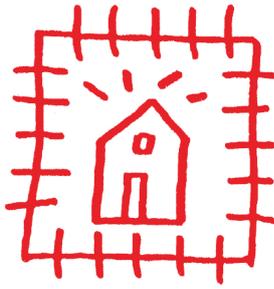


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bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft  
wohnungslosenhilfe

**Austria - National Report 2008**  
**People who are homeless can be housed**

**Christian Perl**

## Austria - National Report 2008 People who are homeless can be housed



Gefördert aus Mitteln des Bundesministeriums für Soziales und Konsumentenschutz.  
Der Inhalt des Berichts liegt in vollständiger Verantwortung der BAWO.

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## Introduction

This report follows a questionnaire FEANTSA<sup>1</sup>, the European umbrella organisation of national organisations working with the homeless, has developed to find out what housing solutions exist for people who are homeless. On the basis of different country reports, FEANTSA will produce a **European overview report**. This report will look in detail at effective approaches and initiatives to provide sustainable housing solutions for people who are homeless across Europe.

This report tries to collect the necessary information from Austrian members that are working in the area of homelessness and shelter or housing. To produce it BAWO the Austrian umbrella organisation for organisations working with the homeless has sent the questionnaire to member organisations in all Austrian regions ("Länder"). In addition we have interviewed several experts in the field of housing from ministries, local authorities and municipalities.

We want to specially thank Margareta Mahidi and Statistics Austria for providing us with the necessary statistics and information to answer the questions in chapter 1. Many thanks also to Gaby Mörk who gave us the necessary background information on Soziale Schiene in Vienna (Chapter 7). We want to specially thank Heinz Schoibl from Helix Salzburg, Thomas Wögrath from B37 and Hubert Mittermayr from Wohnplattform both Upper Austria, Silvia Hartmann and Eric Ströhle from Vorarlberg, Sepp Ginner from Verein Wohnen Lower Austria and Renate Kitzman from FAWOS in Vienna for their numerous input to the specific regions and topics.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://feantsa.horus.be/code/EN/theme.asp?ID=39>

## 1. Basic questions about housing market

% social housing of total housing stock (and give brief definition of social housing)  
 % rental housing of total stock  
 % of sub-standard housing (and give brief definition of sub-standard housing)  
 % of overcrowded housing (and give brief definition of overcrowding)  
 Housing affordability rate (and give short explanation of how it is measured)  
 Other information that might be indicative of the housing situation in your country.

### 1.1 Austria

The total housing stock in Austria in 2001 consisted of 3.858.245 dwellings<sup>2</sup>.

#### 1.1.1 Percentage social housing of total housing stock:

*Social housing is defined as dwellings in buildings owned by local authorities or by non-profit building associations.* In 2001 **one fifth of all dwellings** in Austria (19,9%) were considered social housing owned by state, Land, Commune or non-profit building association. This proportion has slightly decreased from 21,1% in 1991 to 19,9% of all stock in 2001.

**Tab 1: Percentage social housing of total housing**

Ownership	1981	1991	2001
	%		
One person as private owner	39,5	30,9	31,5
More than one person as private owners	36,4	44,4	43,1
State	1,0	0,9	0,5
Land	0,2	0,2	0,2
Commune	9,9	9,4	8,3
Non-profit building association	9,6	10,6	10,9
Other legal entity (2001:oth.enterprises)	3,3	2,9	4,3
Other public body (e.g. chamber; 1991,2001)	0,0	0,8	0,7
other owner (2001)	0,0	0,0	0,6
<b>Total</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>
	<b>% social housing of total housing</b>		
	20,8	21,1	19,9

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<sup>2</sup> Statistics Austria, census 2001: without dwellings exclusively used as doctor's surgeries, lawyer's or others small offices e.g.

### 1.1.2 Percentage rental housing of total stock:

In 2001 **38,8%** of all dwellings (1.496.463) were **rental housing** subject to the rental act or rental housing subject to the non profit act.

Half of the total housing stock in Austria (50,1%) is **owner used** (dwellings in detached houses or in residential buildings with 2 or more dwellings).

**Tab 2: Percentage of rental housing in Austria 1981 -2001**

dwelling	1981	1991	2001
	%	%	%
building proprietor's own use	40,3	41,0	38,9
freehold dwelling (owner-used)	8,8	10,7	11,2
rent (subj.to Rent Act/Dwel.Non-Profit Act)	40,2	36,9	38,8
official residence, dwel.as income in kind	4,4	3,0	2,4
other tenure (e.g. sub tenancy)	6,3	8,4	8,7
<b>Total</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>

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### 1.1.3 Percentage of overcrowded housing<sup>3</sup>

Over crowdedness defines as two or more persons living in one room. This criterion applies to many households in Austria und is a sign for hidden homelessness. In 2001 over 88.000 Austrians lived under such conditions. This approximates 1 percent of all inhabitants of Austria. The following chart derives from the census 2001 and relates to dwellings with one or two rooms (with more than 4 sq.m. and a kitchen included).

**Tab 3: overcrowded housing and persons affected**

persons per housing	dwellings with 1 or 2 rooms	rooms per Person	m <sup>2</sup> per person	number of persons
Total of 1 or 2 room housing	474.726	1,1	29,6 m <sup>2</sup>	- - - -
4 persons	13.391	0,4	12,4m <sup>2</sup>	53.564
5 persons	4.315	0,4	10,0m <sup>2</sup>	21.575
6 persons	1.332	0,3	8,4m <sup>2</sup>	7.992
7 persons	437	0,2	7,0m <sup>2</sup>	3.059
8 persons	248	0,2	5,6m <sup>2</sup>	1.984
<b>Number of inhabitants living in overcrowded housing</b>				<b>88.174</b>

<sup>3</sup> Daten der Volkszählung, 2001; in: ÖSTAT Nachrichten 8/04

### 1.1.4 Housing affordability rate<sup>4</sup>

1,3 million persons live in households with a share of housing costs higher than 25 %. This 1,3 millions were **17%** of population in private households.

The arithmetic average of equivalised housing costs in 2006 was 2.775 EUR per year. For all households the share of housing costs was 17% of the equivalised household income. In 2006 12% of the population felt their cost of housing being a high financial burden.

**Tab 4: Self-perceived financial burden of and share of housing costs in equivalised household income**

	Population in private households (expanded)	no burden		certain burden		high burden		share of housing costs >25%		housing costs <sup>5</sup>	
		in 1.000	in %	in 1.000	in %	in 1.000	in %	in 1.000	in %	arithm. average in EUR	share in % <sup>6</sup>
2.005	8.141	2.001	25	4.992	61	1.148	14	1.298	16	2.732	17
2.006	8.182	2.076	25	5.104	62	1.003	12	1.370	17	2.775	17

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### 1.1.5 Percentage of sub-standard housing and other information<sup>7</sup>:

**Standard housing:** Equipment with central heating, bathroom/shower and WC reached **90%** of dwellings (1997: 81%), 7% (1996: 13%) were equipped with bathroom/shower and WC, but had only individual stoves.

**Sub-standard housing:** The contingent of dwellings without bathroom/shower, but WC and piped water was only **0.5%** (1997: 2%), dwellings lacking WC had a contingent **of 2%** (1997: 5%).

<sup>4</sup> The housing affordability rate is not computed in Austria. Statistics Austria suggests to use the share of housing costs in equivalised household income (equivalised housing costs per year are shown as percentage of the equivalised household income per year). Housing costs: available for tenants, owners, rent-free accommodations; includes rent or mortgage interest payments, services and charges (sewage removal etc), costs of utilities (water, electricity, gas and heating).

Household income: total disposable household income as the sum of all personal income components and household income components. Equivalised: The amount is divided by the sum of person weights per household. Person weights are calculated according to the EU-scale: first person=1.0; any other person 14 years or older=0.5, children younger than 14 years=0.3.

<sup>5</sup> equivalised housing costs

<sup>6</sup> equivalised housing costs for renters and owners

<sup>7</sup> WOHNEN, Ergebnisse der Wohnungserhebung im Mikrozensus, Jahresdurchschnitt 2007, Herausgegeben von STATISTIK AUSTRIA 2008

In 2007 **91%** of dwellings were **heated** by district-, central heating operant in whole building or in dwelling (floor) and also gas convectors or built-in electric heater and 8.5% were heated by individual stoves. The relation in 1997 represented 83% to 17%.

**Average floor space** of dwellings in 2007 amounted to 98.2 sq.m., in the year 1997 only to 88.8 sq.m. The size of house owner dwellings rose with 132.8 sq.m. considerably compared with 1997 (116.5 sq.m.), the difference for tenant dwellings was marginal (68.1 sq.m. to 65.9 sq.m. in 1997).

In **35%** of the Austrian dwellings lived only **one person** (of these 43% men and 57% women), the rise compared with 1997 (30%) was considerable. In Vienna the part of single-dwellings was 46% (of these 39% persons in the age of 60 or more years).

## **1.2 Vienna<sup>8</sup>**

Vienna is by far the largest city and the capital of Austria. The city is the economic and cultural centre of the »Vienna region«. The level of household income is above the national average; the number of jobs has been declining over the last years.

The population of Vienna has been relatively stable over the last years. It stood at 1.722.800 inhabitants (2006). The total number of households has been growing in Vienna since 1996 to a level of 813,300 in 2006. The 374,000 single-person units have a share of 46.0 per cent in the total of all households (2006). On average, 2.1 persons live in each household.

One quarter of all Austrian employees work in Vienna. The number of unemployed persons in Vienna corresponds to one third of the Austrian total. The unemployment rate for Vienna is higher than for Austria (9.7 to 7.3 per cent in 2005).

In Vienna, the number of people with a migration background (foreign nationality) has been growing slightly to a share of 18.7 per cent of the total population (2006). For Austria, a share of about 9.8 per cent is registered. By far, the largest groups of migrants come from the former Republic of Yugoslavia and from Turkey.

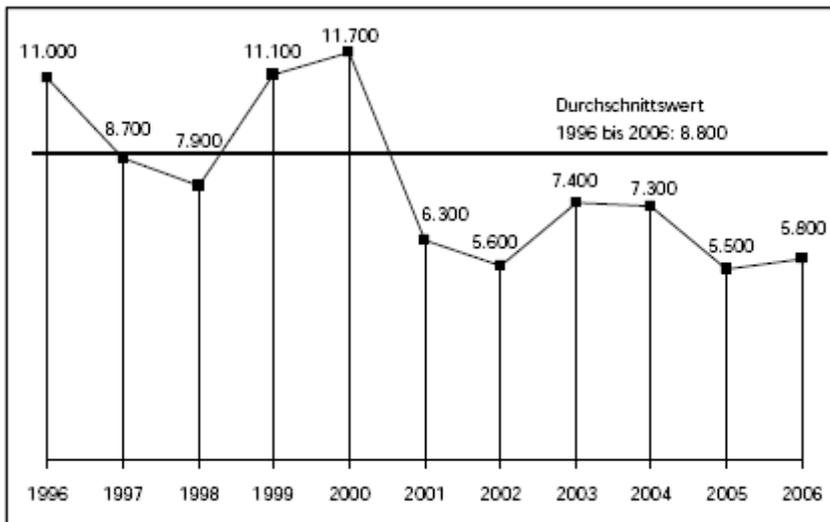
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<sup>8</sup> Housing and Housing Policies in Large Cities – Executive Summary A , Synthesis research, December 2006

The city council plays a major role in Vienna's housing policies. The annual budget for direct subsidies (new construction, renovation) has fluctuated between EUR 505 million and 735 million since 1997 (2005: EUR 568 million). The budget for **housing allowances** expanded from EUR 26 million to 76.6 million in 2005 (from 18,000 to 46,500 low-income households).

About **80 per cent of the total housing stock in Vienna is rental housing** (2005); half of this share is private rental apartments. About 360,000 units belong to the social housing sector (220,800 council housing; 140,000 of cooperative housing); about 20 per cent are either owner-occupied apartments or detached and semi-detached housing units.

**Tab 5: Development of newly constructed dwellings in Vienna 1996 -2006<sup>9</sup>**



### Synthesis Forschung

In the second half of the nineties about 10,100 annual housing units have been newly constructed in Vienna. In recent years, this number decreased to an annual average of 5,600. In 2005, about 5,500 housing units have been newly constructed.

The city council and the Vienna Land Procurement and Urban Renewal Fund (wohnfonds\_wien) are closely cooperating in the process of »soft urban renewal«. In 2005 EUR 9.353 million of public funds have been invested in subsidised renovation and modernisation of about 8,500 units of the existing housing stock.

<sup>9</sup> Synthesis Forschung, Wien, die städtische Bevölkerung und ihre Wohnversorgung, S 9

## 2. Public housing policies

What are the aims/objectives of public housing policy in relation to homelessness (if any)?

What (statutory) role for public housing policies in preventing and addressing homelessness (if any different from above)?

Which decision-making level leads on the issue of housing (local, regional, national...)?

Do housing policy makers have a leading role in addressing and preventing homelessness (in relation to policy development – not service provision!!)?

Why (not)?

What is the % of the public housing budget spent on homelessness (if you include prevention of homelessness, please specify)?

### 2.1 The **main objectives** of public housing policies in Austria today are:

- decent housing provision for the majority of the population
- Balanced provision of rent/ owner occupation
- right to buy according to consumer's choice
- reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in the housing sector

As housing policy in Austria has a **unitary approach**, the majority of the population is targeted by the housing policy measures. The share of the public effort in favour of housing is ca. 1.1 percent of the gross domestic product (2007). The financial relation between the Federal State and the Länder is established with the "revenue equalisation", which is a major political instrument in a federal State.

### 2.2 **Parties involved** in the issue of housing are:

Federal State: legislature for civil law (rent law, condominium law, "Limited Profit Housing Associations" - LPHA Law), collection of taxes, provision of taxes to the "Länder".

Länder: legislature and execution of housing promotion acts.

Municipalities: provision of low priced building land, documentation of housing need, sometimes allocation of social dwellings.

**Housing promotion (subsidies)** is in the competence and authority of the "Länder" (provinces). Their housing subsidy schemes cover aid for individuals (allowances), subsidies for bricks and mortar (object side subsidies in new construction) and subsidies for refurbishment. In the frame of the housing subsidies' system the Länder finance housing research and sometimes targeted new policies in the fight against homelessness and housing advice. The Centre for Secure Tenancy (FAWOS) and Wohndrehscheibe in Vienna (counselling for migrants in the field of housing) were established under this aspect.

**2.3** There are **two main stakeholders in addressing and preventing homelessness** in Austria. On the one hand, the **communes** organise the allocation of LPHA dwellings and administrate the allocation of municipal housing.

In **Vienna** for instance, the city owns approx. one fourth of the total housing stock in Vienna. Municipal housing in Vienna has so called "emergency dwellings", which are allocated off the usual succession<sup>10</sup>. The respective department which belongs to the housing department of the city allocates over two thousand dwellings every year to special vulnerable persons and homeless.

The other **leading role in addressing and preventing homelessness** is mainly played by the social (welfare) departments of the Länder and communes, who finance social services as well as housing for individuals in need through the social welfare budget.

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<sup>10</sup> See also chapter 7 role of social housing

### **3. Access to housing as a trigger/cause of homelessness**

Does housing play an important role in the pathways in and out of homelessness? Please explain?

Do you know of any evidence that bad/inadequate housing causes homelessness? Please explain.

Do you have evidence that homelessness increases when the housing market is stressed (or the other way around)? Please explain.

What are the most important housing related problems that lead to homelessness (if other than the above)?

Related to affordability? Please, explain.

Related to the quality? Please, explain

Related to adequacy of supply? Please, explain

Related to insecurity (e.g. anti-social behaviour, tenancy law)? Please. Explain.

Do you see increase/decrease in the importance of housing as trigger of homelessness? If yes, does this changes the profile of the homeless population?

#### **3.1 Access to the private market**

In Austria **high access costs** for new housing in the **private market** often are responsible, that people with low income, who are socially excluded are not able to afford adequate housing. In order to get a lease contract at all, a person has to pay up to 6 monthly rents caution money (security deposit) and 3 monthly rents brokerage. There is a tax to be paid just for the fact that the lease contract is signed. This means, that people with low income sometimes have to finance nearly 10 month's rent before they even enter their new dwelling. The security deposit should be paid back at the end of the contract, but resourceful landlords sometimes find ways to refuse this, especially when their counterpart is in a social and financial weak position. Temporary lease contracts lead to a permanent repetition of access costs. Therefore and as a growing number of people is not able to afford their housing any more the political discussion in the moment is moving towards a lowering of these access costs.

The access to the private housing market is hindered furthermore by sometimes massive **discrimination** against migrants and minorities. NGO<sup>11</sup>s report that migrants have to pay more for the same quality of housing. They often have to follow a discriminating and humiliating screening procedure by brokers and owners before they will get a lease contract.

### **3.2 affordability and other housing related problems:#**

FAWOS, the Centre for Secure Tenancy in Vienna has assessed that over **90% of all evictions** take place because of financial problems and **arrears of rent**. Thus affordability is one of the main housing related problems that lead to homelessness. The clients of the social services are forced to change their dwelling more often than other people, because of temporary lease contracts or eviction.

As mentioned above this means that the entry costs for people with low income sometimes have to be paid every three years. People do not go to court and insist on (claim) their rights anymore in order not to lose their contracts.

Cheap housing often has **bad quality**. Dwellings on the ground floor often are clammy and mouldy. Dwellings on the attic floor sometimes have a bad isolation and therefore are hot in summer and have high energy costs in winter. Wohndrehscheibe<sup>12</sup> in Vienna reports, that housing that is rent to immigrants sometimes has a very bad quality. Dwellings in the cellar, without daylight, mouldy and in very bad shape can still be found rented to immigrants on the private market. The city of Vienna therefore has started projects to fight speculation housing. The number of emergency dwellings that were allocated to persons who lived in dwellings hazardous to their health has because of that and because of extensive facilitation of refurbishment, fallen continuously since the year 2000, when the program started.

Because of high housing costs **families** often are forced to rent smaller dwellings that suit their budget but not their family size. This leads to subsequent additional problems especially in the neighbourhood community and for the children who cannot develop adequately.

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<sup>11</sup> for instance: Wohndrehscheibe, annual reports 2000 - 2005; ZARA, annual report 2007;

<sup>12</sup> Wohndrehscheibe, annual report 2005

### **3.3 Access to rental public housing**

For people with low income the **access costs** to the rental public housing sector can also be **quite high**, as the tenant has to pay an amount for ground- and building costs as a down payment. There are subsidies in the form of assisted loans for that, but as it is a loan it increases the monthly payments after all. The benefit in this market is lower rents once one has entered though.

As mentioned above, Austria follows a **housing policy of unitary or integrated rental housing markets**. This implies rather high income ceilings for LPHA rental housing, which is accessible up to ca. the 8<sup>th</sup> income decile<sup>13</sup>. Municipal housing is accessible for households up to ca. the 6<sup>th</sup> income decile. Incomes are evaluated only by entering the contracts. Growing incomes have no consequences. This results in quite integrated settlements. There is hardly any segregation in Austria. For LPHA dwellings there is as well a floor income. But lacking incomes may be substituted by social transfers. Lowest income groups are served primarily by municipal housing.

There are **allowances** available for special social situations (especially low income). Social housing should be in principle open for everybody with permanent residence in Austria. BAWO members<sup>14</sup> report a different handling in different municipalities and **institutional discrimination of immigrants** in some municipalities. The public housing stock of the Vienna Municipality was opened to non-EU citizens only recently on behalf of an EU directive against discrimination.

The „Social Allocation of Flats“ of the City of Vienna reports, that nearly **57%** of all registered migrants for „emergency dwellings“ live in **overcrowded dwellings** with two or more persons per room. **9,2 %** of the registered migrants are **young adults** leaving their family homes, **8,6%** are in urgent need of a new dwelling because of housing problems related to medical condition or age.

The City of Vienna has assigned Wohndrehscheibe of Volkshilfe Österreich, an Austrian NGO, to help migrants to better access the private and the public housing market. Since 1997 **Wohndrehscheibe**<sup>15</sup> offers a wide range of specific services as needed in Vienna. These services reach from information on the housing market and specific advise on housing related issues such as financing, subsidies and benefits to intensive guidance for vulnerable groups in search of housing. Since the start Wohndrehscheibe has found around 3000 affordable dwellings for persons suffering from social exclusion in Vienna.

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<sup>13</sup> Figures: Federal Ministry of Economics and Labour

<sup>14</sup> Annual conference 2006; workshop housing and migration.

<sup>15</sup> [www.wohndrehscheibe.at](http://www.wohndrehscheibe.at); [www.europaforum.or.at/site/HomepageUNECE/de/dokumente.htm](http://www.europaforum.or.at/site/HomepageUNECE/de/dokumente.htm)

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In 2004 Wohndrehscheibe (Housing Information System for the Disadvantaged) was selected best practice for the Dubai International Award by UN Habitat<sup>16</sup>.

**Summarised** one can of course say that housing is a trigger/ cause of homelessness. In Austria sometimes high entry costs, high rents in the private market and still institutional and discrimination by private landlords lead to inadequate housing situations and homelessness. BAWO members in the Länder report that increase of housing and energy costs is surpassing and disproportionate to the earnings. This leads to the fact that the access to affordable housing for homeless and persons with low income is getting more challenging and more people are in danger to loose their dwellings.

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<sup>16</sup> [www.bestpractices.at/main.php?page=vienna/best\\_practices/housing/housing\\_information\\_system&lang=de](http://www.bestpractices.at/main.php?page=vienna/best_practices/housing/housing_information_system&lang=de)

#### **4. Role of hostel accommodation**

Please explain what is the role (if any) of hostels in the transition process to permanent/independent housing for people who are homeless?

Do you believe that hostels are a necessary step towards more independent forms of accommodation for homeless people? Please, explain.

It is often argued that many homeless people (who are on the streets or in hostels) are not capable of independent living. Please explain what hostels (can) do to make homeless people *housing ready*?

What are the most important obstacles for people to move on from hostel accommodation to more independent housing?

Can (certain types of) hostel accommodation be a *permanent solution* for certain people who are homeless? Please, explain.

Do you believe that a *housing first approach* (i.e. provide immediately permanent/ independent housing, offer (social) support in this housing and adapt it to the changing needs of the tenant, rather than keep homeless people in temporary accommodation, try to solve their problems through support, and provide independent housing when the person is deemed to be *housing ready*) can work in your country? Why / why not? Please, explain.

**4.1** In Austria hostels play an essential role in the initial acute care for homeless people in the metropolitan areas, as they help to avoid "life on the street". Together with the proposition of appropriate care/ social support they can offer a **stabilizing effect** and so pave the way for further steps towards independent living. Prerequisite for this is the possibility to keep the sheltering as short as possible though and to be able to offer subsequent tenders especially subsequent access to housing with mobile social support.

The accommodation in a hostel is not a necessary prerequisite for the step into independent living. Hostels more often are a form of **emergency service**. Additionally they develop to a form of more **permanent housing for people with multiple needs**, especially in combination with psychological disorders or psychiatric diagnoses. For these clients there often are no standard offers in specific services or they are

not accommodated because of their additional set of problems (alcohol, no medical insight, special care requirements...). Hostels with their specific offers then often are the only housing they can live in permanently according to their current needs and find the necessary social support and care needed.

**4.2** In August 2008 BAWO has organised a **focus group with homeless and former homeless** in Vienna in order to **evaluate hostels** and the social support provided. The people experiencing poverty and social exclusion formulated their **recommendations** for human shelters and successful social support.

They demanded:

- More concepts which foster individual care and support and so are able to answer the individual needs of the clients, vs. standard concepts which treat all clients the same
- More target group specific accommodation, less mix of different target groups (drug problems, alcohol problems, psychiatric diagnoses...)
- Better access to medical, psychological and psychiatric care
- More social work, it should be possible to contact a social worker also on a short notice in emergency cases
- enough time for and during the counselling (without any interruptions)
- Holistic approach: Social work should be more than a financial counselling, one should be able to turn to the responsible social worker with all ones' problems, including personal problems

**4.3 Housing first** is an essential approach to avoid threatening or acute homelessness, or to find a fast way out of it. Although BAWO members welcome this approach in principle, to some of them it seems rather challenging to implement it generally in the near future. Especially in some rural areas where the supply of affordable housing is low, this approach seems to be hard to implement at the moment. Members from Vienna and other cities where homeless mainly are housed in affordable dwellings owned by the municipality or by housing associations are in favour of the housing first approach, as sustainable personal, financial and social integration can be reached. A tenancy changeover which always is a radical change and an additional stress for homeless persons and the negative consequences out of this can be avoided; independent living can be better prepared and ensured.

There are first beginnings to **implement** this approach:

- In Lower Austria *Niederösterreichische Wohnassistenz*<sup>17</sup> rents affordable dwellings from social housing associations and subleases them to persons in urgent need for housing. Niederösterreichische Wohnassistenz offers social support and counselling to improve the circumstances of living of the clients. The tenants have the possibility to rearrange their personal and professional life and take over the contract after a period of two years.
- *Wohnplattform*<sup>18</sup> in Upper Austria offers a similar concept
- *Wohnbasis*<sup>19</sup> in Vienna is run by Fonds Soziales Wien. Target groups are homeless families with children. For children and minors tenancy changeovers are an extreme burden, as they have to change their social surroundings – kindergarten, school, and friends – again and again. Therefore the families who are in the project get a dwelling owned by the municipality. They are obliged to supervised housing until the person in support agrees with a takeover of the rental contract.

In practice **supervised housing with a mobile social support system** often proves to be very practicable. On the one hand clients are able to (re-)learn their ability to live independently in an apartment. On the other hand, they have an affordable possibility to reflect and define their expectations for future housing, the surrounding and themselves and clarify these together with reality. The optimal model would include the right to take over the rental contract for permanent use, to avoid an unwanted change of apartment.

Sometimes supervised housing is not able to offer the needed concept. In these **emergency cases** hostels can be important institutions to offer the right care for people who are overstrained with independent living. In the context of the hostel a *consolidation* can take place or be attempted. The hostel offers a place, where people can – together with intensive social support – to deal with their diseases, to stabilise mentally, financially and to reawaken their resources. Thus the basis can be built to go further on with one of the mentioned concepts. If this does not work out, hostels can be a place to stay, where life is secured.

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<sup>17</sup> [www.wohnassistenz-noe.at](http://www.wohnassistenz-noe.at)

<sup>18</sup> [www.verein-wohnplattform.at](http://www.verein-wohnplattform.at)

<sup>19</sup> [http://wohnen.fsw.at/wohnungslos/betreutes\\_wohnen/ww\\_gmbh.html](http://wohnen.fsw.at/wohnungslos/betreutes_wohnen/ww_gmbh.html)

#### **4.4 permanent hostels for senior homeless in Vienna,**

A few years ago the City of Vienna has started a new program together with NGOs working in the field. This program offers housing for people who are not able to live independently anymore. This form of permanent housing has developed to an important integration component for homeless in Vienna that cannot be replaced anymore. One aspect of this concept is to secure dignity for people with an advanced age together with adequate housing.

The "Viennese Integration Concept for Homeless People" identified need for more low threshold services for people who will not be able to live independently because of their long-lasting experience of homelessness and living in the streets together with other social problems such as severe alcohol abuse.

There are mainly **two forms of permanent hostels** for homeless persons in Vienna:

4.4.1 **Partly self governing hostels** which were founded out of initiatives by people experiencing homelessness together with committed citizens. The homeless demanded nearly unsupervised forms of housing together, funded by the city. Many of the daily tasks that accumulate with running a shelter are performed by the inhabitants. There are two such shelters in Vienna, one run by CARITAS and one run by neunerHAUS.

4.4.2 The second form of permanent shelter offers the majority of places in this segment: For older, (formerly) homeless, who are not capable of independent living in a home, FSW in cooperation with the Association of Nichtsesshaftenhilfe Vienna, the Caritas, Volkshilfe and the Vienna Hilfswerk has established **senior citizens homes**. This housing is offering permanent housing also for another target group - patients from the geriatrics who because of physical, psychological or social impairment and in lack of housing but with no need of intensive care.

## **4.5 Developments**

In the last years in Austria some **sustainable improvements** took part:

- *BAWO Frauenarbeitskreis* has developed standards on the work with female homeless. All over Austria NGOs and governments more and more get aware of the needs of this target group and establish special hostels and day care centres according to these standards. Amongst others in Vienna *Frauenwohnzimmer*<sup>20</sup> has opened three days a week for women living in difficult circumstances. In Linz *B37*<sup>21</sup> has opened a special wing for **homeless women**.
- Special **Hostels for minors** have been established all over Austria.
- In Vienna P7<sup>22</sup> offers systematic **clearing** and accommodation to all homeless.
- In all of Austria the **quality** of accommodation in hostels has been **improved** towards accommodation in one and two bedrooms

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<sup>20</sup> <http://wohnen.fsw.at/wohnungslos/p7.html>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.b37.at/verein.html>

<sup>22</sup> <http://wohnen.fsw.at/wohnungslos/p7.html>

## 5. Home-ownership

Is repossession due to mortgage default an issue in relation to homelessness in your country?

Has homelessness increased recently because of increasing cost of home-ownership and repossession rates?

Can home-ownership be a sustainable solution for homeless people?

Can you give examples of (state-funded or voluntary) schemes that make home-ownership possible for homeless people (co-ownership, incremental home-ownership, self-built...)? Please explain?

Is extreme poverty amongst home-owners (especially for people without any mortgage duties anymore) an issue in your country?

Do you know of housing situations amongst home-owners that would amount to the experiences of homelessness (e.g. ownership of sheds, extreme overcrowding)? Please, explain

What State intervention is possible/necessary to improve the situation of home-owners experiencing extreme poverty?

(For new member states) Has the transfer of State housing to the tenants after the fall of communist regimes created invisible forms of homelessness (*homeless home-owners*)? Please, explain.

It is sometimes argued that slums reappear - especially in large urban areas. Would this be true for your country?

Why do you think most governments make access to home-ownership a priority of their housing policy and how does that affect the role of public housing policy in relation to homelessness? If this is not the case in your country, how do you explain this?

Do you think that the right to buy or other forms of promoting homeownership amongst social housing tenants is a good way of ensuring the necessary fluidity in the social housing stock and increase social housing options for the homeless? Please, explain

**5.1** In 2001 nearly half of all dwellings in Austria were freehold dwellings or used by the building proprietor<sup>23</sup>. In Vienna about 21,6 per cent are either owner-occupied apartments or detached and semi-detached housing units (2006)<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> Statistics Austria

<sup>24</sup> Synthesis Forschung, Städtbericht Wien, November 2007

**Tab 6: Percentage of homeowners in Austria 1981 -2001**

dwelling	1981	1991	2001
	%	%	%
building proprietor's own use	40,3	41,0	38,9
freehold dwelling (owner-used)	8,8	10,7	11,2
rent (subj.to Rent Act/Dwel.Non-Profit Act)	40,2	36,9	38,8
official residence, dwel.as income in kind	4,4	3,0	2,4
other tenure (e.g. sub tenancy)	6,3	8,4	8,7
<b>Total</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>

© STATISTICS AUSTRIA

**5.2** As people with low income mainly are housed in the public and private rental market extreme poverty amongst home-owners is not really an issue in Austria. Neither are there housing situations amongst home-owners that would amount to the experiences of homelessness like ownership of sheds or extreme overcrowding. But debt counselling institutions report that there are some **execution sales** in the Länder where the rate of homeownership is higher than in the cities. Affected are house owners who are not able to redeem their mortgage any more. Debt counselling in lower Austria reports that the amount of these execution sales has been stable in the last years. But they fear that non-performing loans in other currencies that have been pushed by banks in the last years will lead to a growing amount of execution sales in the future. According to debt counselling lower Austria the granting of credits by banks is much too easy for home owners in principle. House owners who are affected get help by social institutions like the Wohnassistentz in Lower Austria or find accommodation with their families.

Debt counselling in Vienna reported that the amount of execution sales amongst owners of apartments is not very high. As the Viennese housing market is a rental market evictions of tenants because of high rental debts is much more of a problem. Execution sales occur **together with divorces** when the remaining partner is not able to redeem the mortgage. This is also reported by the prevention counselling in Upper Austria.

There are no reports in Austria that homelessness has increased recently because of increasing cost of home-ownership and repossession rates. But BAWO members of all Länder report that higher costs of housing including higher energy and running costs lead to more persons in risk to get evicted.

**5.3** The functioning Austrian system of public rental housing and housing allowances makes homeownership not a desirable and sustainable solution for homeless people. On the contrary – subsidies that are spent for ownership are missing in social housing. **Buying options** in social housing lead to a decline of the rental market that is needed for the supply of affordable housing for persons with low income. Communities with a high rate of homeownership create – wanted or unwanted – a barrier for socially and economically discriminated persons. Social housing that is oriented towards homeownership runs the risk to adjust affordability criteria upwards.

Promoting homeownership amongst social housing tenants is just a good way for every government to loose the necessary housing stock for a functioning social housing policy. Especially the „emergency dwellings“ in Vienna where 2000 dwellings every year are allocated to homeless and other socially excluded persons show, how necessary it is to be able to keep a large affordable social housing stock.

**5.4** In Vienna, but also in the Länder extensive **refurbishment programmes** have led to a reduction of substandard housing. There are no slums in Austria. The term „Ghetto“ is politically misused especially by right wing parties to discriminate migrants. But there are areas especially in the larger cities where there is a high concentration of third country nationals.

## **6. Role of private rental housing market?**

Do you think that the private rental housing sector can be a genuine actor in the provision of decent and affordable housing for homeless people?

Do you know of policies aimed at *socialising* the private rental sector for homeless people? Please, explain how (and why) they work/do not work?

What are the most common obstacles to convince private landlords to rent out dwellings to homeless people? How can these obstacles be overcome?

Do you think rent regulation works to ease housing market pressures and make private rental housing more affordable for very vulnerable groups such as homeless people? Explain why/why not and how it works.

Do you know of successful policies that aim at reducing vacancy rates and making vacant housing available for homeless people?

Do you know of policies aimed at specific landlords with substantial amounts of vacant housing such as shops, the church...?

Do you know of effective policy measures to stop speculation in housing?

Is very inadequate/substandard housing in the private rental market a big problem in your country?

Do you know of housing situations (both related to physical standards, bad housing management practice, and housing insecurity) in the private rental market that amount to the experience of homelessness?

Please, explain.

What public intervention/regulation exists to stop very inadequate housing by slum landlords?

Are homeless people put into cheap hotel accommodation because of lack of other alternatives?

Why?

What is the cost (annual cost per country or indication thereof)?

What public measures are taken to reduce the use of hotel accommodation?

Is squatting considered to be an issue related to homelessness? Please, explain.

**6.1** In 2001 **38,8%** of all dwellings (1.496.463) were **rental housing** subject to the rental act or rental housing subject to the non profit act. Approx. **16% of all dwellings** are held by **private rental housing**.

**Tab 7: Percentage of rental housing in Austria 1981 -2001**

dwelling	1981	1991	2001
	%	%	%
building proprietor's own use	40,3	41,0	38,9
freehold dwelling (owner-used)	8,8	10,7	11,2
rent (subj.to Rent Act/Dwel.Non-Profit Act)	40,2	36,9	38,8
official residence, dwel.as income in kind	4,4	3,0	2,4
other tenure (e.g. sub tenancy)	6,3	8,4	8,7
<b>Total</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>

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About one fourth of the lesser in the private market are legal entities, three fourth are individuals<sup>25</sup>. A relatively small and even decreasing part of private rental dwellings is subject of a rent regime with very low rents. The bigger part is regulated with a rather liberal and market oriented rent regime (Richtwertsystem).

About **80 per cent** of the total housing stock in Vienna is rental housing (2005); **half of this share is private rental apartments**<sup>26</sup>.

Because of long waiting lists for rental public housing<sup>27</sup> and because not everybody is entitled for the public housing market, the **private housing market often is the only possibility to find a dwelling at all**. The other side of this coin is that newly rented private dwellings are at the edge of, or above affordability. The phenomenon of „working poor“ is partly due to the high housing costs on the private market that persons are confronted with.

<sup>25</sup> Federal Ministry of Economics and Labour

<sup>26</sup> Housing and Housing Policies in Large Cities – Executive Summary A , Synthesis research, December 2006

<sup>27</sup> Members report for instance that in Salzburg the waiting list for recognised emergency cases can be up to 10 years.

**6.2** The **access to the private rental market** is mainly market based. Heirs in direct line may enter into a rent contract with similar conditions. The predominant part of the private market is mediated by real estate brokers.

There is high access **costs** for new housing in the **private market** that often are responsible, that people with low income are not able to afford adequate housing (see also chapter 1.1). The access to the private housing market is hindered furthermore by sometimes massive **discrimination** against migrants and minorities. NGO<sup>28</sup>s report that migrants have to pay more for the same quality of housing. They often have to follow a discriminating and humiliating screening procedure by brokers and owners before they will get a lease contract.

**6.3** Wohndrehscheibe<sup>29</sup> in Vienna and members in the Länder report, that housing let to third country nationals sometimes has very **bad quality**. Dwellings in the cellar, mouldy and overcrowded can still be found on the private rental market let to immigrants. The **City of Vienna** therefore has started projects to fight **speculation housing**. The number of emergency dwellings that were allocated to persons who lived in dwellings hazardous to their health has because of that and because of extensive facilitation of refurbishment, fallen continuously since the year 2000, when the program started.

#### **6.4 Cheap hotel accommodation:**

There has been different feedback from BAWO members in the "Länder" on this question.

In **lower Austria** it is in some regions quite common to rent a room or cheap hotel accommodation for persons who have been evicted when prevention measures have failed or were not indicated. In the follow up supporting institutions are asked, if they have

accommodation free. From the respective figures of Amstetten BAWO estimates that in lower Austria there would be 150 persons a year who are accommodated in this way. Costs for one month lay around 300 to 450.- EURO per month. This would accumulate to costs in the height of ca. 400.000.- EURO. In general there is a good supply by stationary institutions. The hostel in St. Pölten does not have enough space for the whole region though. Especially in the periphery such as Wald- and Weinviertel such offers are missing.

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<sup>28</sup> for instance: Wohndrehscheibe, annual reports 2000 - 2005; ZARA, annual report 2007;

<sup>29</sup> Wohndrehscheibe, annual report 2005

In **Salzburg and Vorarlberg** this praxis is also quite common. Cheap boarding houses make a living out of accommodating homeless. This leads to small neighbourhoods with a concentration of socially excluded persons. Very often in houses like this exploiting structures and dependencies develop. Therefore CARITAS Salzburg started to frequent such houses and help the people to find adequate social housing programmes.

In **Upper Austria** aid for homeless people is part of the "social benefit law „Pflichtleistung/ Sozialhilfegesetz). Financial help and accommodation is regionally organised, so there is normally no necessity for cheap hotel accommodation. In Linz some single cases have been reported.

The City of **Vienna** tries to provide as many places for homeless as necessary. Therefore the praxis that cheap pensions and hotels earn good money with low quality housing as it was still popular in the 80 ties has been abandoned. Today P7 offers clearing and mediation into emergency shelters.

## **6.5 The authorities' intervention**

Austria still has good **tenant's rights**, e.g.:

- Rent control for the bigger part of private rental dwellings.
- In the bigger part of rental dwellings with unlimited contracts, there are only few possibilities for the landlord to cancel a contract.
- Right to inherit rent contracts (relatives in direct line).
- Very tenant oriented regulations on maintenance and repair.
- Strong representations of interest.

According to the federal structure of Austria there are nine housing allowance systems that differ in some parts quite immensely. In some of the "Länder", such as Vienna, **housing allowances** as a system of aid for individuals are provided for private rental dwellings as well.

**The government intervenes** in the following fields in connection with private rental units:

- There is a building code for new construction and refurbishment. If private landlords get subsidies for new construction and refurbishment, they are linked with clearly defined conditions.
- There are rent controls, particularly for rental dwellings built before 1945 (Richtwertsystem) and subsidized, private rental housing. The Richtwertsystem has lowered tenant's protection noticeable.

## Austria - National Report 2008 People who are homeless can be housed

- There is no special taxation of under-occupancy or vacancies
- If dwellings are in very bad and jeopardizing shape local governments can source repairs at the owner's expense.
- There are specific types of aid for creation or maintenance of private social housing units, as there are partly rather generous subsidies for refurbishment.

These **subsidies** are guaranteed only under special conditions:

- Sitting tenants remain in their dwellings.
- Strictly limited increase of rent.
- Rent limitation also for new tenants.
- In Vienna private landlords who get subsidies for new construction and refurbishment have to give part of the subsidised housing stock to the city to be allocated to special target groups.
- Local governments decide the subsidy schemes, evaluate project applications, evaluate execution and pay out the subsidies.

**Summarised** the private rental market takes its fair share in the fight against homelessness. At the same time it enhances the risks of poverty and the financial burdens, it makes a contribution to high eviction rates and is (co-) responsible for substandard provisory arrangements.

## **7. Role of social/public housing (Make difference between both if necessary)**

*(make difference between both if necessary)*

How is social housing defined in your country and what are the statutory aims?

What role does the social housing sector play in addressing and preventing homelessness?

Do social housing landlords have a statutory obligation to house homeless people? If yes, please explain?

Are you aware of any other policies that help/incite social housing Landlords to provide housing to homeless people?

What are the most commonly used arguments for social housing landlords to house/not to house homeless people? Do you agree with these arguments?

Do you think the social housing stock is large enough to allow social housing landlords to play an effective role in addressing and preventing homelessness? If not, what happens with homeless people during the time more social housing is made available?

Does the funding regime help/complicate social housing operators to focus on homeless people?

On what basis is social housing allocated to the tenants? Do the selection criteria favour/obstruct access to housing for homeless people?

Please provide details of the share of the different income groups in social housing – in particular the share of people in the 2 lowest income deciles.

Do you agree that social housing should be allocated primarily on the basis of the urgency of housing exclusion – even if that would jeopardise social mix in the social housing stock? Please, explain.

Are there any conditions in relation to the place of residence to access social housing? Is this relevant to homelessness. Please, explain?

Are you aware of any structural cooperation between the homelessness sector and social housing providers? If yes, can you explain how the cooperation is organised (voluntary or statutory basis) and give examples of good practices.

Do you agree that mixing housing tenures and social & ethnic groups is a precondition for building sustainable communities? Please, explain.

How can one solve the tension between building socially mixed communities and providing housing for the most excluded?

Are you aware of sustainable poor housing communities?

What are the main obstacles in your country to construct more social housing? How can they be overcome?

### **7.1.1 General framework**

The Austrian scheme for affordable rental housing differs from public housing. "**Limited Profit Housing Associations**" (LPHA), which operate in the sense of Public-Private-Partnerships (PPP), fulfil public service obligations and in return get access to subsidies and tax deductions. They are organised as private organisations: capital companies or cooperatives.

New construction of affordable rental housing is mostly done by these LPHA. Their share of principal residences is 15% in rental dwellings and another ca. 8% in affordable condominiums (2007)<sup>30</sup>.

Municipalities used to be very active in rental housing, particularly the Municipality of Vienna. Today they represent altogether 9% of principal residences. In Vienna one fourth of the total housing stock is owned by the municipality

Both LPHA and commercial housing developers have gained market shares since the 1990s. Municipalities have abolished their activities in new construction. New construction of private persons (single family houses) is decreasing. Regarding the shares in stock, only slight changes took place. LPHA have a particularly good performance, because they work similarly as investors, housing developers and housing managers. Some municipalities engaged LPHA for managing their housing stock, but most still do it by themselves.

### **7.1.2 Access to rental public housing**

As mentioned above, Austria follows a **housing policy of unitary or integrated rental housing markets**. This implies rather high income ceilings for LPHA rental housing, which is accessible up to ca. the 8<sup>th</sup> income decile. Municipal housing is accessible for households up to ca. the 6<sup>th</sup> income decile. Incomes are evaluated only by entering the contracts. Growing incomes have no consequences. This results in quite integrated settlements. There is hardly any segregation in Austria. For LPHA dwellings there is as well a floor income. But lacking incomes may be substituted by social transfers. Lowest income groups are served primarily by municipal housing<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> Federal Ministry of Economics and Labour

<sup>31</sup> Figures: Federal Ministry of Economics and Labour

There are **allowances** available for special social situations (especially low income). According to the federal system in Austria there are 9 different allowance systems.

Social housing should be in principle open for everybody with permanent residence in Austria. BAWO members<sup>32</sup> report a different handling in different municipalities and **institutional discrimination of immigrants** in some municipalities. The public housing stock of the Vienna Municipality was opened to non-EU citizens only recently on behalf of an EU directive against discrimination.

Affordable rental housing is understood to be affordable for low income groups as well. Due to the big stock of affordable housing, even low income groups enjoy a comparably high quality of housing provision. Therefore both municipal housing and LPHA rental housing fulfil their obligations in the fight against homelessness to a good extent. One big **advantage of the public housing sector** is, that there is no brokerage costs. Tenants are required to pay a certain percentage of construction costs as a down payment (in Vienna 12,5%), but the rents are lower than in the private market afterwards.

### **7.1.3 The demand for rental public housing**

LPHA serve proved demand, which e.g. is documented by municipalities in the form of waiting lists. LPHA have a construction output of ca. 15 000 units per year. But this is only one part of affordable housing provision. As LPHA have to serve proved demand, they can give a reliable feedback to the housing departments of provincial governments, who are responsible for the subsidy programmes. The overall housing demand is oriented on population forecasts.

### **7.1.4 The procedure for allocation of public housing units**

In most "Länder" allocation of LPHA dwellings is also organised by the municipalities. In Vienna the LPHAs may allocate the bigger part of their dwellings by themselves. But the LPHA sector is demand driven. Typically for unitary markets the rents are not very low, but affordable. In this way the customers have decision-making authority. This leads to competition between LPHA particularly in urban areas. For municipal housing, allocation rules regarding household and dwelling size are applied.

The allocation criteria usually follow the principle "first come, first served". Municipal housing in Vienna has so called "emergency dwellings", which are allocated off the usual succession.

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<sup>32</sup> Annual conference 2006; workshop housing and migration.

### **7.1.5 Rental relationships**

The tenant is entitled to remain on the premises. If his/her income comes to exceed the eligibility threshold for public housing, there are no consequences. A system of housing allowances warrants that households may keep their dwelling even in difficult situations.

## **7.2 Social housing in Vienna<sup>33</sup>**

Social housing has a long tradition in Vienna and is in fact part of the city's identity. More than 60,000 community-owned apartments were built by "Red Vienna" during the First Republic alone. In 1934, one-tenth of the local population lived in community housing.

Today, social housing includes approximately 220,000 community-owned and 200,000 subsidised rental apartments and also those built by non-profit or commercial building societies. Since 1995, special emphasis has been placed on the comprehensive quality of subsidised housing. Economic and ecological considerations are just as important as architectural ones. Experimental projects, such as a car-free model estate, women's workshops I and II, integration projects and passive houses are to further improve quality. Around 5,500 new apartments are built each year.

Apart from providing new housing, many old buildings are renovated.

### **7.2.1 Community-owned Apartments**

To apply for a community-owned apartment one must:

- Be at least 17 years old
- Have Austrian, EEA or Swiss citizenship or be a recognized refugee
- Earn less than the maximum salary
- Have lived at your current address in Vienna as a main (not secondary) residence for a minimum of two years at the time of application

To have one's name put down for a community-owned apartment the following must apply:

- the current apartment is detrimental to your health
- requirement of a different apartment due to failing health or old age
- There are too many people living in the current apartment - over crowdedness
- you are separating households

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.wien.gv.at/english/housing/>

- you have lost your company or government apartment through no fault of your own
- you are a young Viennese without an apartment of your own (less than 30 years of age)
- you require an apartment for people with disabilities

### **7.2.2 Co-operative Apartments (“Limited Profit Housing Associations” )**

Subsidies for co-operative apartments are calculated on the basis of income and the number of people living in the same household.

**Requirements:** In principle applicants must have an urgent need for housing to be eligible for co-operative apartments. The apartment applied for must be such as to meet that urgent need for housing. The apartment may not be used as secondary residence. The following additional requirements apply:

- Citizenship
  - Austrian citizenship or
  - EU/EEA citizenship
  - Non-EU citizens holding a residence permit
  - Refugees under the Geneva Convention
- Age requirements
  - 19 years completed (applications may be filed at 17 years completed)
- Income limits
  - The sum of net incomes of all persons living in the same household must be within defined minimum and maximum limits.

Construction costs are funded in part by the province of Vienna. The remainder is raised through capital market loans and/or the building society’s own funds. Tenants are required to pay 12.5 percent of construction costs upon moving into their apartments. To have these costs financed you may apply for a loan as a substitute for own funds (Eigenmittlersatzdarlehen) in Vienna.

### **7.2.3 Housing Assistance**

#### **Who can apply?**

- Austrian citizens or persons of equal status (such as EU citizens)
- Foreigners who can prove to have legally lived in Austria for a minimum of five years (for publicly financed renovation works an employment permit or certificate of exemption under the act governing employment of foreigners will suffice)

Housing assistance is granted only for the apartment the recipient of housing assistance and their family members are living in.

You may apply for housing assistance even if you are behind with your monthly rent. Housing assistance is paid directly to property management until you have made up arrears.

### **Eligibility of Housing Assistance**

- **Family size:** family includes spouses, children, grandchildren, life companions, grandparents, parents-in-law, siblings, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, cousins, brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law.
- **Family income:** family income is made up of the net income (social insurance and income tax deducted also) of all persons living in the same household. Monthly family income is one twelfth of the total annual income (including Christmas and holiday pay).
- **Apartment size:** the adequate useful floor space is 50 square meters for one person, 70 square meters for two persons and an additional 15 square meters for each additional person up to a maximum of 130 square meters, or 150 square meters with more than five persons living in the same household.
- **Housing expenditures**

In the event **general housing assistance** is more than housing assistance for subsidized apartments you are eligible to general housing assistance.

Applications may be filed only by the person entered in the tenancy agreement (for rental apartments), agreement on the use of co-operative apartments or the purchase agreement (for condominiums). Fees are payable with the tax office for all agreements.

### **You are not eligible for housing assistance**

- If you own a non-subsidized apartment or home or an apartment renovated with public funds
- If you live in a nursing home or apartment subsidized as nursing home
- If you are entitled to use houses on small gardens estates
- If you are a tenant (co-) owning the property, or tenant with a close relationship to the landlord of a non-subsidized apartment. Close relationship as a rule refers to spouses, children, grandchildren, life companions, parents, grandparents, siblings, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, cousins, brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law.
- If you are a foreigner and have legally lived in Austria for less than five years.

### **7.3 Co operations between the homelessness sector and social housing providers - Best Practices**

Soziale Schiene Wien ("Social Allocation of Flats"<sup>34</sup>) has been introduced best practice by the *COOP Project* (How to help people excluded from decent housing, Experiences from nine European cities). The projects introduced below under 7.2.2 und 7.2.3 were evaluated by a *Jury of homeless* in summer 2008<sup>35</sup>. BAWO Austria arranged a focus group who evaluated best practices from the view of the people experiencing poverty and social inclusion<sup>36</sup>

#### **7.3.1 Soziale Schiene Wien ("Social Allocation of Flats"<sup>37</sup>)**

Although the City of Vienna provides council housing and other publicly funded housing, there is a need for **special support** for groups for whom this accommodation is not accessible or appropriate; for various reasons – emergency need, affordability, and special conditions of access, information deficit or personal difficulties in dealing with this challenge.

**Vulnerable groups** to be assisted are people with low incomes or specific handicaps, either leaving sheltered/ cared accommodation or homeless. Another group is migrants, for whom access to funded dwellings is difficult for various reasons, and who often live in insecure and unacceptable housing conditions.

**Solution:** "Social Allocation of Flats" is a contact point, which finds community owned dwellings for all these groups. Various social care institutions submit applications for housing from their clients to this special municipal institution, where needs are clarified and an offer made from the available pool of municipal housing.

For **migrant households**, who are entitled to the service because of precarious housing situation and a particular legal status (based on the guidelines of the "Emergency Housing" programme), a similar procedure applies (clarification in a "circle of experts").

Those living on the street can also address the institution with a direct application.

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<sup>34</sup> CO-OPERATE\_report- 12 2005; <http://www.srz-gmbh.com/coop/report/index.html>

<sup>35</sup> „4 Wände und mehr“, Preis für menschenwürdiges Wohnen; <http://www.sbausparkasse.at>

<sup>36</sup> For more information please contact [christian.perl@bawo.at](mailto:christian.perl@bawo.at)

<sup>37</sup> CO-OPERATE\_report- 12 2005; <http://www.srz-gmbh.com/coop/report/index.html>

**Tab 8: Soziale Schiene: Number of Applications (households) and dwellings allocated (homeless and supported persons 1993-2007)**

YEAR	NUMBER APPLICATIONS	ALLOCATION DWELLINGS SUPPORTED PERSONS	ALLOCATION DWELLINGS HOMELESS	ALLOCATION DWELLINGS TOTAL
1993	1.719	497	307	804
1994	3.272	899	732	1.631
1995	3.290	907	584	1.491
1996	3.376	881	536	1.417
1997	3.755	806	521	1.327
1998	3.639	857	549	1.406
1999	3.562	862	611	1.473
2000	3.926	818	651	1.469
2001	4.143	799	626	1.425
2002	4.789	874	739	1.613
2003	4.225	830	642	1.472
2004	4.643	832	831	1.663
2005	4.168	923	844	1.767
2006	4.897	1.005	907	1.912
2007	5.022	1.200	841	2.041
<b>Total</b>	<b>58.426</b>	<b>12.990</b>	<b>9.921</b>	<b>22.911</b>
		<b>56,70%</b>	<b>43,30%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Figures: MA 50/ Soziale Wohnungsvergabe

Social Allocation of flats is good practice mainly because of the direct cooperation of all actors, the coordination process and the large number of **affordable dwellings allocated to vulnerable groups** in Vienna. This program shows how important it is that a city has some housing stock at its disposal.

**Actors:** The actors are made up of a special department of the municipality in the housing field as the responsible body for the activity, further municipal departments and a very wide range of institutions for social information, advice and accommodation. Wiener Wohnen (Vienna Housing) – administrating council housing – acts as housing mediators and housing providers. The social care services attest that their clients are "able to live independently" and apply for them.

### **7.3.2 Wohnplattform Oberösterreich<sup>38</sup> - cooperation wins**

**Main actors:** 13 housing associations, 4 private landlords, 26 NGOs and Wohnplattform.

The model presents a unique cooperation of the people affected (homeless and people who are in danger of becoming homeless), NGOs, „Wohnplattform“ in terms of a „housing supplier“ and housing associations in Upper Austria. The aim of the model is to **improve the access to the regional housing market for homeless** (= socially and economically disadvantaged) people.

The first criterion is actual or impending homelessness, the second criterion is the amount of help needed in this matter, therefore the „Wohnplattform“ is a competent supplier of flats.

The aim is the future integration into a conventional or rather „normal“ living environment and for its realisation currently **one hundred flats** are being offered by thirteen different housing associations. This is an efficient way to avoid concentration and stigmatisation.

People who are affected by homelessness often expect the lowest housing quality. Such meagre living areas are absolutely counterproductive for the improvement of individual situation. The lower the standards, the lower the importance which is ascribed to ones habitation. Social declines are therewith pre-programmed. For this reason only flats out of the category A and B are allocated by the cooperating partners.

It turned out that this kind of accommodation and assistance signifies a fundamental and **target-oriented support** for people who often need to reacquire the basic skills in „living“(appropriate behaviour as a part of a tenant community as well as the payment of rent in regular intervals and the maintenance of living conditions).

A sustainable integration is assured by the resource-orientated assistance approach.

The result of a research in context of a master's thesis<sup>39</sup> shows that 80 percent of all lodgers calling upon this offer were enabled to keep their own flats in the long term.

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<sup>38</sup> [www.verein-wohnplattform.at](http://www.verein-wohnplattform.at)

<sup>39</sup> Decsy, Pongratz, Home sweet home, JKU, Inst. F. Gesellschafts- und Sozialpolitik, 2006

### **7.3.3 AWOL Klagenfurt<sup>40</sup>**

“AWOL Wohnen” aims to provide competent counselling and social support for people with housing problems. Contrary to public attempts to accommodate clients on welfare in dormitories, etc., AWOL provides support with the main objective to meet clients’ needs. In 27 AWOL flats clients are provided housing and social support for a period of 12 months.

This service is limited to a period of one year with the goal to prepare the occupants for independent life in a self-rented apartment, and is provided to individuals (including former prisoners), as well as single mothers with children.

Single accommodation enables housing of clients regardless of their age, gender or group constellation. When assigning the accommodation flexibility is considered most important, this way the majority of the flats is at disposal to all target groups. The experience has shown that small, separate housing units fulfil the needs of clients in the best way.

The possibility to learn and train individuals’ social competences is also offered within the framework of the partially supervised housing. The conflict potential in small living and housing areas is considerably lower, and at the same time awareness of personal responsibility is being developed and strengthened.

First and foremost, the social care is understood as guidance and support for clients dealing with occurring housing problems and issues. Clients should gain competencies for independent keeping, acquiring and organizing of housing.

**7.3.4 Soziales Netzwerk Wohnen<sup>41</sup>** is a new and innovative initiative in Vorarlberg that links soziale institutions, local authorities and housing associations with the aim to improve the housing situation for homeless in Vorarlberg. Experts estimate that there are 200 mainly single persons in Vorarlberg who are not able to find adequate housing. Soziales Netzwerk mediates between all partners and offers social support and care. The network is best practice, because of the fact, that it reaches the building of new housing stock for homeless and the integration of the target group in the “normal” housing market.

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<sup>40</sup> [www.awol.at](http://www.awol.at)

<sup>41</sup> [www.ifs.at/194.html](http://www.ifs.at/194.html); Heidi Lorenzi; +43 (0) 5523/ 52176- 37

## **8. Prevention of homelessness<sup>42</sup>**

What are the main interventions in the housing area aimed at preventing homelessness? Please, explain. (summarise if necessary)

Is eviction an important issue in relation to homelessness? Why/why not – please, explain

% of people evicted who become homeless?

What are the main reasons for people being evicted?

What public intervention exists to prevent eviction?

Do you have evidence that this intervention reduced the number of people who are homeless?

Please, explain the importance of housing allowances as a tool for prevention of homelessness? Is it cost-effective? Does it reach homeless people?

Is housing advice an effective way to prevent/address homelessness?

What kind of housing advice do people need?

How should it be provided?

Is intervening in the housing market a cost-effective way to prevent homelessness? Please, explain.

**8.1** Many people become homeless, because they – if at all – start much too late to approach the multiple social and financial problems they have to solve in crises. They do not know which financial benefits and subsidies there are and how to obtain them. Most of these subsidies are just granted for the future and not for the past, so if they are not asked for on time one loses his or her right. The rental act and regulations in this regard are very complicated and complex, they are amended over the years and in many cases are incomprehensible for those concerned. The system of postal delivery and the legal consequences in Austria are also rather strict; many people lose their legal possibilities, because they miss to contest an action (answer a complaint) on time.

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<sup>42</sup> Text FAWOS: Renate Kitzman

**Tab 9: court proceedings aimed at eviction**

Region 2007	Number of court proceedings	Final number of executed evictions
Wien	21.570	2.789
Niederösterreich	3.751	478
Oberösterreich	2.802	487
Salzburg	1.813	200
Burgenland	459	39
Steiermark	3.793	603
Kärnten	1.630	269
Tirol	1.669	256
Vorarlberg	982	163
<b>Total</b>	<b>38.469</b>	<b>5.284</b>

Chart: FAWOS, figures: Bundesrechenzentrum

In 2007 **38.469 court proceedings** concerning living space have been started in Austria. This number of proceedings affects nearly 90.000<sup>43</sup> persons. More than 5.000 households (about 12.000 persons) have been actually evicted in 2007. More than half of the evictions took place in Vienna.

As experiences show, **most persons concerned lose their flats because of rent debts**. Therefore to avoid eviction and homelessness it is absolutely necessary to assist with **financial support**. On the other hand it does not make sense to secure a flat, if the client has no financial or other perspective to keep the flat in the future. Some of the people will not be able to live without help. In these cases it could be better to transfer them to an institution, which offers supervised housing.

**8.2** In order to **reduce the number of homeless people in Austria** the responsible departments for social affairs in the Austrian regions started **prevention facilities**, beginning in Salzburg 1995 and Vienna in 1996.

In Vienna the City councillors for housing and social affairs entrusted the Volkshilfe Wien, an Austrian NGO, in 1996 to offer advice and help to prevent evictions and also to study the causes which lead to eviction. Volkshilfe established **FAWOS, Fachstelle für Wohnungssicherung – Centre for Secure Tenancy**. In 1998 FAWOS has been awarded **Best Practice by UN Habitat** as one out of the 40 best projects.

<sup>43</sup> 2,3 persons per household, figures FAWOS (Fachstelle für Wohnungssicherung)

### **8.2.1 Objectives of FAWOS**

FAWOS is a central place for all tenants of private flats in Vienna who are threatened to lose their flats. The objective is to secure the existing flat and with it the prevention of becoming homeless. In the medium term, existing shelters for the homeless should be released.

In the long term, a successful prevention should enable a step by step reduction of shelters for the homeless and is a substantial part of the Viennese hostel reform.

Prevention of eviction means, for the people concerned, the prevention of personal suffering. Important socialising processes (particularly with children) do not get interrupted. With the plan of FAWOS there is a homogeneously organised securing of housing with quick and efficient help offered. One of the principles of FAWOS is offering "**help for self-help**". The goal is to restore as quickly as possible a person's ability to take decisions concerning their personal life and to provide financial help very fast.

### **8.2.2 Working method**

#### Access

The Austrian law governing tenancy comprises 2 articles, which put the courts under the obligation to inform the Municipality of Vienna about the beginning of a procedure concerning living space and about the dates of evictions. FAWOS gets this information and is thus able to **contact the people threatened by eviction**.

To get in contact with the people concerned is very important and up to now even the judges send people to FAWOS and tell them, that the next hearing will take place after they had been advised by the employees of FAWOS. The clients are also forwarded by social organisations, they find out about the service through friends and neighbours and through public awareness campaigns.

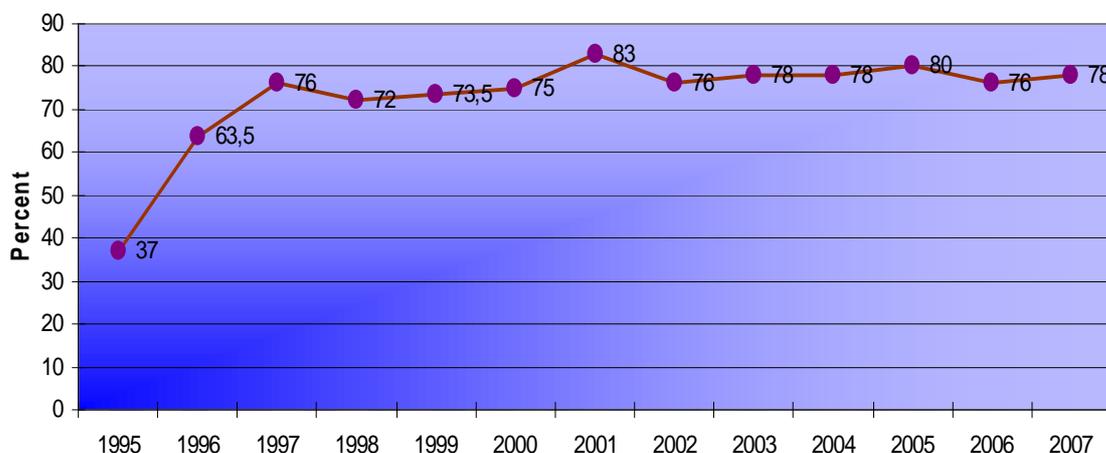
#### Some of the service offered by the team of FAWOS:

1. **Information** on the law governing tenancy and tenant rights and on how to avoid loss of one's home.
2. Information on the right to claim benefits and assistance.
3. Drafting of an **individual financial** plan since in most cases rent debts are the reason for the threatening eviction. This is particularly important, as oftentimes expenditures by far exceed income and priorities, on what to spend money on, need to be revised. Counselling and social support may help to increase people's income.

4. Assistance in **negotiations with landlords and lawyers**. Landlords tend to want to receive their money on time and are reluctant to incur any trouble with their tenants. Evictions are usually costly and take up valuable time.
5. **Cooperation with** and transfer to **other social institutions**. FAWOS has not the capacity to help the clients with their other problems such as unemployment, addiction, other debts, psychic problems or to find another flat if it's not possible to secure the existing flat.
6. If money is needed FAWOS is able to offer **financial support** for covering rent debts according to the principle of "**help for self-help**" and only if there are good perspective that the clients can afford their rents in the future.

### 8.2.2 Results achieved

- **Main outcome:** Compared with the figures of the year 1995, FAWOS succeeded in reducing evictions from 63 percent of cases to 36,5 percent the first year, and to less than 25 percent in the following years. In summary one can say that all objectives of the concept have been achieved and FAWOS has been able to provide security of tenancy as well as timely and efficient assistance to persons threatened by eviction.
- Due to **good contacts** with house owners, property managers and lawyers, which were achieved over the years, it is easier to find a solution formed by the employees of FAWOS together with the clients. By now landlords or lawyers even send tenants to FAWOS before they go to court, because they have confidence in the work of FAWOS.



### **8.2.3 Cost - benefit<sup>44</sup>**

Prevention helps to **minimise the cost of social welfare**. Research proved that housing the people concerned in hostels is much more expensive, than the protection of existing flats because of high personnel costs and administrative expenses, caused by the long residence of homeless people in hostels: The integration of a homeless person costs the city of Vienna about 460 EUR per person and month. This is the cost of accompanied housing in Vienna. The average length of stay in an accompanied housing institution is 18 months.

The cost of prevention of one eviction is 370 EUR per person (budget of FAWOS divided through prevented evictions). 20% of the clients need advice and help a second time. In this case the prevention of an eviction would cost 444 EUR. **Thus the money needed for preventing one eviction allows only one month of reintegration measures.**

In other terms **prevention needs less than one tenth of the amount of money** it is necessary to help people the long way from being homeless into a home. And the longer somebody has felt the experience of homelessness the longer time he or she will need for reintegration. Of course prevention and reintegration must go hand in hand. And there will always be people who will need more than a counselling service can provide, who need to be cared for a longer period of time, before they will be able to live alone in an own apartment. But they can be supervised in their own home and should not have to loose their home in the first place. Anyhow it is still less expensive to prevent people from losing their flats than to re-integrate them or to accommodate them in a new flat.

Last but not least one of the most important benefits is: Prevention of eviction means, for the people concerned, the **prevention of personal suffering**. Important socialising processes (particularly with children) do not get interrupted.

On account of these positive results other Austrian cities and regions have already started or are trying to initiate similar facilities.

8.3 In the Austrian **rental act** there are some regulations which are responsible, that people with low income often cannot find adequate housing in the private market. First of all there are **high entry costs** for people who want to rent an apartment. In order to get a lease contract a person has to pay up to 6 monthly rents caution money (security deposit) and 3 monthly rents brokerage. There is nearly no effective legal upper limit of the rent since the last amendment of the rental act any more. This means that a

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<sup>44</sup> All figures by FAWOS

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landlord can ask as much money as the market will pay for newly rented dwellings . Third, the Austrian legal system allows temporary lease contracts for a period of not less than three years. Because of that the entry costs for people with low income sometimes have to be paid every three years. People do not go to court and insist on (claim) their rights anymore in order not to lose their contracts.

As the costs for rents thus and because of a high inflation have risen enormously in the last years the Austrian social partners at the moment are discussing measures to keep housing affordable and therefore prevent homelessness. Tenants associations consider especially **effective upper limits concerning the price** and **regulations to lower the brokerage** to be effective interventions in this matter.

There are **housing allowances** available for special social situations (especially low income). According to the federal system in Austria there are 9 different allowance systems. The prevention of homelessness is part of the social welfare system. Persons who do not reach the floor income for housing allowances are entitled for **social benefits**. They are designed to also provide the minimum money for housing. In principle this system is effective in the fight against homelessness, but there is also 9 different social benefit systems in Austria.

**Housing advice** makes sense to explain the different facets of the segments of the housing market. How to enter each segment, what does it cost, legal advice, reliable offers, housing allowances and social benefits, but also personal financial planning are some necessary aspects of good advice. In order to prevent homelessness **effective housing advice** needs to come to the client, (aufsuchend?), to accompany the client for the necessary time (begleitend?), and to follow up to prevent new crises (nachgehend?).

## 9. Right to Housing

Is the right to housing enshrined in the constitution and/or legislation of your country? If not, why?

Is the right to housing justiciable (can it be invoked through legal proceedings)?

For whom (what category of the population)?

How?

Is it effective? Why/why not (implementation problems...)?

Are you aware of any land-mark cases (case-law) related to the right to housing?

Do you believe that making the right to housing justiciable is the right approach to combating and preventing homelessness? Why (not)?

Is the discrimination in access to housing (social/private rental/homeownership) an issues in relation to homelessness? If yes, for whom and why?

The right to housing is not recognised as such by a law or under the Constitution in Austria, but housing as a basic need is recognised politically. Austria probably has a comparably low level of homelessness and still a comparably very good housing provision even for the lowest income groups. This positive situation is established by the following elements:

- A strong LPHA sector ("Limited Profit Housing Associations") plus additional public housing especially in Vienna.
- Cost rent scheme of LPHA.
- Rent control regime in parts of the private rental market.
- Strong infrastructure of assisted housing.
- Targeted housing allowances.
- A strong position of housing in civil society.

Nevertheless the situation gets worse as a growing number of people are not able to afford their housing costs due to deregulation and high rents in parts of the private market and due to high energy costs. NGOs working in the field recognise a growing number of "working poor", households who although participating in the labour market, are not able to finance the full amount of their housing and energy costs with their working income any more. Some persons do not fulfil the requirement of a longer residence of some kind in the municipality they remain at the moment and therefore are not entitled for public housing.

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Thus the “right to housing” actually is part of the political discussion concerning the implementation of “social rights” into the Austrian constitution. **BAWO Austria strongly recommends recognition of “the right to housing” by the Austrian constitution.** Therefore it also has been one of the main topics on the annual conferences of BAWO in the last two years. In 2007 the Minister of Social Affairs, Erwin Buchinger, in his opening speech strongly approved an incorporation of the right to housing in the Austrian constitution.

During the conference 2008 BAWO organised a workshop on the topic. Andréé Gachet from FEANTSA France introduced the new French system. The participants unanimously agreed, that equal to the right of housing **high quality standards** in the allocation of homeless as achieved in some Austrian provinces (e.g. Upper Austria) are also of utmost importance.

## **10. Immigration**

On the request of the Administrative Council, we added a section on migration. It might be useful (depends on the situation in your country...) to provide some information on the impact of migration on the housing market and on the housing situation of immigrants (in as much as it amount to the experience of homelessness). An issue of particular concern could be the rights of EU migrants (in particular of migrants from the new EU member states to the old EU-15) to housing and hostel accommodation.

The answers to this questions are included in the respective other topics above.