Housing as a starting point for migrants' integration: opportunities and obstacles in Emilia-Romagna region[1]

La casa come punto di partenza per l'integrazione dei migranti: opportunità e ostacoli in Emilia-Romagna

Marta Salinaro
Ricercatrice
Università di Bologna

Marta Ilardo
Ricercatrice
Università di Bologna

Abstract

The article focuses on the need to implement housing integration practices for migrants in Italy. Through an overview of the literature on housing, with an insight at the Emilia-Romagna region, the aim was to identify opportunities and obstacles that arise for refugees and holders of international protection once they leave the reception and integration services. As part of the H2020 MERGING project we introduce a first phase of the qualitative research conducted and the methodology adopted for the selection of the case study investigated. The selected project presents itself as a potential model to be implemented to address the housing issue as a right to be protected but also as a starting point for the integration process.

Keywords: housing, forced migration, integration, Emilia-Romagna, case study.

Sommario

L'articolo si concentra sulla necessità di implementare pratiche di integrazione abitativa per i migranti in Italia. Attraverso una panoramica della letteratura sull'abitare, con uno sguardo alla regione Emilia-Romagna, l'obiettivo è stato quello di identificare le opportunità e gli ostacoli che si presentano ai rifugiati e ai titolari di protezione internazionale una volta che lasciano i servizi di accoglienza e integrazione. Nell'ambito del progetto H2020 MERGING introduciamo una prima fase della ricerca qualitativa condotta e la metodologia adottata per la selezione del caso di studio indagato. Il progetto selezionato si presenta come un potenziale modello da implementare per affrontare la questione abitativa come diritto da tutelare ma anche come punto di partenza per il processo di integrazione.

Parole chiave: abitare, migrazioni forzate, integrazione, Emilia-Romagna, caso studio.

Introduction

In the last decade forced migration has been on the frontline of EU politics. The European Union's response to the crisis in the Mediterranean marked a significant expansion of the external dimension of European immigration and asylum policy, with the search for new cooperative models based on the experiences gained in the management of *mixed* flows during the two-year period 2015-2016.

Indeed, the reception and the consequent integration of people who arrived in 2015 and 2016, as well as those who have continued to migrate till today have posed challenges for both administrations, civil societies, and migrants.

To provide guidance for addressing the migration-related challenges mentioned in the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, the EU has developed an Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021-2027), which is a follow-up of the 2016 Action Plan, that

covers all the different stages and phases of the integration process: predeparture measures, reception and early integration, long-term integration, and the building of inclusive and cohesive societies. It considers the different situation of migrant populations in member States and supports member States and other relevant stakeholders in finding the adequate response in their integration and inclusion policies (Action Plan 2021-2027, p. 3).

According to the EU the involvement of migrants with their rights and responsibilities within their host society is fundamental, as well as the commitment of the host society itself, which has to create the opportunities for a full participation from the economic, social, cultural and political points of view (Ambrosini and Abbatecola, 2009; Boccagni and Pollini, 2012; Ager and Strang, 2018). Therefore, integration is defined as a bilateral process involving mutual commitment on both sides, and can be interpreted as a long-term action, in which there are several factors and basic needs (Sciortino, 2015). One of these basic needs is access to housing, recognised as a key determinant of successful integration also for its strong impact on employment and education opportunities and on the interactions between migrants and host communities.

Despite officially being considered a fundamental human right, access to housing for migrants and adequate legislations in this field are still not guaranteed all over Europe. The economic crisis of 2008 has brought to the fore a veritable housing crisis in Europe and the severe lack of adequate public interventions in housing provision has turned this crisis into a new normal. In fact, the increasing housing prices, shortages of affordable and social housing, and discrimination in the housing market make it difficult for migrants to find adequate and long-term housing solutions (Lukes *et al.*, 2019).

In the face of this scenario, Member States are encouraged to ensure a holistic approach and coordinate housing policies with regulations on access to employment, education, healthcare and social services and provide adapted and autonomous housing solutions as early as possible for refugees and asylum seekers who are likely to be granted international protection. As well, the European Commission (2021-2027) encourage promoting a model of autonomous housing (rather than collective housing) for asylum applicants, especially families, and disseminates and scales up successful innovative models of inclusive and affordable housing for beneficiaries of international protection.

In this regard, housing integration practices for migrants have been the subject of extensive discussion in the international literature and numerous contributions have focused on their conceptual definition, articulation and analysis. The academic literature includes different strands of research, for example, academic knowledge on housing understood as social policy is rich and covers housing programmes for low-income families to analyse the impact of housing on poverty reduction, deconcentration (McClure, 2008), and residential segregation (Anderson *et al.*, 2003), as well as the impact of affordable housing programmes to revitalise low-income communities and make them safer (Diamond and McQuade, 2019). Other scholars have analysed housing programmes for disadvantaged populations, including migrants and refugees (Bevelander, 2011). However, little has been done to understand how housing affects integration.

To support and enrich the thesis for which the possibility to access housing for migrants is directly linked with their social integration, welfare and employment, the MERGING *Housing for immigrants and community integration in Europe and beyond: strategies, policies, dwellings and governance* H2020 Project has analysed different housing practices and solutions for migrants developed in four European countries (Spain, France, Sweden, Italy).

The MERGING project, which started in January 2021, has just completed its first phase, during which each of the countries involved analysed existing knowledge on the subject, integration initiatives at macro (EU migration policies), meso (regional economic and social systems) and micro (individual practices) levels in which housing occupies a prominent place. On this theoretical-empirical basis, each partner country has found potential case studies identified during the mapping phase of existing experiences on the national and regional territory, until selecting the case study to be analysed in depth.

The qualitative analysis focused on four countries/cases, i.e. France, Italy, Spain and Sweden to determine and demonstrate the factors contributing to successful migrant inclusion though accommodation in each of these countries. This will enable us to assess the feasibility of participatory pilots in order to implement, test and evaluate them in 3 regions of these European countries involved. The final objective of the current research is to contribute – empirically, methodologically and conceptually – to integration studies through a migrant-centred approach, while providing empirically grounded policy and operational recommendations to foster innovation in the field of migrant integration in Europe.

Since housing solutions for migrants are highly context-dependent, this paper will address the selection process of a case study by facing the Italian context, with a particular focus on the Emilia Romagna region and the city of Bologna.

The research process we hereby present has been extracted by combining extensive deskwork on primary literature overview on housing for migrants in Italy and both theoretical and purposive sampling of a case study of regional/local integration housing projects carried out by the Italian interdisciplinary research team (UNIBO)[2]. Due to its methodological approach, the research phase described here has an eminently exploratory intent and does not aim at a generalisation of its result.

1. Main problems and obstacles confronted by migrants in the access to housing in Italy

According to FEANTSA (European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless) and the Abbé Pierre Foundation, almost 4% of the EU population have experienced homelessness at least once during their lifetime. Moreover, the annual *Overview of Housing Exclusion and Homelessness in Europe* (2021) shows that nearly two million families are homeless and, in Italy, 58.5% of the approximately 49,000-52,000 homeless are foreigners.

A regressive panorama characterized by growing rejection tendencies, the worsening of housing conditions, and the territorial displacement of migrants emerged after the 2008 crisis. Migrants were increasingly pushed and segregated in interstitial and peripheral spaces and entered a vicious circle between informal work and informal housing.

In 2015, the refugee crisis paved the way for a whole series of new mechanisms for migrants' displacement, containment, and relocation that made the housing problem increasingly evident for migrants in many European cities (Paidakaki, 2021), and Italy is no exception.

The lack of housing solutions hampers in turn integration (Cortese and Zenarolla, 2016; Boccagni, 2018; Pece, 2017; Vietti, 2020) as it impacts migrants' employment options and the educational opportunities. As well, for the same reason, their social interactions, residence situation and, accordingly, their possibility to apply for family reunification and citizenship rights are compromised.

In particular, experts underline that this risk of marginalization and precariousness is particularly evident when migrants leave reception centers: when and if they leave,

migrant do not always find a system of information, coordination, and help to guide them in the transition from reception to independent housing solution. Moreover, despite the severe transformations that have affected the Italian reception system ever since its creation, a comprehensive plan for reception and inclusion of migrants able to bridging the gap between the protection granted and the presumption of a full autonomy after leaving the reception centers is still lacking (Campomori and Feraco, 2018; Salinaro, 2021).

In agreement with this analysis, Dotsey and Lumley-Sapanski (2021) highlight also other critical aspects that hinder this transition from reception to integration concerning the housing opportunities. In particular, their research highlights the combination of a lack of permanent work contract and a lack of a locally based social network, limited knowledge of housing options, limited capacity to afford them, and the small chances that migrants possess documentation (a formal contract) required for accessing a legal housing contract. This additional combination of factors generates a high level of housing precariousness for subjects moving from state-managed accommodation to independent housing.

In addition, literature points to different types of discrimination and forms of racism against migrants that are widespread in the rental market: from prejudice, whereby landlords refuse to rent to foreigners, to speculation whereby people rent to migrants but under conditions that are unfavorable to them, i.e. at higher prices than Italians or for the same rent as Italians, yet renting houses below any standard level of quality and equipment (Bosch *et al.*, 2010; Baldini and Federici, 2011; Colombo, 2019). These unfavorable conditions are compounded by inadequate legislation on rights, which leads those concerned towards distrust, frustration, and to the point of giving up regulated housing, in the most extreme cases.

Concerning the problems related to the real estate market, Colombo (2019) points out that in Italy there is no national system for regulating rents and the real estate market is private. In fact, there is a deep lack of a national system in the regulation of social and housing policies. Within this framework, migrants experience great difficulties in accessing housing, as housing is not adequately treated as a social priority in Italy and the requirements for accessing public residential housing are very strict and selective (Meer *et al.*, 2021; Petrillo, 2018).

Despite Article 40 of the Consolidated Law on Immigration which states that regularly residing foreign nationals, similarly to Italian citizens, may access public housing without any discriminations whatsoever (Article 43, Paragraph 2, Letter c), more recent law provisions have introduced additional requirements. In particular, the 2008 national housing plan (Law 133/2008, Decree of Ministries Council's President 16/07/2009, Decree 08/03/2010) envisaged the provision of residential housing to different groups of subjects, including low-income regular migrants. And yet, such provision has been subject to the applicants' residency in the national territory for at least ten years, or in the regional territory for at least five years (Article 11, Paragraph 13). The same applies to the requirements for accessing a rent supplement. As a result, the provision of a residency conditionality for accessing public residential housing seems to have penalized the population with a migratory background.

This results in a high level of housing precariousness and explains the missing nexus between reception and integration (Campomori and Ambrosini, 2020; Salinaro, 2021).

Scholars such as Mariani and Rossi (2011), Fravega (2018), Colombo (2019), Lomonaco (2020) as well as Meer *et al.* (2021) have demonstrated the precarious situation in which many migrants and refugees find themselves derives from legal norms that recognize migrants a *permanently flexible status* (Dotsey and Lumley-Sapanski, 2021),

which exposes them to the vulnerable condition of underpaid workers (i.e., working poor), and the conditions of exclusion and downward assimilation deriving from it, that often results in a process of entrapment in *ethnic, economic and housing niches* (Fravega, 2018). In this regard, some studies note the development of the so-called *migratory chain* (Haug, 2008), the process by which a flow of migrants moving into a given area leads to the settlement of new migrants of the same origin in the same area. Chain migration encourages co-housing arrangements based on ethnic or family ties with members of the same family migrating at different times sponsoring forms of mutual cooperation and further migratory movements (usually the first who migrate are primary wage earners, followed by secondary wage earners or those with no income). However, this phenomenon has not yet been deeply investigated as the production of social, cultural, and urban segregation. According to some informant interviewed this ambivalent phenomenon of inter-ethnic cooperation and self-segregation could be also interpreted as a consequence of the problem of discrimination and racism which spreads on different levels of social life mentioned above.

These unfavorable conditions are compounded by inadequate legislation on rights, which leads those concerned towards distrust and frustration, to the point, in the most extreme cases, of giving up regulated housing (Campomori, 2018). From this point of view, the complex material difficulties of migrants intersect with cultural, urban, and psycho-social factors that do not encourage the search for solutions in institutions and cause the migrant to fall into a virtuous circle inscribed in a triangle of vulnerability suspended between migration, homelessness and poverty.

Intervening into this vicious circle, Italian third sector organizations had to take action in filling state policies' gaps in the provision of housing solutions to marginalized groups of both nationals and non-nationals, from which differentiated paths and dimensions of social inclusion have arisen.

In recent years, the cities have supported low-scale projects in different districts and the most frequent solutions have been recurring to host families, co-housing projects, social housing initiatives, but also property brokerage, and especially the Housing First approach, a delivery service system mainly based on immediate access to permanent and independent housing.

2. Methodology

Housing projects in Emilia Romagna and the selection of the case study

Following a reconstruction of a framework on housing for migrants in Italy, we focused on the choice of the case study to be investigated.

The in-depth literature had already allowed us to carry out a theoretical sampling, identifying initiatives in Italy aimed at inclusion through housing. We then proceeded with a purposive sampling strategy (Gentles *et al.*, 2015) that allowed us to maximize the variety of cases and identify a heterogeneity of the services offered (i.e. brokerage services for rent; housing transition services).

To make our work operational, we were inspired by various proposals to qualify and evaluate the integration policies suggested by the works of Ager and Strang (2008), Hynie *et al.* (2016), Garcés-Mascareñas and Penninx (2016).

In this phase of the MERGING project, each partner conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with experts and stakeholders at national, regional and local level through the snowballing recruitment technique (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981; Noy, 2008), to identify innovative housing integration practices in the current scenario of each

country involved. The choice to interview scholars and stakeholders was aimed at mapping the existing resources, the management methods and the participatory actions that have been tested in Italy in terms of access to housing for refugees and holders of international protection, but also of a larger population that is marginalized.

In order to select our case study, the Italian team conducted 15 interviews, with both academic and non-academic experts (8 in total), as well as relevant policy makers and stakeholders at the national, regional, and local levels (7 in total) (Tab. 1) focusing the attention on the Emilia-Romagna context and thus identifying the most significant realities to be explored from which to determine the case study.

Interview type	Number of interviewees
Academic and non-academic experts	8
Stakeholders	7
Tot. Interviews	15

Tab. 1: Overview of interviews conducted for the selection of the case study (Cuconato *et al.,* 2021).

The information collected was then combined with a desk-research on the existing literature on immigrants' access to housing at national and regional levels (e.g., policy reports and online archives). These preliminary efforts constituted the basis for drafting two country reports respectively synthesizing the state of the art about our topic, and available policies concerning this theme. Both reports informed our mapping of relevant experiences of projects favoring access to housing for refugees and people holding diverse forms of international protection.

The decision to focus the study on the Emilia-Romagna area was made for several factors. First, Emilia-Romagna is the second Italian region for the number of migrants welcomed, after Lombardy, keeping the regional figure at 10% of the national total over the years, as reported by the Regional Observatory on Migration Phenomena (Regione Emilia-Romagna, 2021). The latest data published by the Observatory reveal, as of December 2020, 10,494 migrants received in local services (i.e. first and second reception centers, CAS and SAI)[3].

Furthermore, the Emilia-Romagna reception model is characterized by a high level of territorial diffusion compared to other areas of the country, counting a network of 174 municipalities, equal to 53% of the regional total. This made it possible to promote and strengthen a model of widespread reception in medium-sized structures and apartments, more functional in encouraging the social inclusion of the migrants received (Regione Emilia-Romagna, 2021).

Therefore, in this territorial context, local authorities and the third sector actively collaborate in promoting an integrated reception, which seeks to stem the limits defined by the rules and practices of emergency reception and assistance in order to favor intervention models that are functional to guarantee a real integration in the new context of life.

The realities that we have selected for their activity aimed at the housing integration in the Emilia-Romagna context were the following: *Salus Space* project, which was funded in Bologna by the EU Urban Innovative Actions programme and involved 16 partner entities under the coordination of Bologna Municipality. Salus Space is a multifunctional center. The area, where the Villa Salus private clinic once stood, has been recovered from abandonment and regenerated. It offers not only accommodation, but also artistic and craft workshops, a theater, a study center with coworking stations, an emporium, a weekly market, vegetable gardens, a restaurant and above all an intercultural and collaborative community.

Housing First Co.Bo.[4] project, which is developed by the cooperative Piazza Grande and, since 2018, receives funding from Bologna Municipality's ASP within the scope of the national PON Metro (Programma Operativo Nazionale Città Metropolitane 2014-2020) is a program aimed at people living in conditions of severe marginalization, often people who have experienced the chronicization of homelessness.

Mediterranean Hopes project of FCEI (i.e. the Italian Federation of Evangelic Churches), which has been activated nationwide through the work of non-profit associations is based in several regions throughout Italy and act as implementing partners. Among other activities it carries out, it deals with reception through humanitarian corridors.

Tandem project of CIAC non-profit organization, which is based in the city of Parma. Tandem is an intercultural co-housing project between young Italians and young holders of protection leaving the SAI reception system. It is characterized as a laboratory of community and civic commitment.

Each of the cases listed was investigated through semi-structured interviews with the coordinators of the four projects. We drafted 46 questions divided into 6 dimensions to explore, relating to: description of the project (composition, management and organization); beneficiaries; services; participatory approach; networks; assessment.

The information collected was useful to compile a grid of indicators developed by our team and common to all MERGING partners, used to select the case study. 57 items related to five categories of analysis were explored: target audience (10 items); urban planning (14 items); integration goals (14 items); governance (11 items); welfare (8 items). Each item was given a score from 1 to 3 points, depending on whether the individual project assessed was «not responsive» = 1; «quite responsive» = 2; «very responsive» = 3.

	TARGET AUDIENCE	URBAN PLANNING	INTEGRATION GOALS	GOVERNANCE	WELFARE	TOTAL SCORE
Salus Space	11	25	38	30	15	119
Mediterranean Hopes_FCEI	12	17	27	20	15	91
Housing First	10	18	32	29	20	109
Tandem	7	15	32	22	19	95

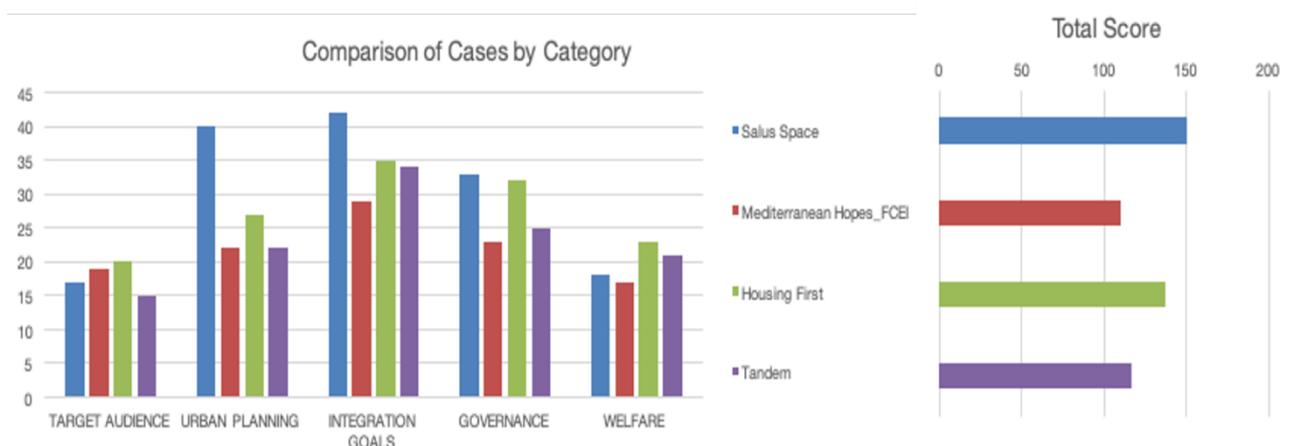Tab. 2: Projects' scoring by Category (Cuconato *et al.,* 2021).

Chart 1: Comparison of Cases by Category (Cuconato *et al.,* 2021).

The highest scoring case was the *Salus Space* project which was to be selected as a case study. However, we had to select the project that allowed us to investigate the specific target group of the MERGING project, i.e. refugees and protection holders, while ensuring reasonably high accessibility to interviews with stakeholders, community members and beneficiaries. This resulted in the choice to investigate the project with the second highest score, *Housing First Co.Bo*. In fact, *Salus Space* does not count refugees or holders of international protection among its beneficiaries. Furthermore, the project was supposed to start in January 2021, but the Covid-19 pandemic caused a significant delay in its implementation. When we had to start the field work phase, some beneficiaries had just moved into the building, while others were still in the entry phase.

Housing opportunities in Bologna: from the housing transition to the Housing First Co.Bo. program

By starting our in-depth study on the selected case located in Bologna, we, therefore, concentrated our efforts on the territory and the networks set up to address the issue of housing. The largest number of asylum seekers, refugees and holders of international protection in Emilia Romagna are welcomed in the structures in the province of Bologna. In particular, as of 30 June 2021, Bologna Municipality's data indicated the presence of 874 migrants in the local SAI project, of which 493 are holders of protection (www.bolognacares.it). As a result, many of the refugees who have left or will soon leave these reception centers in recent years will find themselves looking for housing in this area.

According to the stakeholders interviewed and the literature reviewed, the housing solutions available for refugees and holders of international protection in the Bologna area are mainly characterized by being of a temporary nature. At the end of their stay in the reception system, if it was not possible for them to find a stable housing solution in the private market or through personal acquaintances and informal networks, they are directed to *housing transition* services. They represent a sort of *third reception* for migrants who leave the CAS or SAI pathways.

The Housing Transition Service (Servizio Transizione Abitativa) of ASP City of Bologna deals with temporary housing projects and was born in 2014 as a response by the Municipality of Bologna to the housing emergency, to combat illegality and promote autonomy. The types of housing solutions provided are different according to individual situations, together with educational support aimed at achieving autonomy, in close collaboration with the sending social service. The service is aimed at adults or families who are in conditions of social and housing fragility and vulnerability. Initially the service had 24 lodgings available, to date it has about 290 lodgings. The housing resources available are divided into two different categories: housing transition and prompt reception. Thanks to the PON Metro loan, in 2017 the ASP housing transition services were able to activate the Social Agency for Rent (Agenzia Sociale per l'Affitto), with the main objective of supporting families welcomed in housing transition services or prompt reception on their path towards housing autonomy. This also involved the experimentation of new solutions to intervene in the prevention of housing problems and orientation to the private market.

The housing transition is also managed by non-profit organizations or third sector associations, to provide temporary accommodation to residents in so-called *residential distress*, both citizens and foreigners. In some cases, the third sector or non-profit organizations in charge of providing these services supplement the public funds they receive with the funds they obtain thanks to donations and loans received from private

foundations. The main housing transition projects available in the city of Bologna include: the *Housing Led* project, curated by Antoniano Onlus; *Pro-tetto* project, managed by diocesan Caritas as well as the *Housing transition* projects managed by the Società Dolce cooperative.

The investigation for access to transitional accommodation is initiated by the competent social services for each case, which in the case of refugees and holders of international protection would be the ASP International Protection Unit. From May 2019, the *Servizio Abitare* was activated within the ASP International Protection Operating Unit, created with the aim of facilitating the exit routes of migrants from the reception system, providing support to migrants themselves as well as to social workers and fostering the network between the realities that deal with the theme of housing in the Bologna area.

However, according to some respondents, the temporary nature of these solutions could risk translating into the mere postponement of the challenge of accessing stable and autonomous housing conditions for refugees and holders of international protection. *Housing transition* projects are believed to provide temporary solutions to prevent the risk of homelessness but do not respond to the demand for stable housing solutions. Furthermore, *housing transition* projects have limited resources, which cannot always satisfy all the requests.

A recent project, *Nausicaa*, was activated in December 2020 by the Municipality of Bologna and financed by the Migration Policy Fund of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies. Managed by the social cooperatives of the Consorzio L'Arcolaio, it is activated in close collaboration with the Housing Services of the Municipality of Bologna and with the Municipal Office for Work. The project foresees three specific actions: housing integration, work integration and then one concerning transcultural psychology activities. For housing integration, it proposes an innovative Property Brokerage project that creates guarantee tools to ensure that migrants can access housing in the private market.

Other solutions activated by the third sector are co-housing and family reception projects, such as the *Vesta*, *Refugees Welcome* and *Famiglie Accoglienti* projects. Some other organizations provide real estate brokerage services and coordinate co-housing experiences within the apartments they rent for the beneficiaries. This is the case with *Housing First Co.Bo.* program conducted by the Piazza Grande cooperative, the only proposal that is characterized as a permanent housing solution.

In-depth case analysis: the Housing First Co.Bo. program

Once our case study was identified, our team worked on creating three semi-structured interview grids, respectively to conduct interviews with stakeholders, community members and project beneficiaries.

The three interview structures were all aimed at investigating the role played by access to housing in the integration and social inclusion paths of refugees and beneficiaries of international protection.

The research questions that guided our analysis were: what factors contribute to the process of social and subjective integration of migrants who participate in housing initiatives? What factors of change and belonging to the community (citizenship, territory) contribute to the integration process? What are the good practices that make the housing project a possible replicable model in other situations? What factors (funding, support from the public and private entities, etc.) have managerial and organizational implications for implementing sustainable and innovative housing solutions for migrants?

After discussing and approving our interview grids with all partners involved, we began planning and conducting 22 online or in-person interviews with institutional and non-institutional stakeholders related to *Housing First Co.Bo.* service network (7 in total), other local stakeholders who collaborate with *Housing First Co.Bo.* (4 in total) the employees working for the project (4 in total), some community members who revolve around the apartments rented by the project (2 in total), as well as the few beneficiaries who agreed to participate in our study (3 in total).

Interview type	Number of interviewees
Stakeholders connected to the *Housing First Co.Bo.* network of services	7
Employees working for the project	4 (1 coordinator + 3 members of the multidisciplinary team)
Community members	2 (1 neighbor + 1 landlord)
Refugees	5 (3 beneficiaries of the selected housing project + 2 non-beneficiaries of the selected housing project)
Other local stakeholders	4
Tot. Interviews	22

Tab. 3: Overview of interviews conducted (Cuconato *et al.,* 2021).

All the interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of each interviewee and then transcribed. Then, all the selected texts were encoded, first manually and then using the NVivo software.

Only three out of seventeen holders of some form of international protection or legal residence permit in Italy hosted in *Housing First Co.Bo.* agreed to meet us for an interview. Having to collect as many stories as possible of migrants who found themselves in the position of looking for a house in the Bologna area, we, therefore, decided to include in our studio also two former beneficiaries of the *Pro-Tetto* project in Bologna; developed by Caritas, it hosts for a short period some refugees who have left the reception system in apartments that the cooperative rents from the private market.

The *Housing First Co.Bo.* project was born from the Housing First (HF) program launched in the United States in 1990 with the aim of providing an efficient housing solution to a specific target population, the homeless. It was implemented for the first time in Italy in 2014. It promotes ways of social and work reintegration of the homeless and disadvantaged people and, as the name suggests, the house represents the starting point of this model. *Housing First Co.Bo.* arises from the project of the Piazza Grande cooperative *Tutti a casa* activated in 2012. Given the positive results of the project in terms of housing maintenance, improvement of health conditions and contribution to social integration, the Municipality of Bologna has decided to finance it by starting a Housing First experimentation and allocating funds for the experimentation through a public tender. In 2015 Piazza Grande obtained both the financing and the management of seven apartments owned by ASP where it would have been possible to place additional homeless people. In 2018 the Municipality of Bologna decided to renew the project for a further four years. *Housing First Co.Bo.* hosts 73 people, 70 of which live in co-housing and 3 in studios. 7 apartments are provided by the public body ASP while 29 come from the private market. In the United States, most of the people who join Housing First are housed in studios, however in Italy this is not possible due to scarce resources.

The people admitted to participate in the project belong to the first and second categories of the ETHOS classification[5] and to specific categories defined by the PON Metro Bologna (young adults, couples, LGBTQI+). Participants not only live in

conditions of severe marginalization but are very often people who have experienced the chronicization of homelessness, as they have either lived on the street or used the dormitories of the city for at least two years. Additionally, they may be drug addicts, diagnosed with psychiatric illnesses or with a dual diagnosis.

Housing First Co.Bo. rents the apartments by entering into regular subletting agreements to its beneficiaries. Through a financial contribution, it supports them in paying the rent. The project seeks to promote social integration through the provision and support of stable and independent housing. There is an emphasis on housing located in neighborhoods, as a means by which social integration is provided (Quilgars and Peace, 2016, p. 6). The apartments are located in areas of the city that are easily accessible from a logistical point of view, some being in the city center. This choice allows beneficiaries to socialize with local citizens and feel part of a neighborhood.

Currently, 19 out of a total of 73 beneficiaries are refugees or beneficiaries of international protection or other types of long-term residence permit and live in *Housing First Co.Bo.* apartments. The selection procedure for access to the project involves 4 phases: application at the social counter, interview with a social worker, evaluation and access to the apartment. This process involves all the services addressed to the person who has been taken in charge, all equally participating in supporting and bringing the person closer to all the opportunities that they can find around them. The project adopts a methodology based on the capability approach, which aims at the empowerment of the beneficiaries and their active participation.

Conclusions

Considering the first reflections that emerge from the research carried out within the MERGING project, the objectives pursued by *Housing First Co.Bo.* are wide-ranging and represent a potential model to be implemented to give centrality to the housing as a starting point for the process of inclusion. An implementation and re-evaluation of this program would be desirable not only for people with a chronic homeless condition but also as a possibility for a wider target and as a prevention of situations of marginalization and social adversity in which migrants could find themselves once they leave the reception services. Access to housing, in this sense, would offer the opportunity to take care of one's well-being and to improve one's autonomy in a stable way, also facilitating access to the labor market.

Looking at the increase in migratory flows in recent years, a greater number of migrants can be expected who will need access to permanent or long-term housing solutions. As emerged from the analyzes carried out, the lack of responses from the public market and the discrimination suffered by migrants in the process of searching for a house in the private market leads to an answer towards temporary solutions. Through the mediation of the third sector and informal networks, the solutions offered are characterized as an extension of the temporary nature of the reception system (i.e. CAS and SAI services). A greater effort would therefore be desirable during the stay in the services dedicated to the reception and integration of migrants. The search for a housing solution should be activated in advance to try to facilitate the exit routes from the services themselves and prevent the continuation of emergency solutions.

This research also brings out reflections that are in line with the European Commission recommendation (Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027) to promote a model of autonomous housing (rather than collective housing) for migrants and disseminate and scale up successful innovative models of inclusive and affordable housing for beneficiaries of international protection. The implementation of programs

such as *Housing First Co.Bo.* could provide more stable answers in a political and social context that struggles to find structured answers and effective collaboration between public institutions, the private market and real estate agencies to the housing problem. It would therefore be necessary to implement other proposals that are in line with the principle of guaranteeing the right to housing as the starting point to offer a concrete response to the need for a dignified life for all, no one excluded.

Note

[1] Funding: The study was conducted as part of MERGING *Housing for immigrants and community integration in Europe and beyond: strategies, policies, dwellings and governance* H2020 Project. The project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101004535. See the web-site of the European research: https://www.merging-housing-project.eu/.

Authors' Contributions: The two authors both were involved in the conception and design, acquisition, analysis and interpretation of data. Although the manuscript is a result of a collaboration among the two authors, the contribution of each author can be qualified as follows: Marta Ilardo wrote the introduction and section 1; Marta Salinaro wrote section 2 and conclusions.

This article reflects only the author's views and the Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.

[2] The Italian team of the project involves the Department of Education Sciences "G.M. Bertin" and the Department of Business Sciences of the University of Bologna.

[3] The Italian reception of asylum seekers and refugees consists of two systems: the first is the Reception and Integration System (SAI), managed by municipalities and NGOs, and the second is the Extraordinary Reception Centers (CAS), coordinated by the prefectures (the local offices of the Ministry of the Interior). Initially conceived as a temporary solution to cope with the increase in migrant arrivals in 2011, the CAS has become an essential additional support for the main reception system SAI. Today, asylum seekers, Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASCs), holders of international protection and people with specific residence permits are accommodated within SAI structures. Moreover, SAI services are divided into two levels: the first reception is dedicated to applicants for international protection, the second reception addresses instead those with an already determined legal status, and thus provides them with additional services aimed at their social integration. On the contrary, CAS reception services only address asylum seekers, e.g., first reception.

[4] Housing First Co.Bo. (Co.Bo. refers to the Municipality of Bologna).

[5] The European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS) was developed by FEANTSA and the European Observatory on Homelessness. ETHOS classifies people who are homeless according to their living or "home" situation. These conceptual categories are divided into 13 operational categories that can be used for different policy purposes such as mapping of the problem of homelessness and developing, monitoring and evaluating policies (feantsa.org).

Bibliography

Ager A. and Strang A. (2008), *Understanding integration: A conceptual framework*. In «Journal of refugee studies», Vol. 21, n. 2, pp. 166-191.

Ambrosini M. and Abbatecola E. (2009), *Migrazioni e società. Una rassegna di studi internazionali*, Milano, FrancoAngeli.

Anderson L.M., Charles J.S., Fullilove M.T., Scrimshaw S.C., Fielding J.E., Normand J. and Task Force on Community Preventive Services (2003), *Providing affordable family housing and reducing residential segregation by income: a systematic review*. In «American journal of preventive medicine», Vol. 24, n. 3, pp. 47-67.

Baldini M. and Federici M. (2011), *Ethnic discrimination in the Italian rental housing market*. In «Journal of Housing Economics», Vol. 20, n. 1, pp. 1-14.

Bevelander P. (2011), *The employment integration of resettled refugees, asylum claimants, and family reunion migrants in Sweden*. In «Refugee Survey Quarterly», Vol. 30, n. 1, pp. 22-43.

Biernacki P. and Waldorf D. (1981), *Snowball Sampling: problems and techniques of chain referral sampling*. In «Sociological Methods & Research», Vol. 10, n. 2, pp. 141-163.

Boccagni P. and Pollini G. (2012), *L'integrazione nello studio delle migrazioni. Teorie, indicatori, ricerche*, Milano, FrancoAngeli.

Boccagni P. (2018), *At home in home care? Contents and boundaries of the 'domestic' among immigrant live-in workers in Italy*. In «Housing studies», Vol. 33, n. 5, pp. 813-831.

Bosch M., Carnero A.M. and Farrè M., (2010), *Information and discrimination in the rental housing market: evidence from a field experiment*. In «Regional Science and Urban Economics», Vol. 40, pp. 11-19.

Campomori F. (2018), *Criticità e contraddizioni delle politiche di ricezione dei richiedenti asilo in Italia.* In «Social Policies», Vol. 3, pp. 429-436.

Campomori F. and Ambrosini M. (2020), *Multilevel governance in trouble: the implementation of asylum seekers' reception in Italy as a battleground*. In «Comparative Migration Studies», Vol. 8, n. 1, pp. 1-19.

Campomori F. and Feraco M. (2018), *Integrare i rifugiati dopo i percorsi di accoglienza: tra le lacune della politica e l'emergere di (fragili) pratiche socialmente innovative.* In «Rivista italiana di politiche pubbliche», Vol. 13, n. 1, pp. 127-157.

Campomori F. and Freddi G. (2016, September), *Protection system for asylum seekers in Italy: The weakness of integration policies*. In «Conference paper Annual Conference Espanet», pp. 1-3.

Colombo F. (2019), *The housing autonomy of asylum seekers and holders of international protection in Italy.* In «Argomenti. Journal of economics, culture and social research», Vol. 13, pp. 1-28.

Commission of the European Communities (1990), *Policies on Immigration and the Social Integration of Migrants in the European Community. Experts "Report on Behalf of the Commission of the European Communities*, Bruxelles, Commission of the European Communities, SEC (90)1813.

Cortese C. and Zenarolla A. (2016), *Housing First: una sfida per il contrasto alla grave marginalità e l'accesso alla casa anche in Italia*. In «Autonomie locali e servizi sociali», Vol. 39, n. 1, pp. 179-193.

Cuconato M., Ilardo M., Salinaro M., Pagano C., Caccamo S., Bolzani D., Corbo L., Bolognesi I. and Turnaj Elhart I. (2021), *Deliverable D3.1 Case Study Report: Case study: Housing First Co. Bo., Italy*, pp. 1-64.

Diamond R. and McQuade T. (2019), *Who wants affordable housing in their backyard? An equilibrium analysis of low-income property development*. In «Journal of Political Economy», Vol. 127, n. 3, pp. 1063-1117.

Dotsey S. and Lumley-Sapanski A. (2021), *Temporality, refugees, and housing: The effects of temporary assistance on refugee housing outcomes in Italy*. In «Cities», Vol. 111, pp. 1-11.

European Commission (2020), *New Pact on Migration and Asylum*. In EUR-Lex - 52020DC0609 - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu) (consulted on the 12/04/2022).

European Commission (2020), *Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027*. In EUR-Lex - 52020DC0758 - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu) (consulted on the 12/04/2022).

FEANTSA and Abbé Pierre Foundation (2021), *Sixth Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe 2021*. In 6th_Overview_of_Housing_Exclusion_in_Europe_2021_EN.pdf (feantsa.org) (consulted on the 28/04/2022).

Fravega E. (2018), *L'abitare migrante. Aspetti teorici e prospettive di ricerca*. In «Mondi migranti», Vol. 1, pp. 199-223.

Garcés-Mascareñas B. and Penninx R. (edited by) (2016), *Integration Processes and Policies in Europe. Contexts, Levels and Actors*, Springer Open. In Integration Processes and Policies in Europe: Contexts, Levels and Actors (oapen.org) (consulted on the 12/04/22).

Gentles S.J., Charles C., Ploeg J. and McKibbon K. (2015), *Sampling in Qualitative Research: Insights from an Overview of the Methods Literature*. In «The Qualitative Report», Vol. 20, n. 11, pp. 1772-1789.

Giuffrè M. and Marchetti C. (2020), *Vivere insieme*. In «Antropologia Pubblica», Vol. 6, n. 2, pp. 55-74.

Haug S. (2008), *Migration networks and migration decision-making*. In «Journal of ethnic and migration studies», Vol. 34, n. 4, pp. 585-605.

Housing and Economic Recovery Act Of 2008. In https://www.congress.gov/110/plaws/publ289/PLAW-110publ289.pdf (consulted on the 12/04/22).

Hynie M., Korn A. and Tao D. (2016), *Social context and social integration for Government Assisted Refugees in Ontario, Canada*. In M. Poteet and S. Nourpanah (edited by), *After the flight: The dynamics of refugee settlement and integration*, Cambridge, Scholars Editors, pp. 183-227.

Law 133/2008, Decree of Ministries Council's President 16/07/2009, Decree 08/03/2010): See Housing and Economic Recovery Act Of 2008. In https://www.congress.gov/110/plaws/publ289/PLAW-110publ289.pdf (IT) (consulted on the 12/04/22).

Legislative Decree N. 286 Dated 25 July 1998, available online at: https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/legislative-decree-2571998-no-286-consolidated-act-provisions-concerning_en (consulted on the 12/04/22).

Lomonaco A. (2020), *Discriminazione e diseguaglianza nell'accesso alla casa della popolazione straniera a Bologna*, [Dissertation thesis], Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna, Dottorato di ricerca in Sociologia e ricerca sociale, 32 Ciclo.

Lukes S., de Noronha N. and Finney N. (2019), *Slippery discrimination: a review of the drivers of migrant and minority housing disadvantage*. In «Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies», Vol. 45, n. 17, pp. 3188-3206.

Mariani L. and Rossi A. (2012), *La casa come fattore di integrazione*. In «Osservatorio romano sulle migrazioni», IX Rapporto, pp.193-200.

McClure K. (2008), *Deconcentrating poverty with housing programs*. In «Journal of the American Planning Association», Vol. 74, n. 1, pp. 90-99.

Meer N., Dimaio C., Hill E., Angeli M., Oberg K. and Emilsson H. (2021), *Governing displaced migration in Europe: housing and the role of the "local"*. In «Comparative Migration Studies», Vol. 9, n. 1, pp. 1-17.

Noy C. (2008), *Sampling Knowledge: The Hermeneutics of Snowball Sampling*, In «Qualitative Research, International Journal of Social Research Methodology», Vol. 11, n. 4, pp. 327-344.

Paidakaki A. (2021), *Social innovation in the times of a European twofold refugee-housing crisis. Evidences from the homelessness sector*. In «European Journal of Homelessness», Vol. 15, n. 1, pp. 13-34.

Pece E. (2017), *Dall'Housing Sociale ai nuovi percorsi abitativi per l'integrazione sociale dei migranti in Italia.* In «Culture e Studi del Sociale», Vol. 2, n. 2, pp. 189-201.

Petrillo A. (2018), *La crisi dell'abitare migrante in Italia: una prospettiva storica*. In «Sociologia urbana e rurale», Vol. 117, pp. 19-37.

Quilgars D. and Pleace N. (2016), *Housing First and Social Integration: A Realistic Aim?*. In «Cogitatio», Vol. 4, n. 4, pp. 5-15.

Regione Emilia-Romagna. Osservatorio regionale sul fenomeno migratorio (edited by) (2021), *L'immigrazione straniera in Emilia-Romagna*. In «I Quaderni dell'osservatorio». In L'immigrazione straniera in Emilia-Romagna — Sociale (regione.emilia-romagna.it) (consulted on the 12/04/22).

Salinaro M. (2021), *Temporanei Permanenti. Migranti e operatori dell'accoglienza: paradossi politici e traiettorie pedagogiche*, Foggia, Edizioni del Rosone.

Sciortino G. (2015), *È possibile misurare l'integrazione degli immigrati? Lo stato dell'arte.* In «Quaderni del Dipartimento di Sociologia e Ricerca Sociale», n. 63, Università degli Studi di Trento, Dipartimento di Sociologia e Ricerca Sociale.

Vietti F. (2020), *L'antropologia in condominio*. In «Antropologia Pubblica», Vol. 6, n. 2, pp. 33-54.

Sitography

https://www.merging-housing-project.eu/ (consulted on the12/04/2022).
https://www.bolognacares.it/ (consulted on the12/04/2022).