

# **Housing pathways of refugees as an indicator for (social/spatial) integration in Flanders.**

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## **Abstract:**

Today refugees' housing careers are complicated due to capacity problems, discrimination and a lack of local social networks. To a large extent, the geographical location and the acquisition of residence are factors that significantly shape a further integration process. However, policy measures by the Flemish government do not reflect this reasoning, which causes voluntary organizations to take up a significant (local) role in the transition from shelter to housing. By means of multiannual qualitative research my PhD research investigates refugees housing careers both in the past and future. While previous research on housing careers mainly used to focus on future outcomes in migration countries, researchers like Firang (2018) describe the probable influence of homeland housing situations (past) on immigrants' further housing careers, concerning housing preferences, expectations and aspirations in their destination country. Also, previous reception situations, their locations, and social contexts could have a vital influence on further housing preferences (van der Horst, 2006). Although the research addresses housing careers, there is more to it than just a sequence of houses as static and physical dwellings. It is broadened to the concept of home or even homing (Boccagni, 2017). The project studies the way in which refugees' senses or experiences of home affect their housing careers, serving as an indicator for social integration. The research assesses housing careers by three multi-layered aspects: the relational, functional and morphological aspect. This research questions whether the experience of home is linked to a specific place and depends on the functional aspect of interpersonal relationships, social capital, community resources and local networks. At the same time, the role of the morphological aspect in this process is being studied: how are the material aspects of a home experience (morphologically) affected by migration (homeland & adopting country)? Starting from the relational aspect, most attention goes to activities, barriers and actors involved in housing search process itself. The mechanisms of how newcomers access

housing can be better understood by looking at practices and interactions of diverse actors providing formal and informal support in the search process (Aigner, 2018; Murdie, 2002). The study pictures the role of these different actors and particularly tries to demonstrate the full task of voluntary organizations.

## **References**

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