

INNOVATIVE HOUSING SOLUTIONS FOR THIRD COUNTRY NATIONALS

TECHNICAL GUIDELINES FOR MUNICIPALITIES



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The project "**Building evidence on innovative housing solutions for Third Country Nationals**", funded by the British Embassy in Italy and implemented by IOM, aims at facilitating housing integration of third country nationals (TCNs) residing in Italy through the development of guidelines for municipalities on how to develop good practices for providing affordable and adequate housing.

The analysis showed that there are some key **context-related factors** that significantly impact the design, implementation, and replicability of housing integration projects.

- **Access to stable and adequate housing proves difficult for all residents facing socio-economic hardships.** This is due, among other things, to lack of adequate private and public housing, difficulty in accessing credit, and job insecurity.
- TCNs, though, face **additional difficulties** in finding adequate accommodation due to lack of trust and/or discrimination in the rental market, and, to a lesser extent, poor language skills and barriers in accessing services.
- In addition, TCNs are more exposed to the **risks of housing exploitation**. Informality in the private rental market poses an obstacle to contract registration and, consequently, to residency registration and access to services.
- Supporting housing autonomy requires a **holistic approach**, aimed at building social inclusion pathways that also involve employment, language skills development, and access to services.
- **Each local area has different characteristics.** Project design should start with context analysis and requires to be assessed from within the reference community. Housing initiatives should take into account the migration history of the local area (e.g. first reception, transit, stable permanence, family reunification), and the demographic composition of the foreign population (individuals, families, seasonal workers etc.).



The guidelines presented in this document were developed based on interviews with key informants, literature reviews of existing good practices, and focus groups with representatives of Italian municipalities and third sector organizations (TSOs).

The recommendations regard five key areas for successful project design and implementation, namely sustainable project development, mainstreaming, specific integration needs, participation and exchange networks.



(1) Sustainable project development



(2) Mainstreaming



(3) Specific integration needs



(4) Participation



(5) Exchange networks



(1) Sustainable project development

Sustainable and effective housing integration initiatives should be based on technical and institutional cooperation.



(1.1) Technical assistance and capacity building

- Municipalities have a **fundamental role** in supporting housing integration, coordinating local actors, and securing funding.
- Despite this, municipalities face severe and largely structural **personnel shortages**. The lack of human resources represents a technical obstacle to project development. Therefore, it is important to **expand staff and services** dedicated to housing projects and foresee multidisciplinary teams (including educators, social workers, and technicians).
- It is also fundamental to **strengthen municipalities' technical competencies and capacity** in matters of project development, accounting, and project management, particularly with respect to European funding instruments.
- Addressing personnel shortages and updating competences would significantly **improve project design and management capacities in the medium-long term**, ensuring more systemic and sustainable interventions.
- In this respect, technical assistance from TSOs proves fundamental in the project design, implementation, and monitoring phases. **Working in close cooperation with TSOs, municipalities can benefit from specific intercultural competences, additional technical training, and greater coordination capacity on the field.**
- Support networks provided by TSOs **can be adjusted** on the basis of the municipalities' real needs. They also contribute to the **social innovation potential** of co-designed housing projects.
- Importantly, capacity building activities in cooperation with TSOs prove most effective if they happen **through local, national, and international exchange networks** (see point 5).





(1.2) Institutional coordination and support

- By their very nature, housing integration initiatives require **strong interdepartmental synergies** within municipalities. To this end, it is crucial to facilitate coordination and exchange venues through thematic working groups.
- It is also crucial that actions in this field are agreed upon by the **technical-administrative management** and the **political leadership** of each municipality.
- On one hand, the analysis highlighted that **political-institutional guarantees** are essential to legitimise actions in favour of TCNs in the eyes of the public. Their absence or poor institutional involvement is perceived as an element which may jeopardise the success of housing integration projects (particularly with respect to securing the collaboration of private landlords).
- At the same time, however, project development and implementation should **go beyond the political mandate from local authorities**. Using their technical-administrative autonomy, municipalities should develop **far-reaching actions** for social inclusion and to ensure **continuity**.



(2) Mainstreaming

- Housing integration projects should be part of **broader welfare and social cohesion strategies**.
- While it is important to provide specific services to TCNs, housing support measures should be **cross-sectoral** and respond to **community needs** (e.g. poverty reduction, skills development, combatting housing and work exploitation, gender equality).
- The governance level which is best tasked to achieving this objective is **the municipal level** given its proximity to local communities. Local and neighbourhood communities represent ideal interlocutors to co-design or co-implement collaborative housing projects (see point 4).



- Mainstreaming of housing integration initiatives is more effective and preferable also with respect to **garnering public support**. Through mainstreaming, municipalities and TSOs can bring to the fore **the benefits of social cohesion initiatives** that also involve TCNs for the whole community (e.g. vouchers for landlords, urban regeneration, renovation of vacant houses, etc.).



(3) Specific integration needs

- Together with housing support initiatives integrated into broader welfare policies, it is also important to **provide needs-based services to TCNs**, including cultural mediation services, and legal and linguistic support.
- Some categories of TCNs call for **specific housing support measures**, both from the material and social inclusion points of view. This is the case for example of unaccompanied minors, families, seasonal workers, and Roma communities.
- **Combining mainstreaming and specific integration needs**, municipalities should, therefore, develop cross-sectoral interventions.



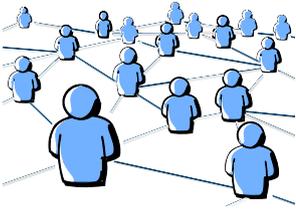
(4) Participation

- Engagement of beneficiaries is key for housing policy and project design. The role of TCNs may vary on the basis of social context, immigration history, involvement capacities, and project type. In some cases, for example, it is difficult for municipal authorities to find appropriate partners and/or interlocutors among beneficiaries or their involvement is not possible due to knowledge gaps.



- Participation may also vary on the basis of the project phase concerned.
 - **Participation in project co-design:** TCN communities, immigrant associations, and cultural mediators may be involved in co-design or policy updating to make sure that information about experiences, needs, and the available resources is shared at the city level. This is also important to ensure that TNCs are not just beneficiaries of housing integration measures but also active agents in the process.
 - **Participation in project implementation:** when it comes to specific or operative actions, direct beneficiaries may get involved through workshops, thematic meetings, and focus groups. These activities may also be used to foster interactions with neighbourhood communities, local actors, civil society, and third sector organizations. Participation in the implementation phase may also involve testimonies from beneficiaries with the aim of promoting housing projects within the reference community.
 - **Participation of indirect recipients:** it is key to favour the participation of all community residents as indirect beneficiaries. To achieve greater social inclusion and narrow perceived gaps between newcomers and host communities, it is important to raise awareness about the mutual benefits of housing integration projects.
- The engagement of direct and indirect beneficiaries contributes to raising awareness about community living and establishing trust-based relations at the **community level**.
- The participation of TCNs improves property management, neighbourhood relations, knowledge of rights and duties, and awareness about housing exploitation.
- Participation in collaborative housing projects (e.g. co-housing, "*condomini solidali*", shared public spaces) also allows for the reduction of costs, renovation of urban spaces, and creation of new public services.
- Last but not least, collaborative housing promotes the **development of trust-based networks**. These networks are instrumental in countering lack of trust in the private rental market and support TCNs on the path towards full housing autonomy.





(5) Exchange networks

- National and international exchange networks are paramount as they **favour knowledge sharing and capacity building** (see point 1.1).
- In particular, this research found that municipal authorities often struggle to offer in-house capacity building services to their personnel, and have to resort to **external support**. In this respect, networks like *ADMin4All* and *Includ-EU* are key to the fostering of skill development and exchange, be it locally, nationally, or at the European level.
- Networking, peer-to-peer exchanges, and capacity building should involve different professionals and aspects of housing integration projects. This would ensure an encompassing skills development with far-reaching effects on housing integration projects.

