deliver equality and justice. This report will thus specifically contribute with insights on grassroots and non-governmental actors involved in supporting newcomers', and other vulnerable people's, socio-economic integration through housing.

This report is part of a larger H2020 EU funded project called MERGING. MERGING is an interdisciplinary study of immigrant integration through participatory housing initiatives. The project brings together seven disciplines from ten partners to test an innovative approach aiming to facilitate and ensure the sustainability of immigrants' integration process.

Within MERGING, this report is part of a so-called work package with the overall objective to analyse and enable policies, legislation, and regulatory systems for newcomers' inclusion through housing. The work package further aims at providing stakeholders with the necessary tools to ensure efficient governance and the successful implementation of constructive housing initiatives for newcomers. This report should be seen as a contribution in that direction: a useful report for stakeholders working with newcomers' integration and housing more broadly. Such stakeholders can be policymakers (politicians), policy-users (practitioners, officials) and civil society (e.g., NGOs, churches, activists).

In this report we will mainly use the term "newcomers" to describe people who have crossed national borders and migrated to European countries from mostly outside Europe in the past couple of decades to improve their living conditions. The newcomers may have different legal statuses: citizenship, permanent residency, temporary residency, undocumented, or the status of an asylum seeker. However, most of them share a deprived position in society and experiences of being racialized and discriminated against in the housing market, labour market, and everyday life. The level of vulnerability of the newcomers depends on a range of intersecting power structures such as social class, ethnicity, race, gender, religion, age, among others. For example, a racialised transgender newcomer is in a particularly vulnerable condition.

We chose to use mostly "newcomer" in this report instead of "migrant" or "immigrant" since the latter terms reduce complex realities and may reproduce stigma. The category of "migrants", for example, is today used by politicians, the media, and in public debate to polarize society (see, e.g., Dahinden & Korteweg, 2023). Using "newcomer" is an attempt to *not* contribute to the negatively classed and racialized "migrant" found in contemporary public debate. However, we are aware that "newcomer" is not an unproblematic term, especially when it comes to define which people that are referred to by this term. A newcomer may be associated primarily with a newly arrived person, but we use it also to refer to people who may have lived for a longer time in the new country. Hence, the people referred to by this term may naturally be in very different positions and with different needs.

Also, the related concept of "integration" and the whole scholarly field of "integration" has received a lot of important criticism in the past years. This is a critique demonstrating that a focus on "immigrant integration" represents migration as an anomaly and the migrant as a problematic subject (see, e.g., Dahinden & Anderson, 2021; Schinkel 2018). Academics, politicians, practitioners, and civil society all co-shape public discourse. Unfortunately, much contemporary discourse on integration brings with it

assumptions that migrants have not yet “really arrived” or not become “members of the society” yet. These are dangerous assumptions that may fuel racism and polarization. Therefore, not only is it highly important for researchers, but also policy makers and policy users, to ask themselves: what happens when some people are evaluated in terms of their “integration” and others are not (Schinkel 2018)? It is crucial to be aware of, and self-critical about, whether current policies and the way we talk and think about “immigrant integration” risk contributing to knowledge that divide people into separate groups where some are seen as more deserving of certain resources than others. For this specific report, “integration” is used to describe the process of building a life in a new place and the centrality of housing in this process.

Next, we present the added value of choosing activists as stakeholders for this specific MERGING workshop. This is followed by a theoretical section on why housing justice is important and the challenges to achieve it. In this section, we also present some relevant results from previous MERGING reports. We then go on to outline the methodology of the workshop, the process of carrying out the workshop, and the results. The concluding section consists of a discussion on how we can understand these results, how they can be organized in thematic areas and lastly formulated as recommendations.

1.1 Why activists?

Activists are here defined as people organised collectively with certain social and political aims related to access to decent housing and the right to the city. Activists are a form of social movement actors and thus potential creators of social change. Social movements aim at, or resist, fundamental changes of society, inevitably affecting given power structures. Activists are thus actors who engaged not only in social but also in political struggles (Rucht, 2023).

The reasons behind choosing activists as the main stakeholders for this specific workshop, or online forum as we formally called it, are several. Firstly, we consider activists to be important stakeholders in society, not the least when it comes to issues of societal change and efforts to create a more just society, which are central aims of MERGING.

Secondly, activists have not yet been involved as stakeholders in MERGING and can thus represent an added value to the project and its results. Focusing on this new group of stakeholders in the workshop enables us to approach a more complete picture of the barriers and possible solutions to housing challenges in relation to migration.

Thirdly, since the topic and aim of the workshop according to the MERGING Grant Agreement was to “come up with new ideas and innovations for progressive governance solutions”, activists can be considered a well-suited group. Activists are known for being radical thinkers and innovative practitioners; activists’ strengths and abilities are to think and act counter hegemonically, meaning they can create visionary ideas of another better world where justice, equality, anti-racism and

feminism can thrive (Hansen 2019). Activists' perspectives ought therefore to be considered highly relevant for MERGING and the project's overall results.

In Social Movement scholarship, activists are commonly defined as people who work politically in extra-parliamentarian groups and networks in their free time beyond a "normal day job". Examples of such activists are Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (PAH; Platform for People Affected by Mortgages), a Spanish grassroots organization that takes direct action to stop evictions and campaigns for housing rights (González, 2019). Another example is Refugees Welcome International which is a network of various local Refugees Welcome organizations located in various countries in Europe where volunteers are engaged. This network has the shared mission of providing private accommodations for refugees and the aims of "fostering exchange between refugees and locals, combatting discrimination and prejudice, and supporting refugees and asylum seekers in the establishment of local social networks (<https://www.refugees-welcome.net/about-us/>). This can be seen in this video created by Refugees Welcome: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uEnsmZ3YESs&t=81s>.

However, we concluded that it may be difficult, for various reasons, to only recruit these kind of extra-parliamentarian activists and volunteers. One reason would be that they may not be able to devote time for this kind of online workshop conducted daytime during normal working hours. Another potential reason is that the more radical flanks of activists may not find participating in a workshop financed by the European Union to be in line with their political ideology and aims. Extra-parliamentarian housing activists, such as those in PAH, are commonly categorized as "radical" in the social movement literature: composed of individuals who believe in revolutionary, left-libertarian solutions, inspired by several left-radical outlooks such as syndicalism, anarchism, communism, and autonomous Marxism (Jämte, 2013). Due to the potential obstacles described above, we decided to broaden the understanding of "activists" to also include those who are employed in certain organisations and advocacy groups who work with issues related to housing justice. One example is the Swedish Unions of Tenants (Hyresgästföreningen) that work for the rights of tenants in Sweden.

Hence, the activists recruited for the workshop do not only work with the issue of housing for people categorized as "migrants" or "refugees", or newcomers, which is the focus of MERGING. Activists engaged in housing justice issues will most probably have worked together with newcomers in this struggle, but not exclusively, since housing shortage and injustices is not something only affecting newcomers but all people in vulnerable conditions.

Activist scenes share some similarities with the NGO sector. As shown in a previous MERGING report (Bousiou and Spehar 2021), NGOs play an important role in housing and integration policies and practices. NGOs and grass roots initiatives by activists, as those exemplified in this report, offer flexibility and locally adapted approaches and responses to the increasing need for housing for newcomers (especially since 2015). NGOs and social movement organisations contribute to integration processes and fill governmental gaps in providing housing for newcomers. During the workshop, several activists shared a frustration over this fact, saying that it should ideally be the responsibility of

public and state authorities to provide housing for newcomers, not activists and the third sector. However, when governmental institutions show either an unwillingness or incapacity to act and provide housing, activists feel forced to act. Activist initiatives nevertheless contribute to important and not seldom life-changing support for newcomers in the process of organising and accessing housing. Housing is not only a home to live in, but about being part of a community, learning the language and familiarizing with the culture and building social relationships. NGOs, and even more so activist organisations, commonly rely on scarce resources and individuals' good will and unpaid commitment which limit their possibilities to create long term projects.

1.2 Why housing justice?

Housing is a fundamental part of our everyday lives. It impacts other opportunities in life such as work, education, health, and social life. Housing thus constitutes a key pathway for newcomers' dignity, inclusion, and a good life.

Scholars show how the lack of affordable housing and housing shortage is a result of a neoliberal market-oriented and profit-first approach in housing policies and urban restructuring. In addition, migration policies and regulations, coupled with the lack of political will and the existence of discriminatory practices among authorities and housing providers, constitute obstacles for newcomers' access to housing. The MERGING public report on multilevel governance of refugee housing in Europe D7.1 (Bousiou and Spehar 2021), shows how housing markets in Europe are difficult to navigate for refugees due to the high cost of housing, scarce availability of housing in the larger cities and frequently discrimination. Lack of housing, a severe problem in itself, also prohibits refugees from accessing other social services.

Despite multiple structural and political obstacles for newcomers to access affordable and decent housing, people from the civil society, such as activists, are nevertheless finding ways to support them and finding solutions in this process. Two examples are opening squats and welcoming newcomers at home.

In Sweden there is a general lack of housing. However, it is important to point out that it is not the housing market that suffers from this general lack of housing. Rather, we see a housing market that creates housing shortage for some groups (Boverket, 2023; Listerborn, 2018), namely low-income groups which include, among others, newcomers, students, elders, and single-parent households (especially mother-only households).

Housing under neoliberalism (financial capitalism) has gone through extensive changes. Neoliberalism refers here to political economic practices that produce a series of contemporary projects of capital accumulation through reduction of state services (health, education, housing) and workers' rights, as well as through processes of privatisation, deregulation, the lessening of restrictions on business operations, and the increasing of public-private partnerships (Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Harvey,

2005). Beyond being referred to as a series of projects for reorganising capital accumulation that indicate a shift from the welfare state to the logics of the market, neoliberalism should also be understood as a specific form of political rationality: it is a particular form of governance that constitutes individuals and institutions in compliance with the norms of the market, producing individualised subjects responsible for their own well-being—or misery (Brown, 2015). Individualism, entrepreneurialism, competition, and freedom of choice are central values of neoliberalism (Sager, 2015).

Housing has been deregulated and commodified in this context of market economy and neoliberal policies. It can thus be argued that housing in a market economy is not produced and distributed to provide all people with a roof over their heads, but as a commodity to create economic profit. From this perspective, the shortage of housing and the consequent higher prices of housing found in Spain, Sweden, France, and Italy are not the result of a failing system, but of a system functioning properly (Madden & Marcuse, 2016). This report, building on the results from the stakeholder workshop, therefore relies on a crucial and urgent critique of this system.

James et al.(2022) explains housing inequality as a direct or indirect consequence of the functioning of housing markets, based on four main mechanisms: (1) governments and markets fail to adopt fair housing policies; (2) the tension in housing policy measures between treating housing as a home or as an investment object; (3) people’s precarious conditions on the private rental market, and (4) a geographically uneven distribution of housing, which means, for example, that there is a shortage of housing where labour market opportunities are available (commonly larger urban areas).

Since the contemporary housing system as described above does not wish to create housing justice, or is not able to do it, it is necessary to either find ways of changing the system, or to find solutions beyond this system. This is arguably what activists are trying to do when they mobilize in social movements for social change.

2. Work performed

2.1 Methodology of the workshop

The workshop was presented as a platform for knowledge exchange and creative co-creation of new ideas, at the intersection of policy, practice, research, civil society initiatives and activism related to housing. The aim of the workshop was three-fold and formulated as follows:

- 1 Knowledge sharing and learning of good practices
- 2 Increased awareness of challenges and possible solutions

- 3 To document outputs, such as possible solutions for countering problems related to newcomers' (and other vulnerable groups') integration through housing, for dissemination among the civil society, politicians, and practitioners

We reached out to activists in Sweden, Spain, Italy, and France since these countries are the ones represented in MERGING. We asked the activists to participate and share with us their experiences and knowledges of working actively with housing justice on the ground. The questions asked in the recruitment process were:

- How do you work in practice to support newcomers to access housing?
- Do you have experiences of temporary or permanent housing solutions for newcomers that were successful?
- What are the barriers you face in supporting newcomers in their access to decent housing?

To devise innovative solutions for integration challenges through housing by means of an online forum, we drew on some features from design thinking (Janik-Hornik & Lipczak, 2019; Liedtka et al., 2017; Pachocka & Proczek, 2020), in combination with common features of general workshop methods such as facilitating inclusive discussions through creating small groups. We considered different possible group compositions to find a proper balance between comfort (language for instance) and necessary links between people to create constructive and efficient discussions. We eventually decided to have the group discussions organised by country, to create comfort and easy communication.

Design thinking involves the use of non-linear, iterative processes aimed at better understanding a given problem or situation, and subsequently challenge current assumptions, redefine problems and arrive at innovative solutions. This often requires thinking “outside the box”, a change in thinking and in the perception of the issue in question. Design thinking can thus serve as a useful framework to identify, address, and attempt to solve a variety of problems, including those related to the integration of newcomers (Pachocka & Proczek 2020, 142).

The design thinking methodology was not meant to be implemented very strictly but rather to function as a guide in organizing the workshop structure and process. The goal was to encourage participants to reflect on integration challenges through housing based on their experiences of activism and explore creative, innovative solutions. Design thinking is a human- and user-oriented method that is commonly applied throughout the entire design process. It assumes that the central point of the design process is the person – the recipient or beneficiaries – for whom the result of the design work is dedicated. This commonly presupposes the active participation of the beneficiaries in the workshop process. This was not the case in this workshop since it focused on housing activists that support people in need of housing. However, activists engaged in housing struggles may be newcomers themselves and/or with past experiences of the complexities of accessing housing. All activists, whether they are newcomers themselves or not, have valuable practical experiences of working closely with newcomers (and other local population) in need of housing and with problem solving together with newcomers related to the

lack of access to (decent) housing. The workshop thus explored the participants' (activists) experiences of co-creating direct actions, campaigns, and other political struggles together with the people in need of housing. Some of the recruited activists for the workshop had personal experiences of migration and therefore felt strongly connected to the difficulties and challenges that newcomers face in their country.

Furthermore, design thinking combines divergent thinking, which relies on "searching for multiple solutions to the same problem, generating original ideas and their different variants, and convergent thinking, whose role is to choose and adjust the best solution" (Pachocka & Proczek 2020, 145). In each country or context, activists may have used and tried different solutions to one and the same general problem. This may inspire the activist in other contexts who are used to other specific solutions.

2.2 The workshop

The workshop took place on 22 September 2023 at 10:00-13:00 on Zoom. The online form facilitated the active participation of activists from various distant geographical places (Sweden, Spain, France, Italy) in an ecologically responsible way. It was decided early in the planning process to invite only 2-3 activists per country and have in total approximately 10 participants, which is an ideal group size for enabling fruitful engagement, interaction, and maintaining focus.

The participants of the workshop represented the following organizations:

- PAH (Plataforma de Afectadas por la Hipoteca (<https://afectadosporlahipoteca.com/>),
- Provivienda (<https://www.provivienda.org/>),
- The Swedish Union of Tenants (<https://www.hyresgastforeningen.se/var-politik/hyresgasternas-val/>),
- Agape (<https://www.agapegoteborg.se/>),
- Movimento Identità Trans (<https://mit-italia.it/>)
- Refugees Welcome Italia (<https://refugees-welcome.it/>)
- CUM (Coordination Urgence Migrants, <https://www.coordination-urgence-migrants.org/>),

Christina Hansen (author of the report) was the main organiser of the workshop. Thibault Simonet, an expert in social change methodologies, was the main facilitator and co-organiser of the workshop. Co-facilitators were Virginia Signorini, Morena Cuconato, Anne-Cecile de Giacomoni, Jorge Velasco-Mengod, and Carles Xavier Simó-Noguera. The task of the co-facilitators was to take notes of the participants' experiences and ideas as shared in the small group discussions carried out per country, and to facilitate, if necessary, the discussions.

To enable and encourage activity and creativity among the workshop participants, the collaborate online platform Miro (<https://miro.com/>) was used. Miro is a digital "whiteboard" where remote people can think, collaborate, and work together. Since a couple of the participants did not master the English language, we recruited an interpreter service for the workshop. The participants were

encouraged to think creatively and radically concerning ideas and possible solutions to the problems and challenges that we see in relation to the struggle for housing.

Some days before the forum, all participants wrote a short presentation of themselves that were shared among all participants together with the detailed agenda of the workshop (see Figure 1). This enabled the participants to get to know each other a little before the forum and become well acquainted with the purpose and content of the workshop. The presentations allowed us to use our three hours more efficiently by not dedicating time to participants' oral presentations during the workshop. The participants were invited to comment on the report before completion and submission.

Figure 1. Detailed Agenda of the Activist Online Forum (see next page)

| Activist Online Forum | | | | | |
|--|-------|--|---|---|--|
| Participants 11 activists in total from Italy, Sweden, France and Spain who are involved in the issue of housing for newcomers or other vulnerable groups. | | Facilitation Thibault Simonet, Cota Christina Hansen, UGOT | | Organization *Friday, 22nd of September 2023 *From 10:00-13:00 (10 am-1pm) *Online (Zoom) | |
| | | | | Objectives The aim of the workshop is three-fold 1) Knowledge sharing and learning of good practices 2) Increased awareness of challenges and possible solutions 3) To document outputs, such as possible solutions for countering problems related to newcomers' (and other vulnerable groups') integration through housing, for dissemination among the civil society, politicians, and practitioners. | |
| Step | Time | Duration | Subject | Objective | Explication |
| 1 | 10.00 | 10 minutes | Introduction | Welcoming the participants Starting the workshop | *Christina welcomes the participants and introduces the forum: Why activists ? *Thibault introduces the design of the forum: aim, methodology, process, and expected results. *Each person is invited to express their mood and their main expectation for this forum. *Thibault takes notes on the Miro board. |
| 2 | 10.10 | 20 minutes | Definitions of key terms/concepts | Sharing our different understanding of key terms in activism and MERGING | *Christina or Thibault asks the following questions: /What does "social change" and "innovation" mean to you in the context of housing solutions for newcomers? /What do we associate with these words? *Participants can write down their ideas directly on Miro, and Thibault summarizes and organizes their contributions. |
| 3 | 10.30 | 45 minutes | Examples of practices based on personal experiences | Sharing knowledge and increase awareness within the national context | *Each participant works individually for 15 minutes. *First, each person reflects on the following 3 questions: 1. What experiences do you have of projects/actions/initiatives that involved short and/or long-term housing solutions for newcomers and/or vulnerable groups in general? 2. What challenges did you meet? 3. What changes do you see necessary for these housing projects/actions/initiatives to have an impact on a larger scale? *Each person can put down their remarks on the Miro board, for example by writing keywords, bullet points, or whole sentences. *After 15 minutes, the groups gathers by country (or any other option, if there is only one person representing one or several countries), and each participant shares and explains their experience (during approx. 30 min). |
| 11.15 | | 15 minutes | BREAK | | |
| 4 | 11.30 | 30 minutes | Possible solutions | Discussing in small groups on possible solutions for the identified problems/challenges | *Each group meet again and tries to come up with potential ways forward/solutions – creatively and visionary – to the previously identified problems/challenges concerning housing for newcomers and/or other vulnerable groups. *To do so, each group chose one or two examples discussed in the previous sequence as a basis for discussions, and put down their ideas of solutions on the Miro board. |
| 5 | 12.00 | 45 minutes | Ideas for the future | Knowledge sharing and increased awareness across national contexts | *All the groups come back in plenary. *Each group presents its ideas and solutions ; the other participants can ask questions, add suggestions, express a disagreement, bring a shade, and so on. *Thibault or Christina takes notes on Miro, in order to organize the contributions in relevant "blocks". |
| 6 | 12.45 | 15 minutes | Conclusion | Summing-up and identifying new perspectives | *Thibault summarizes what has been done during the forum, and highlights the main findings. *Thibault identifies connections across contexts and/or differences and specificities. *Each person is invited to comment and complete their summary. *At the end, each participant is invited to identify one thing they will bring with them from the forum, and to share it with the group (it can be a concept, a solution, a contact, an emotion, and so on). |
| 13.00 | | END OF THE FORUM | | | |

Work principles : Sharing experiences, listening to others, trying to establish links between people and challenges, exploring potential solutions.

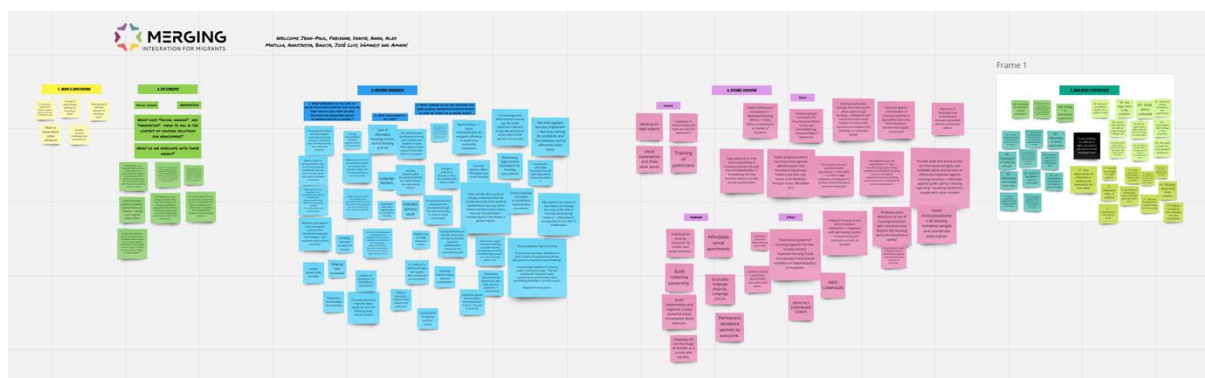
The forum's design was as follows (please see detailed agenda in Figure 1): It started with a welcoming and a short reminder of the workshop's aim and design (step 1). This was followed by a brainstorm and warming up activity (step 2) of defining two central concepts of the MERGING project and of activism, namely "innovation" and "social change". Innovation is an explicit term of MERGING, while social change is an implicit term. Activists always strive towards some kind of social change like increased justice and equality; however, "innovation" is a less common term in activists' circles. Therefore, discussing these two concepts, in the context of housing solutions for newcomers, enabled the sharing of our different understandings, associations and definitions on them.

Step 3 aimed at sharing knowledge and contribute to increased awareness of practical examples based on personal experiences. Each participant worked individually for 15 minutes reflecting on the following questions: 1. What experiences do you have of projects/actions/initiatives that involved short and/or long-term housing solutions for newcomers and/or vulnerable groups in general? 2. What challenges did you meet? 3. What changes do you see necessary for these housing projects/actions/initiatives to have an impact on a larger scale?

After individual reflection, the participants gathered in groups by country where each participant shared and explained their experiences and examples.

Step 4 consisted of a continued discussion in the small groups but now focusing on possible solutions on the identified problems and challenges. This was followed by a plenary where the groups shared their ideas and possible solutions. Figure 2 below shows what the Miro Board looked like, zoomed out, when the workshop was completed. The participants engaged actively by writing on digital sticky notes on the digital whiteboard.

Figure 2. Overview of the Miro board after completion of the workshop.



2.3 A self-critical note

We are aware that the format of an online workshop has its limits. Three hours may seem too little consider the big questions discussed, but the longer duration the more difficult to recruit participants. The disadvantages of the online format are usually the lack of face-to-face interaction, the difficulty of staying motivated, and technical issues. The workshop included participants from different countries

and organisations which means they represented civil society from various and different political, legal, and administrative contexts. Please consider this when reading the results section. For more information on the governance of housing for newcomers in Sweden, France, Italy and Spain, please see Bousiou and Spehar (2021). The results as formulated in this report are not necessarily contextualized, but presented in a general and generic format, which may be relevant to different country contexts.

Since some participants did not master the English language, we had recruited an interpreter service. Having simultaneous interpretation during the plenary discussions may have obstructed an easy understanding and communication between participants.

Considering the resources available and the general difficulties in recruiting participants in an international context, we nevertheless found this format of the workshop to be the most appropriate. And despite the challenges that usually come with these forms of international forums, the organisers, and co-facilitators considered the process and outcome of the workshop to be constructive and positive.

3. Results

One important and instant result of the forum was that it enabled knowledge sharing among activists from different organisations and countries, which potentially inspired further, or even new ways of, organising. The forum also enabled awareness raising and knowledge sharing with the researchers and members involved in MERGING that participated during the forum as facilitators.

Next, we will present the results according to the different relevant steps of the workshop (steps 2-5). This is followed by a section with a discussion on how we can summarise and understand these results as connected to some of the previous research presented in the introduction of this report.

3.1 Definition of key terms: innovation and social change

Quotes by participants:

I'm very uncomfortable with the word innovation. Decision makers love it. It's necessary to "innovate" to obtain funds.

Many [projects] just replicate old manuals and protocols that really don't produce the change that they should be producing: really *challenging* inequalities.

Yes, it's necessary to innovate, but these innovations must have a true purpose to make a social change - *real* social change. We need *real* political commitment to change the system.

"Innovation" is not only trendy but also scary. What is actually innovation? What are you doing that is innovative?"

Innovation and social change are really related. One of the solutions is to change our traditional approach in which there is not enough relations with local people: Reinforcing links and connections with local people.

In Spain we understand that we need innovation, we need a radical change and a radical political commitment. The narrative of the far right is terrible. We see evictions, deaths, terrible situations.

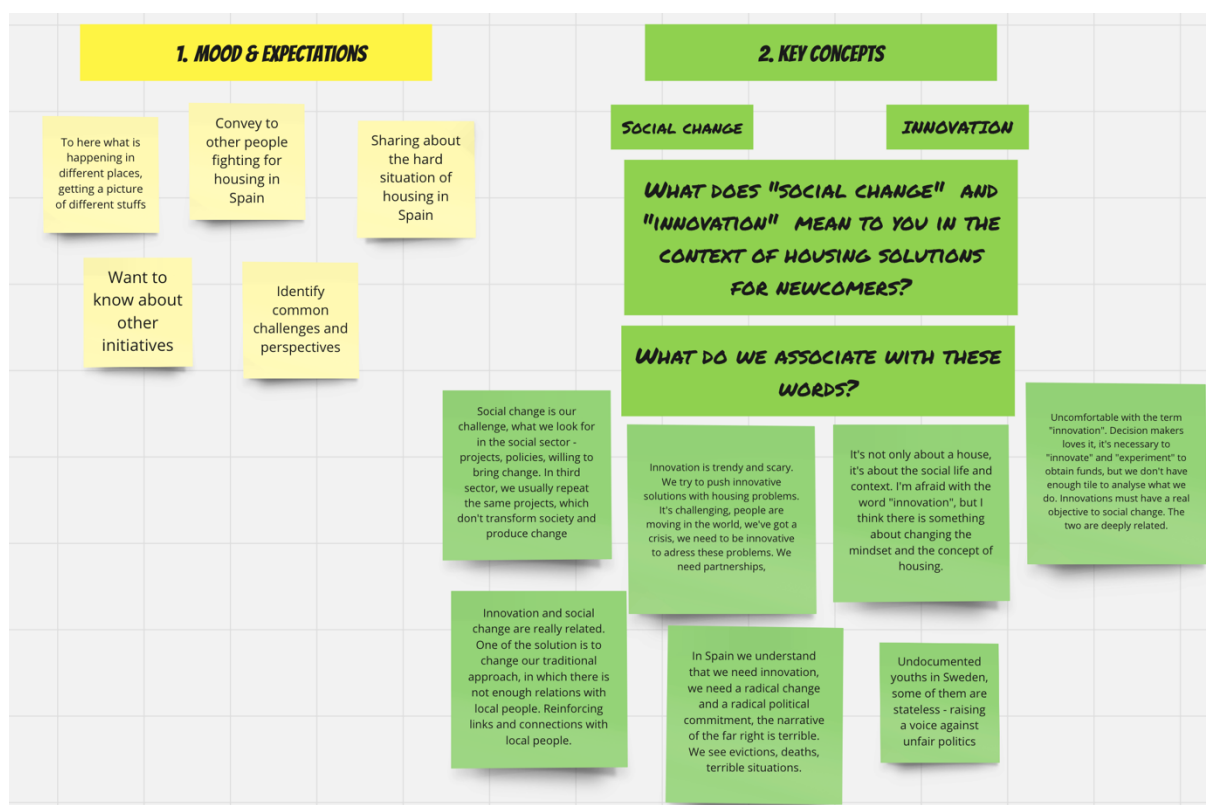
Social change is our challenge and what we look for in the social sector; projects and policies willing to bring change. In the third sector, we usually repeat the same projects, which don't transform society and produce change.

Domestic housing is an innovative model that can help refugees with real connections with local people.

Drawing on the above quotes made by participants during the workshop, we can conclude that there are different but interrelated understandings and definitions of “innovation” and “social change”. Critical voices were raised towards the concept of innovation as representing empty words, yet necessary to use in projects to obtain funds. Some self-critical perspectives were also shared saying that although social change is the aim of the activists’ work, it is very difficult to achieve, being caught up in a feeling of only “repeating the same projects without transforming society”. Hence, social change was arguably defined in the discussions as a process that radically transforms society and the system. This can be understood as: having projects and activities that have an impact only on the individual level – for example providing temporary shelter to individuals – does not contribute to “real” social change in terms of challenging the unequal order on the structural and systemic level.

In one of the quotes by a participant from Spain (although similar experiences were shared by the activists from the other countries) it is possible to discern a sense of despair and urgency concerning the situation of housing for newcomers and other people in vulnerable conditions.

Figure 3. Miro board with sticky notes from step 1 and 2 of the workshop.



3.2 Examples of practices

The activists represented a variety of organizations and activities across the four countries Spain, Sweden, Italy, and France. The organisations applied different methods and implemented different kind of projects and activities in accordance with their ideological foundations, which varied among the organisations. For example, some organisations use more radical tactics such as direct action and squatting (these terms are explained below), and other use methods that are not considered confrontational, such as housing newcomers in your own home. Below, each organisation is presented briefly.

Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (PAH; Platform for People Affected by Mortgages) is a Spanish grassroots organization that takes direct action to stop evictions and campaigns for housing rights. Direct action is a common method applied by social movements. As the term indicates, direct action is an immediate implementation of something without intermediaries. The achievement may be temporary or fragile, but it does not involve intermediaries. Hence, through direct action, a group (or individual) “uses their own power to prevent an injustice or supply a good, as opposed to appealing to an external agent” (Gordon, 2018, p. 529).

Provivienda (<https://www.provivienda.org/>) is a non-profit organization that works for social and residential inclusion across Spain, promoting the right to housing since 1989. Among other things, Provivienda coordinate social programs aimed at the reception and integration of asylum seekers and refugees.

The Swedish Union of Tenants (hyresgastforeningen.se) is one of Sweden's largest grassroots movements. They organize tenants and fight for everyone's right to a good home at a reasonable cost. They do this by, among other things, offering legal advice, opinion work, and negotiating rents with landlords. Their main struggle today in Sweden is related to the struggle to stop the introduction of market rents in the country.

Agape (<https://www.agapegoteborg.se/>) is a voluntary organisation in Gothenburg, Sweden, working for the right to housing for unaccompanied and undocumented children and youth. The organisation runs ten accommodations. Agape primarily supports young migrants who were age-assessed to be 18 or older, thus disqualified from institutional support.

MIT (Movimento Identità Trans, <https://mit-italia.it/>) in Bologna, Italy, works with migrants' inclusion, rights, and empowerment. They focus on migrants who identify with the LGBTQI+ community. Among other things, they aim to empower trans and gender-non-conforming refugees focusing on job opportunities, housing and education.

Refugees Welcome Italia (<https://refugees-welcome.it/>) is part of the Refugees Welcome International Network operating in 12 countries and promoting the social inclusion of migrants and refugees through family-based reception and mentoring.

CUM (Coordination Urgence Migrants, <https://www.coordination-urgence-migrants.org/>) is an association that bring together various associations and committed citizens who work with newcomers in the Lyon area. CUM fights with the public authorities so that, instead of leaving houses and buildings vacant, these buildings are the subject of "precarious occupation agreements" so that these vacant houses can accommodate and house people who are otherwise homeless, especially newcomers. CUM thus uses the method of squatting which is an action of occupying an abandoned or unoccupied building, usually residential, that the squatter does not own, rent, or otherwise have lawful permission to use.

One workshop participant worked in a university in Lyon where she coordinates programmes for students under international protection and asylum seekers.

3.2.1 Challenges

Challenges that the activists see and experience in their work are multiple and diverse. Some challenges were described from the perspective of the difficulties they meet in their own work (internal factors) such as shortcomings in their own organisational structures and activism. One example is that their “solutions” are commonly temporary and short-term, which also research shows (see, e.g., Hansen, 2019). For example, hosting newcomers in your own home is burdensome for the hosts, it gives the newcomers a lack of privacy and freedom and puts them in a position of dependency on the host. Also squatting is a short-term solution, and it may be violent in character and cause traumatic experiences for beneficiaries and associations that support them.

Other challenges were described as those found beyond their own organisational structures (external factors), such as different forms of institutional oppression and barriers (some examples are described below).

Furthermore, some challenges were described as found on an inter-personal level, such as in everyday communication and how to organise a diverse set of people of whom many do not share the same language. Other challenges were described from the perspective of conflicts with public or private institutions who hindered the activists in their work of providing shelter for newcomers and other people in vulnerable conditions. Some challenges were described as concerning systemic and political levels.

For example, in Sweden, the activists expressed a sense of a severe backlash, considering the contemporary liberal-conservative (supported by the far-right Sweden Democrats) government’s continued dismantling of the welfare system and anti-immigration propositions. Furthermore, the Swedish activists experience that journalists are lacking in their ability to pose the necessary critical questions to politicians, concerning their decisions that put more, not less, people in vulnerable conditions.

Also, in Italy the government is right-wing and implementing anti-immigrant laws and policies. The challenges as shared by the activists in Italy can be summarised with “high housing costs on the private market, few possibilities for social housing, informal contracts, discrimination and racism”. They also expressed a need and a yearning for the moral and emotional support of their activism from the local population.

One Italian activists also expressed the opinion that, ideally, the solutions to the problems discussed in this workshop should not come from activists or the third sector, but from those in power. It should be the responsibility of the state to solve problems because that’s where the resources are. As already mentioned, activist do not have any funds or resources (if they do the money is commonly conditioned by the giver and short-term). In the Swedish case it is also very clear that the support directed to people in vulnerable conditions is perceived as a responsibility of the state. Consequently, it is seen as a failure if the third sector must step in and cover up for the state’s shortcomings. In both Italy and Sweden, the governments are implementing ever more restrictive migration policies and de-regulations of the housing market, which research shows create increased segregation, income inequalities, and more people ending up outside or in the peripheries of the housing market, thus leading to ever more needs and requests for support from below.

Many participants were critical of the free market that enables the use of houses as speculation objects rather than homes, in line with the research-based discussion in the introduction. Also, the power of private real estate actors was highlighted as very problematic. As one French activist put it: “the right to owning always wins over *using* them”, a statement made in relation to their work of trying to open up empty houses to be used by those who need it.

3.3 Possible solutions

Here follows a selection of solutions, some of which are formulated as rather concrete measures, proposed during the workshop. We have tried to organise the results from the discussion on solutions according to the areas that they relate to 1) the housing market, 2) migration and integration, 3) racism, 4) inclusion, democracy and empowerment.

[Measures related to the housing market](#)

The measures discussed related to the housing market revolved mostly around the urgency and necessity of government-imposed restriction and regulations of the housing market in order to increase the affordable housing stock. Examples of measures discussed were legislating against the commodification and financialisation of housing, to regulate real estate companies’ profits, to regulate housing prices, and to prevent or stop rent increases. In many large cities around the world, housing is becoming increasingly commodified and regarded as an asset, rather than a social good. People buy real estate with speculative motives, and not with intentions to create a home. Related is the suggestion to avoid refurbishment of rental housing since this may lead to renoviction. This is the term

used to describe the eviction of tenants on the grounds that large-scale renovations are planned. Renovation of housing can be seen as part of a commodifying process most often contributing to housing inequality (Polanska et al., 2022).

Other suggestion put forward during the workshop was to implement policies that demands private real estate investors to build a share of social housing or affordable rental housing and to give access to long-term vacant dwellings. This would enable the building of, and transformation of already existing, properties into affordable housing and/or social housing. Another suggestion is to implement a legal framework that gives public administration pre-eminence (vs. private real estate companies) when purchasing dwellings.

Some concrete measures put forward to contribute to increases housing justice is to create a National Housing Fund to guarantee funds for people without means. This could help to prevent and avoid evictions as much as possible. Another potential solution is to build collective ownership in housing and start building alternative lasting ownership structures beyond free market principles and exclusive housing policies.

Lastly, it was suggested to de-criminalize housing squatting of vacant dwellings in situations of extreme and urgent social needs.

Measures concerning migration policies and integration

A shortage of affordable housing affects most of all people who live in socially, economically, and legally precarious conditions, such as low-income households, immigrants, and undocumented migrants. Therefore, it is not surprising that several measures discussed concern newcomers specifically, and migration and integration policies more generally. It was suggested to introduce permanent residence permits to all newcomers and to ensure the right to housing also to undocumented migrants. It is also crucial to increase legal and administrative security: for example, municipal registration cannot depend on the will and level of information of the specific civil servant.

Furthermore, it is desirable to transform accommodation systems for refugees from isolated centres into housing solutions in the community. However, in doing this, it is important to not concentrate people facing multiple discrimination in certain poorer areas of the city, as this would contribute to ghettoization and stigmatisation. Rather, it is necessary to place newcomers in diverse neighbourhoods with residents of multiple social backgrounds to enable the building of social relationships with inhabitants of various backgrounds.

One group of people that also commonly have great difficulties to access the housing market are seasonal employees (labour migrants). One solution could be to create a legal framework that oblige the employer to provide decent housing to the employees.

Finally, in order to effectively empower newcomers against housing exclusion, it is important that institutions provide wide and accessible information of available rights and services. And to promote

early detection of risk of housing exclusion with social services before the housing exclusion becomes a reality.

Measures concerning contemporary anti-immigrant sentiments and racism

One feature of contemporary European societies that particularly concerned the activists was the ever-increasing anti-immigrant sentiments and racism coupled with the rise and establishment of far-right governments, parties, and organisations in various European countries. There is an urgent need to change the contemporary narrative of “migrants”: migrants are not “our” enemies. They deserve and should have the right to decent lives as anyone else. Instead, local people, institutions and politicians must create a narrative of solidarity. Simultaneously, these same people and institutions must fight against racist sentiments among the local population and against far-right governments, parties, and organisations.

Furthermore, it is necessary to legislate against discrimination and harassment in terms of access to housing. This to avoid the problem where landlords fear renting houses to newcomers or their unwillingness due to racist motives. One possible solution to prevent that newcomers are discriminated against in the housing market is to implement rental intermediation: Associations rent directly from private landlords and then rent to newcomers, acting as official intermediaries between the private landlord and the migrants. Rental intermediation would thus act as a firewall against racism and exclusion.

Measures concerning increased inclusion, democracy and empowerment

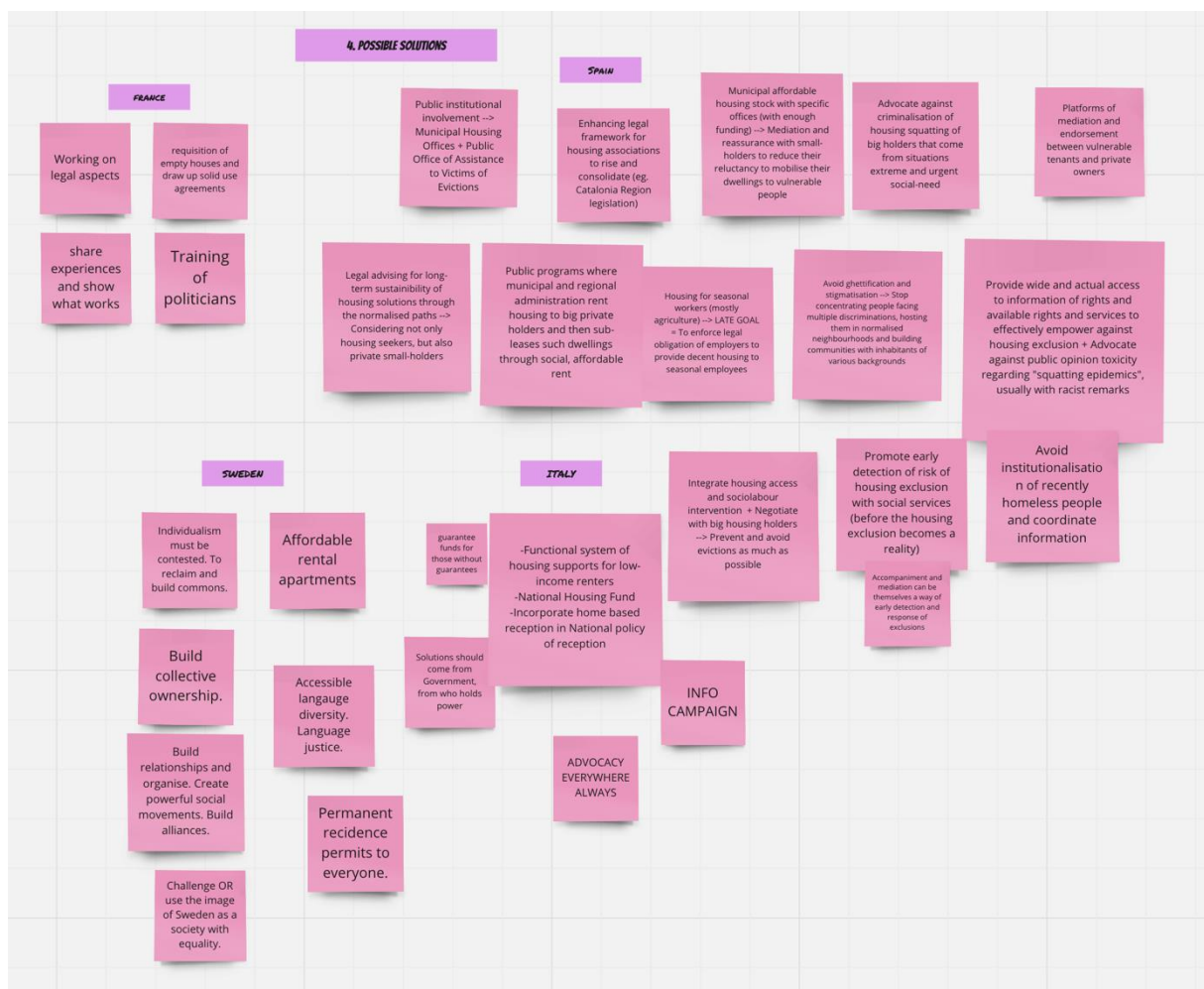
Several discussions on possible solutions revolved around measures to increase newcomers’ inclusion and empowerment, and in that way contribute to increased democracy in general terms. It is important to give voice to those concerned and to strive for newcomers’ self-representation. This to avoid potential paternalism between privileged activists or third sector actors on the one hand and racialised and de-privileged newcomers on the other hand. By giving voice to those concerned we contribute to an increasingly democratic public. One way of giving voice is to create large assemblies among the local population. This shows the importance of building social relationships and to organise politically, to create powerful social movements, build alliances across organisations and movements, and to join forces on the European level. It is also desirable with legal frameworks for local housing associations to rise and consolidate (e.g. Catalonia Region legislation). By networking with other organizations for the right to housing it is possible to grow stronger with more possibilities of political impact.

An important factor to contribute to newcomers’ inclusion is to ensure digital and language accessibility to administrative procedures. Another important factor is to make the administrative procedure upon newcomers’ arrival easier and faster. Regarding access to higher education, it is necessary to make it easier for young newcomers to enrol at the university and benefit from the rooms, meals, grants and support available to students.

As mentioned already above, but worth mentioning again here concerning increased inclusion, is the building of platforms of mediation and endorsement between vulnerable tenants and private owners.

Throughout this report, based on the results from the activist workshop, we can see a strong desire for political change. This change should not be understood only as a change of the political establishment, but also of the citizenry and third sector actors. A fundamental and lasting social change requires a change throughout the whole society, as mentioned above regarding sentiments and structures. It would require a resistance against the ideology of individualism and neoliberalism, to denounce racism publicly and formally, and to reclaim and build commons. It is also important to provide more training to elected representative for them to dare to take risks.

Figure 4. Miro board with sticky notes from step 4 of the workshop: possible solutions.



4. Conclusion: how can we understand these results?

The overall takeaway from the discussion in the workshop is that the situation is alarming for many people in Spain, Italy, Sweden and France. Most of the discussions in the workshop conveyed a sense of despair and critical urgency of the issue. Activists' insider experiences on the ground tell us how severe the housing situation is for many people and that there are many people that suffer from precarity on the housing market, homelessness, racism, discrimination, and restrictive migration policies.

As mentioned earlier in this report, the added value of activists' experiences and knowledges on the issue of housing are their capacity of critical thinking and questioning of the current unjust order. They do not fear political confrontation and repression but are driven by a relentless wish to create a place where all people making up the social fabric of that place (including migrants in precarious social and legal conditions) can live a decent life.

The activists concerns and suggestions of possible solutions resemble much of the critical urban scholarship that shows how a neoliberal market-oriented and profit-first approach in housing policies and urban restructuring have created a housing shortage and a lack of affordable housing. There is a clear critique among the activists of the capitalist system and the deregulated housing market. Many of the solutions as proposed by the workshop participants require far-reaching changes of the economic and political system. Fundamental changes are required at the national level, through increased welfare provision and supply of social and affordable housing, as well as taxation to manage demand. Many potential solutions to the problems formulated by the activists cannot be realized within the free market logic.

Activists' experiences and knowledges further confirm the results presented by Bousiou and Spehar (2021) showing how migration policies and regulations, coupled with the lack of political will and the existence of discriminatory practices among authorities and housing providers, constitute obstacles for newcomers' access to housing.

The results from the workshop as outlined in previous section can be divided into three thematic spheres:

- Critical views on free market capitalism; the system must be changed. Housing should be a human right and not a commodity for profit. Solution: regulate the housing market.
- Creating more inclusive structures through legal frameworks. Include people in vulnerable conditions into democratic structures, local assemblies, and social movements. Implement rental intermediation
- The urgency of resisting the narratives and policies of the far-right: As one activist put it: "Many landlords are racists and the government do not want refugees".

These thematic spheres can be reformulated into straight forward recommendations, which is what we attempt to do below. These recommendations conclude the report:

1. Implement housing market regulations. Legislate against commodification of housing.
2. Create inclusive legal frameworks for newcomers and implement rental intermediation.
3. Create a narrative of solidarity with newcomers to resist racism and far-right sentiments.

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