

Master Thesis

Home in Transition: Exploring Self-settlement Pathways and Emplacement of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Athens



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Abstract

This study set out to explore the housing pathways of refugees and asylum seekers in Athens, Greece, where a housing crisis has severely affected living conditions for an ever-expanding number of households. The importance of this research lies in its potential to advance knowledge on the self-settlement patterns of newcomers in post-2008-crisis Greece and make a comparative analysis with the housing characteristics of vulnerable citizens within Greek society. Twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted with refugees, asylum seekers, and vulnerable Greek citizens, including three Ukrainian refugees to explore potential differences in treatment based on population-centred policies that states impose on different refugee demographics. To overcome the limitations of the small sample size, insights from six key informant interviews with NGO administrators and academics provide a comprehensive overview of policy effectiveness and the role of non-state actors in supporting vulnerable individuals.

The research aimed to complement previous studies on the challenges newcomers face in accessing decent accommodation, the role of social capital in securing housing, and the outcomes of these efforts, primarily in terms of precariousness. To advance studies focused on the Housing Pathways approach in navigating these intricate circumstances, the Emplacement theory was used to include the perspectives of the host society and examine newcomers' sociospatial integration through a two-way process involving the host society, along with the Capabilities approach to emphasise the ramifications of substandard housing and deficient social policies on livelihoods. The findings suggest that all demographics face housing hurdles that significantly impact their well-being, with access to employment and legal status being pivotal for people's resilience. Ukrainian refugees in Greece also struggle with challenging financial conditions, yet they benefit from notably greater levels of state and societal openness. Finally, the Segregation theory was applied to interpret the daily conditions and interactions of these demographic groups in low-income central neighbourhoods of Athens. The research advocates for policy interventions to enhance refugee and housing policies and foster inclusivity amidst the ongoing restructuring of urban societies.

Keywords: refugees, housing pathways, social capital, segregation, emplacement, capabilities, internal borders

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List of abbreviations

NGOs: Non-Governmental Organisations

FDI: Foreign Direct Investment

Helios: Hellenic Integration Program for Beneficiaries of International Protection and Temporary Protection

ETHOS: European Typology for Homelessness and Housing Exclusion

FEANTSA: European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless

1. Introduction

In light of the unprecedented influx of refugees into the EU's territory in 2015, the Mayor of Leipzig stated: “{...} *We don't have a refugee crisis; we have a housing crisis*” (MigrationWork CIC, 2022). This statement encapsulates two predominant -and often intertwined- narratives that currently shape the discourse on migration and the housing sector.

First, contemporary migration is often labelled as a ‘‘crisis,’’ implying the need for close monitoring and regulation, resulting in the proliferation of border controls (Bakewell, 2020; Collyer, 2020; Scheel & Tazzioli, 2022). Despite expectations, stringent border regimes since 2015 have not diminished irregular migration but rather redirected its course (Collyer, 2020; Raghuram, 2020). Scholars now question the significance of territorial borders and explore the exertion of control over populations within destination countries. Concepts like ‘‘internal borders’’ reveal how states create barriers, limiting access to services and civil rights, including housing (Dotsey & Lumley-Sapanski, 2021; El-Kayed & Hamann, 2018). These practices rest on the ‘‘container thinking’’ associated with methodological nationalism, which perceives migrants as intruders disrupting the cultural homogeneity of the host society (Scheel & Tazzioli, 2022). The racialised perception inherent in this approach forms the basis of the integration paradigm, criticised for its neo-colonial implications (King, 2020).

However, when considering this racialised -internal- border enforcement, scholars have noted that specific groups of refugees are treated differently from the global refugee regime. For instance, inclusive practices have been observed toward Ukrainian refugees (De Coninck, 2023; Costello & Foster, 2022). According to Sparke (2006), the complete inclusion of particular populations—achieved through their unconditional admission and rapid access to essential services and civil rights—creates the perception that borders are hardly noticeable for these privileged groups.

Second, the Mayor of Leipzig's assertion highlights that challenges in securing adequate accommodation are an issue predating the arrival of refugees (Bhagat & Soederberg, 2019; Dotsey & Lumley-Sapanski, 2021). Recognising that what is perceived as a migration crisis is, in fact, a housing crisis emphasises the crucial need to understand the intricate connection between migration and housing. The ‘‘housing crisis’’ trope is more apt to describe the challenges encompassing the ‘‘lack of affordable housing, falling quality standards, insecurity, and socio-spatial concentrations of poverty (Powell & Robinson, 2019: 188). This predicament directly stems from the privatisation of the housing sector, in conjunction with neoliberal and austerity policies, which were exacerbated by the 2008 financial crisis. These policies have led to the externalisation of governmental social services, shifting welfare responsibilities to municipal governments, non-state actors, and vulnerable populations themselves (Bhagat & Soederberg, 2019; Darling, 2016; Peck, 2012; Peck, 2015; Ribera-Almandoz et

al., 2022; Soederberg, 2019). Thus, the atomisation features inherent in the neoliberal social state become more apparent at the urban scale, manifesting in the continuous marginalisation of both the low-income local population and refugees (Bhagat & Soederberg, 2019; Cabot, 2018).

The right to housing is unequivocal, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and Article 11 of the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966). This fundamental right is also integrated into the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in target 11.1, which emphasises universal access to adequate, safe, and affordable housing by 2030 (United Nations, 2024). Moreover, recognising access to adequate housing as a prerequisite for a dignified life, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2011) highlights its critical importance, particularly for migrants. This being said, access to housing is also considered one of the four key pillars of refugee integration (Ager & Strang, 2008; Kraler et al., 2020), serving as the foundation for a decent life in a new environment (Kilic & Kraler, 2022).

In essence, housing is more than mere shelter; it serves as a cornerstone for fulfilling fundamental human needs such as health, safety, and privacy while also fostering meaningful social connections that contribute to community belonging, thereby influencing both physical and emotional well-being (Ager & Strang, 2008; Brown et al., 2022; Clapham et al., 1990 Phillips, 2006; Rose, 2001). This impact extends beyond housing per se, shaping individuals' abilities to access crucial domains such as employment, education, and welfare services (Ager & Strang, 2008; Brown et al., 2022; Kissoon, 2010; Marsh et al., 2000; Phillips, 2006). The recognition of housing as a human right (Adam et al., 2019) underlines the imperative role of social policies in supporting accommodation for refugees, asylum seekers, and other vulnerable groups, emphasising the vital link between housing and societal well-being (Cheung & Phillimore, 2017).

1.1 Problem

Nevertheless, refugees and asylum seekers encounter constant housing challenges spanning from their initial arrival in a new country to their settlement efforts in subsequent years. Upon their initial arrival, asylum seekers are placed in reception centres as part of the asylum application process. According to the 1951 Geneva Convention, asylum is a universal human right and simultaneously an international obligation for countries (European Commission, n.d). Existing literature has predominantly focused on the substantial living conditions within this emergency accommodation scheme and their implications for the physical and mental well-being, as well as the long-term integration of asylum seekers (e.g., Bakker et al., 2016; Campesi, 2015; Kreichauf, 2018; Szczepanikova, 2013).

While scholars must shed light on the inhumane conditions in camps, limited understanding exists regarding the circumstances individuals face after leaving these facilities. A growing body of literature calls for examining the transition into independent living following the completion of the asylum application process and departure from the reception phase. Scholars have identified gaps in the current literature regarding the lived experiences of housing systems for refugees, the intricate dynamics involving structural inequalities, individual factors, and actors within the search process, as well as the implications of substandard housing on individuals' well-being (Adam et al., 2021; Aigner, 2018; Brown et al., 2022; El-Kayed & Hamann, 2018; Ribera-Almandoz et al., 2022). We opted for Athens municipality as our case study due to its status as Greece's capital city, located in the Attica region which represents 36% of the country's total population (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2023). Consequently, due to its increased employment opportunities, it emerges as the most likely destination for refugees to settle in. The city's background provides an ideal setting for studying systemic inequalities within urban contexts characterised by superdiversity.

1.2 Research Objective and Questions

The primary objective of this study is to gain a profound understanding of the housing situation of refugees and asylum seekers in Athens, Greece, emphasising the pivotal role of decent accommodation in both "local emplacement" and livelihood improvement opportunities. The study also seeks to discern whether different refugee subgroups, particularly Ukrainians, benefit from better access to accommodation and services, as suggested by scholars (Costello & Foster, 2022; De Coninck, 2022). Nonetheless, we intend not to isolate newcomers from other vulnerable groups within Greek society. Rather, we hypothesise that these groups may encounter similar housing challenges and reside in neighbourhoods with a high concentration of ethnic minorities.

The research adopts the housing pathways approach (Clapham 2002) as a valuable framework for delving into the self-settlement trajectories of newcomers and the vital role of social capital in this process. By outlining the refugee and housing policies in force, we aim to examine their implications for people's well-being and social cohesion between locals and newcomers. This includes understanding the newcomers' perceptions vis-a-vis the host majority regarding the effectiveness of both state and non-state actors in addressing their housing needs. Furthermore, it is crucial to discern whether locals face comparable issues and share interests with newcomers or harbour discriminatory attitudes, attributing blame for their current predicament.

In essence, we aspire to explore the effects of refugee socio-spatial integration on community dynamics in the local neighbourhoods of Athens. Considering that the New National Strategy for Integration in Greece (Hellenic Republic, 2022) envisions social integration as a mutual process

involving cooperation and dialogue between the host society and the immigrant population, our participants' selection rationale seems well-founded. Finally, in light of the policy context, we aim to comprehend the level of resilience demonstrated by each demographic group through the lens of the capabilities approach (Sen, 1999). This entails delving into individuals' freedom to lead lives they have reason to value (De Haas, 2021; Van Raemdonck et al., 2022). Having addressed the aforementioned objectives, our ultimate goal is to provide recommendations that will enhance refugee policies, ameliorate the housing sector, and thereby improve local emplacement in the city of Athens.

Following the research objectives, the main research question that we seek to answer is the following:

‘‘What are the housing characteristics and experiences of refugees and asylum seekers in Athens?’’

To answer the main question, we formulate the following sub-questions:

- 1) What housing strategies are employed by distinct refugee subgroups and asylum seekers to secure housing, and what are their current housing conditions?
- 2) How do their housing conditions compare to those of vulnerable citizens within Greek society, and what are the implications for local emplacement?
- 3) What is the level of resilience exhibited by each demographic, and what plans and capabilities exist to improve livelihoods?

1.3 Research Relevance

This study posits that housing is critical for the successful integration of refugees (Ager & Strang, 2008) and the primary means for individuals to pursue their life goals. By examining newcomers' housing characteristics and perceptions within the socioeconomic and political context of their settlement, the study aims to inform academics, policymakers, and support mechanisms, proposing alternatives to existing refugee and housing policies and exploring ways the region can improve inclusivity. Concurrently, various scholars have emphasised that refugees face housing challenges similar to those of low-income households in the host society (Adam et al., 2019; Aigner, 2019; Brown et al., 2022; Clair et al., 2019; Dotsey & Lumley-Sapanski, 2021; El-Kayed & Hamann, 2018; Fozdar & Hartley, 2014; Robinson et al., 2007). Nonetheless, to our knowledge, no other research combines these two

demographics' viewpoints or explores their -collective- expectations for the future, considering their spatial coexistence. This unique approach enhances the originality of our study.

Additionally, this study explores governmental and public responses to different refugee groups, contributing to a strand of literature that underscores the significance of accounting for such differentiation factors (Collyer, 2020; Costello & Foster, 2022; De Coninck, 2022). Finally, Greece presents a distinctive research setting due to the absence of a social housing institution, diverging from practices observed in other European countries (Emmanuel, 2006). Above all, vulnerable groups are increasingly prone to housing insecurity and its ramifications, owing to the lingering effects of the 2008 financial crisis and recent developments that have shrunk the housing supply.

1.4 Thesis Outline

This thesis consists of nine chapters. The first introduces the research topic, emphasising the importance of housing for refugees, and outlines the study's research questions and relevance. The second chapter details the theoretical underpinnings of refugee housing pathways and operationalises them through a conceptual model. Chapter three describes the data collection methodology, ethical considerations, and the researcher's positionality. In chapter four, a contextual background of the research site is provided before delving into the findings. Chapters five, six, and seven present the empirical findings addressing the three research subquestions, respectively: the housing pathways and conditions of newcomers, a comparison with vulnerable Greek citizens, and the implications for emplacement and livelihoods. Chapter eight links the theoretical background with empirical findings, discusses study limitations, and offers the researcher's interpretation along with policy recommendations. Finally, chapter nine concludes by answering the research questions and objectives, proposing future research, and emphasising the urgency of addressing housing and migration issues in the global policy agenda.

2. Theoretical Framework

To understand the housing characteristics of newcomers and low-income citizens within Greek society, it is crucial to delve into the theoretical underpinnings surrounding housing trajectories and urban community cohesion. First, as the housing pathways approach entails different timeframes and locations, we explore the conditions during the reception phase. Subsequently, we examine the academic discourse on newcomers' self-settlement efforts, addressing obstacles, the role of social capital, and defining housing precariousness. We then turn to theories of segregation and emplacement, considering how spatial coexistence between newcomers and the host society unfolds. Finally, we present a conceptual model that operationalises this theoretical framework, emphasising the significance of the Capabilities approach in our research.

2.1 Reception Phase and Encampment

Since 2015, the massive exodus of migrants from the Middle East and Sub-Saharan regions has raised heightened security concerns among EU member states, leading to widespread labelling of the situation as a ‘refugee crisis’ (Bhagat & Soedeberg, 2019). From 2015 to 2022, nearly 5.5 million individuals sought asylum in the European Union, about half of them arriving in the first two years (European Council, n.d).

Camps have emerged as an emergency paradigm to accommodate the basic needs of asylum seekers (Sano et al., 2021), including temporary accommodation (European Commission, n.d). They serve as the ‘‘crossroad between the asylum procedure and what comes next - integration, relocation to another Member State, or return.’’ (European Union Agency for Asylum, n.d). Nevertheless, numerous scholars have critically examined the conditions within camps, citing concerns such as overcrowding, insufficient hygiene facilities, food shortages, mental and physical health issues, instances of sexual abuse, geographical restrictions and repression of political rights (Baker et al., 2016; Blouchoutzi et al., 2022; Kourachanis, 2018; Milton et al., 2017; Newhouse, 2015). Furthermore, scholars argue that states intentionally extend asylum processing times and detention periods to discourage new immigration flows (Dotsey & Lumley-Sapanski, 2021; Kourachanis, 2018). Therefore, camps have transformed from solely associated with emergencies to becoming a way of life for asylum claimants, a situation characterised as an ‘‘existential limbo’’ (Sano et al., 2019; Brun, 2016). This being said, scholars have questioned the exclusive conceptualisation of camps as a state of exception, advocating for exploring camps as a modern social landscape involving human agency and social networking (Huysmans, 2008; Redclift, 2013).

2.2 Self-settlement

The refugee status is determined based on the criteria specified in Article 1 of the 1951 Geneva Convention (UNHCR, n.d). A notable development since 2022 is the EU's introduction of quasi-automatic Temporary Protection Status for Ukrainian refugees, which exempts them from the typical asylum process (Walker, 2022b), thereby bypassing the lengthy administrative processes of the reception phase (De Coninck, 2023). Upon obtaining asylum approval, refugees possess the right to transition out of the reception system and secure housing in the host country (Adam et al., 2021; Bhagat & Soedeberg, 2019; Brown et al., 2022; Dotsey & Lumley-Sapanski, 2021). Muggah & Erthal Abdenur (2018) note that in 2017, 58 per cent of refugees were reported to live in urban settings. According to Kobia & Cranfield (2009), factors such as the lifestyle in the country of origin, improved employment opportunities and services, as well as the presence of co-ethnic enclaves and social networks in urban areas influence refugees' decisions to settle in urban centres.

Securing housing at this stage is pivotal for successful settlement and socio-economic integration in the host country (Ager & Strang, 2008; Fozdar & Hartley, 2014; Ribera-Almandoz et al., 2022). As scholars (Balkan et al., 2018; Dotsey & Lumley-Sapanski, 2021; Finney & Harries, 2013) indicate, most living outside camps seek affordable rental apartments rather than homeownership. Nonetheless, evidence suggests that it is highly probable for refugees to reside in poor-quality, temporary housing, and unsafe areas (Brown et al., 2022). Strang et al. (2018: 211) note that this results in ‘disruption and disempowerment in refugees’ lives at the very point when society has legitimised their participation.’

Immigrants’ settlement patterns depend on institutional structures, the host society, and individual characteristics (Bolt et al., 2010). Regarding the former, scholars pinpoint the systemic barriers to housing access, shaped by the ongoing neo-liberalization and austerity measures, and the commodification of the housing sector, rendering affordable and public housing unattainable (Bhagat & Soedeberg, 2019; Soedeberg, 2019). Furthermore, Western states promote rapid employment as the central objective of integration, which *inter alia* justifies providing minimal financial assistance (Dotsey & Lumley-Sapanski, 2021). However, refugees often find employment in low-paid sectors and encounter limited job opportunities (Carter & Osborne, 2009; International Labour Organisation, 2020), or face unemployment (Bolt et al., 2010). Hence, prioritising abrupt economic self-sufficiency has several repercussions for refugees' capacity to meet housing expenses. Finally, numerous studies stress the prevalence of discriminatory practices and racial harassment from landlords, (non)private housing agencies, and real estate agents (Adam et al., 2019; Bolt et al., 2010; Fozdar & Hartley, 2014; Murdie, 2008; Teixeira, 2008; Phillips 2006; Ziersch et al., 2017).

Beyond institutional settings and stereotypes against immigrants, micro-level factors of individuals also play a significant role in influencing settlement outcomes (Bolt et al., 2009; Finney, 2013). Notably, language proficiency emerges as a critical factor, often lacking in refugees due to the spontaneous nature of migration (Champion, 2018), leading to challenges in negotiating with landlords (Fozdar & Hartley, 2014; Teixeira, 2008; Zierch et al., 2017). Furthermore, empirical studies (Aigner, 2019; Fozdar & Hartley, 2014; Teixeira, 2008; Ribera-Almandoz et al., 2022) highlight a lack of understanding of local housing market legal intricacies as another significant obstacle.

This housing challenge extends beyond refugees, affecting other vulnerable groups as well (Aigner, 2019; Brown et al., 2022; Clair et al., 2019; Dotsey & Lumley-Sapanski, 2021; El-Kayed & Hamann, 2018; Fozdar & Hartley, 2014; Robinson et al., 2007). Nevertheless, newcomers seem disadvantaged when searching for accommodation due to their pre-migratory experiences and socio-legal status in the host country (Brown et al., 2020; MigrationWork CIC, 2022; Powel & Robinson,

2019). In this highly insecure housing context, non-state actors like civil society help-networks and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) provide alternatives for refugees (Aigner, 2019). Yet, their capacity is limited to temporary solutions and cannot address structural issues resulting from the withdrawal of the social state (Brown et al., 2022).

2.2.1 Social Capital

Social networks play a crucial role in providing refugees with essential information about employment and housing options (Adam et al., 2019; Aigner, 2019; Bolt et al., 2020; Dotsey & Lumley-Sapanski, 2021; Texeira, 2008; Zierch et al., 2017). As scholars (Aigner, 2019; Balampanidis, 2020; Lancee, 2012) indicate, social capital is an intentional act of agency and refugees, being active agents, strategically mobilising their social resources to accomplish their objectives.

Bourdieu (1986) was one of the first scholars to refer to the concept of social capital, emphasising the significance of networks in facilitating cooperative interactions within society. Similarly, Lancee (2012) insists that social networks are important as social resources to improve an individual's quality of life. Numerous scholars have expanded on the concept of social capital, with one of the most noteworthy contributions coming from Gittell & Vidal (1998), who introduced the terms ‘‘bonding’’ and ‘‘bridging’’ social capital. More specifically, social bonds pertain to the ‘‘horizontal’’ social cohesion, representing the relationships between members of a specific social group that shares similar characteristics (e.g., family, friends, co-ethnics) (Ager & Strang, 2008; Harpham et al., 2002). On the contrary, ‘‘social bridges’’ highlight the broader connections encompassing justice and mutual respect within diverse social groups, such as relationships with other communities (Poortinga, 2006). Finally, the concept of ‘‘social capital links,’’ proposed by Szreter (2002), aims to describe how individuals build social networks with influential actors, institutions, or authority structures to leverage their power and overcome structural barriers.

According to Murdie (2008: 99), relying on social capital bonds is not a ‘‘viable long-term strategy for acquiring affordable, good-quality rental housing’’ (Murdie, 2008: 99). Illustratively, Aigner's (2019) study exposed cases where refugees were exploited by pre-settled migrants, creating an informal rental submarket. Thus, Putnam's (2000) indications that overreliance on strong ties can cause dependency and economic disadvantage among immigrants seem empirically supported. Therefore, it is rational for Putnam (2000) to advocate for the importance of immigrants developing weak ties to overcome their current predicament. However, perspectives on this matter vary. Some scholars argue that social capital bonds between ethnic minorities can promote bridging and linking social capital (Cheung & Phillimore, 2013). Finally, Ager & Strang (2008: 177) contend that combining the three forms of social capital can act as facilitators, ‘‘removing barriers to integration.’’

2.2.2 Precarious Housing Conditions

Social capital, though valuable, is not a panacea for navigating the housing market, as most newcomers resort to paying “a high price for inadequate, unaffordable, and often overcrowded housing” (Francis and Hiebert, 2014: 76). According to scholars (Balampanidis, 2020; Ribera-Almandoz et al., 2022), the accommodation trajectories of newcomers are non-linear, with types of precariousness varying due to the intricate interplay of micro and macro-level factors discussed in chapter 2.2. Clair et al. (2019: 4) define housing precariousness as a “state of uncertainty which increases a person’s real or perceived likelihood of experiencing an adverse event, caused -at least in part- by their relationship with their housing provider, the physical qualities, affordability, security of their home, and access to essential services”. Ribera-Almandoz et al. (2022) categorise these four aspects of housing precarity into two overarching dimensions: housing insecurity and housing inadequacy.

Housing insecurity pertains to unstable housing conditions and the lack of control over them (Clair et al., 2019; Lombard, 2023). It manifests for refugees and vulnerable groups through unreliable contracts, unstable tenures and frequent relocations (Flatau et al., 2015; Murdie, 2008; Ribera-Almandoz et al., 2022; Texeira, 2008). On the other hand, Borg (2015) outlines five dimensions of housing inadequacy, covering issues like poor quality of construction and amenities, inadequate space for residents, and socio-economic aspects such as neighbourhood (in)security and unaffordability. Finally, empirical studies on refugee housing trajectories in Italy, Canada, and Australia reveal patterns of temporary or recurring homelessness (Couch, 2011; Dotsey & Lumley-Sapanski, 2021; St. Arnault & Merali, 2019a). In summary, housing insecurity involves a constant risk of homelessness for refugees, as well as other vulnerable groups within societies (Adam et al., 2019; Brown et al., 2022; Flatau et al., 2015; Lombard, 2023). This follows the assertion by Muñoz (2018: 371-372) that, without “access to stable, affordable housing, from which urban residents can engage in long-term homemaking practices, access urban resources, and actively and publicly participate in urban life, there is no right to the city.”

2.2.3 Residential Segregation

Housing precariousness is often intertwined with segregation (Arbaci, 2008). The term segregation is used to describe “the extent to which households from a particular ethnic or faith group live side by side with others from the same background within an area.” (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2016: 41). Segregation is intrinsically linked to social inequality and income disparities (Musterd et al., 2017). Specifically, the socio-spatial stratification of the urban society is contingent on the housing-state nexus (see chapter 2.2), which inter alia favours homeownership, a context often overlooked by mainstream political and academic discourses that tend to attribute housing patterns solely to market dynamics (Arbaci, 2008).

Heightened ethnic clustering is frequently attributed to immigration, the youthfulness and increased family building within these communities, and the host majority's relocation from immigrant-affected areas toward more affluent enclaves (Bolt et al., 2010; Finney 2013; Kaupinnen & Van Ham, 2019; Simpson 2004; Texeira, 2008). Scholars contend that these complex dynamics can lead to social exclusion issues, such as stigmatisation and the transformation of these locales into urban “ghettoes” (Adam et al., 2019; Darling, 2016; Ozkazanc, 2021; Texeira, 2008).

Bolt et al. (2010) challenge the prevailing assumption in policy discourses, where segregation often indicates a lack of integration. Instead, they propose that segregation can strengthen social capital bonds and facilitate community cohesion. Other scholars recognise that spatial segregation may also result from “residential behaviours” and the desire to reside in these areas (Archer & Stevens, 2018; Ozkazanc, 2021). This is commonly termed “self-segregation” (Bolt et al., 2010) and may be a voluntary choice to circumvent integration challenges and derive advantages from living near one another (i.e., a sense of security and stability) (Ager & Strang, 2008; Blokland & Van Eijk, 2010; Ozkazanc, 2021). According to Brown et al. (2022), the necessity to maintain social networks may partly explain why refugees frequently tolerate substandard housing conditions.

An often-overlooked concern is that segregation and limited affordable housing stock may, in turn, fuel social unrest between locals and ethnic minority groups (Adam et al., 2019; Archer & Stevens, 2018; Seethaler-Wari, 2018). For example, Balkan et al. (2018), studying Syrian refugees’ settlement in Turkey, highlight tensions resulting in antimigration sentiments. Also, conflicts may arise as refugees engage in the informal economy and low-skilled jobs, potentially displacing native workers (Balkan et al., 2018; Dotsey & Lumley-Sapanski, 2021). This, however, entails a paradox: employed refugees can be viewed as displacing local workers, while unemployment may be an economic burden on the host country (Kritikos, 2000). In summary, exacerbated social inequality, liberal welfare regimes, and market-oriented housing systems transform social disparities into spatial divisions (Musterd et al., 2017). Hence, it is indispensable to understand segregation not solely from a geographical perspective but also in terms of its impact on the daily experiences of refugees in neighbourhoods (Van Ham & Tammaru, 2016).

2.3 Social Integration

The concept of integration is widely disputed as it entails the notion that migrants, as a culturally homogenous group, must overcome their cultural deficiencies to become members of the majority society (Ager & Strang, 2008; Laubenthal, 2023; see also the introduction). However, alternatives to integration (e.g., assimilation and transnationalism) are also controversial (Laubenthal, 2023). On the one hand, assimilation involves abandoning attachments to the culture of origin (Hartmann & Gerteis, 2005) and becoming “indistinguishable from the host society.” (Ager & Strang, 2008: 175). On the

contrary, the transnationalism theory seeks to grasp how migrants simultaneously maintain connections to various other locations while integrating into the society where they settle (Levitt, 2012). While this perspective extends beyond the conventional nation-state-centric view of societies, it does introduce a form of 'groupism' by perceiving migrants as sharing a common identity (Scheel & Tazzioli, 2022).

2.3.1 Sociabilities of Emplacement

Acknowledging the ambiguous nature of terms like integration, assimilation, and transnationalism, and recognising the pivotal role of social capital in refugee settlement, the concept of "sociabilities of emplacement" becomes essential for our theoretical framework. This concept offers a valuable perspective by conceptualising integration as a reciprocal and dynamic interaction between refugees and the host society, which aligns with the EU's vision (European Commission, n.d).

“Sociabilities of emplacement” challenges prevailing discourses that primarily focus on the practical role of social networks in newcomers' integration (Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2019). Introduced by Schiller et al. (2011: 414-415) in their exploration of mobile individuals through the lens of cosmopolitanism, this concept frames “sociabilities” in the realm of everyday interactions, where “people gather in the same place or in cyberspace around some point of shared interest that is not primarily utilitarian.” Similarly, in their attempt to comprehend today's super-diverse urban landscapes, Wessendorf & Phillimore (2019) argue that the core of "sociability" lies in the interactions between host majority residents and newcomers as equals, transcending nationality dichotomies. This precisely captures the essence of “commonality” that Schiller & Çağlar (2016) sought to convey through the term "sociabilities of emplacement."

Importantly, “emplacement,” as interpreted by Schiller & Çağlar (2013: 495), denotes the “relationship between the ongoing restructuring of a city within networks of power and migrants’ efforts to settle and establish networks of connection within the constraints and opportunities of a specific locality.” Hence, unlike “social integration,” the concept of “sociabilities of emplacement” entails mutual adaptation, shifting away from placing the burden solely on newcomers to conform to the host society (Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2019; Bolt et al., 2010).

2.4 Conceptual Model

To delve into the housing experiences of newcomers beyond the reception phase, we draw upon the concept of “housing pathways” from the existing literature. Introduced by Clapham (2002: 63), this concept seeks to comprehend the “patterns of interaction (practices) concerning house and home, over time and space.” This entails the sequence of household dwellings over time and the socio-economic relations and meanings embedded in the housing context (Balampanidis, 2020). It also considers the

subjective aspirations—reflecting individual agency—and the constraints that influence the relationship with the place (Netto, 2011; Robinson et al., 2007). This approach is closely connected with the constrained choice perspectives (Robinson et al., 2007) and, therefore, the capabilities approach proposed by Sen (1999). Sen re-conceptualized development as the ‘‘enjoyment of freedom’’ (Zoomers et al., 2016). At its core, this approach advocates for evaluating human development beyond economic criteria, with the ultimate goal being to enhance individuals' capability (freedom) to lead lives they have reason to value (De Haas, 2021; Van Raemdonck et al., 2022). Hence, this approach can help us shed light on the adaptation mechanisms that vulnerable groups employ to overcome hindrances to their well-being (Van Raemdonck et al., 2022), particularly in the context of this research, focusing on ‘‘their freedom to choose where to live- including the option to stay’’ (De Haas, 2021: 2).

The conceptual model illustrates the interconnectedness of various theoretical elements used in this research. Within this framework, the research sub-questions outlined in the introduction chapter are operationalised. Following the pathways approach, the model begins with the reception phase, examining housing conditions and their impact on the long-term integration of newcomers. It then focuses on the primary research objective: understanding the self-settlement patterns of newcomers in the urban setting of Athens. This involves probing the macro- and micro-level barriers that hinder refugees' access to decent accommodation, potentially leading to housing precariousness and segregation patterns. Furthermore, the study conducts a comparative analysis of the housing characteristics of the vulnerable population within the host society. Concurrently, it is crucial to explore how state and non-state actors provide support, along with the strategies individuals use to overcome these barriers. After mapping the policy context and individuals' housing intricacies, the study explores their impact on local emplacement and livelihood improvement opportunities, as well as the adaptation capabilities exhibited by the study population. Finally, the research concludes with recommendations for enhancing refugee support mechanisms and housing interventions, based on participants' lived experiences and insights from key informants.

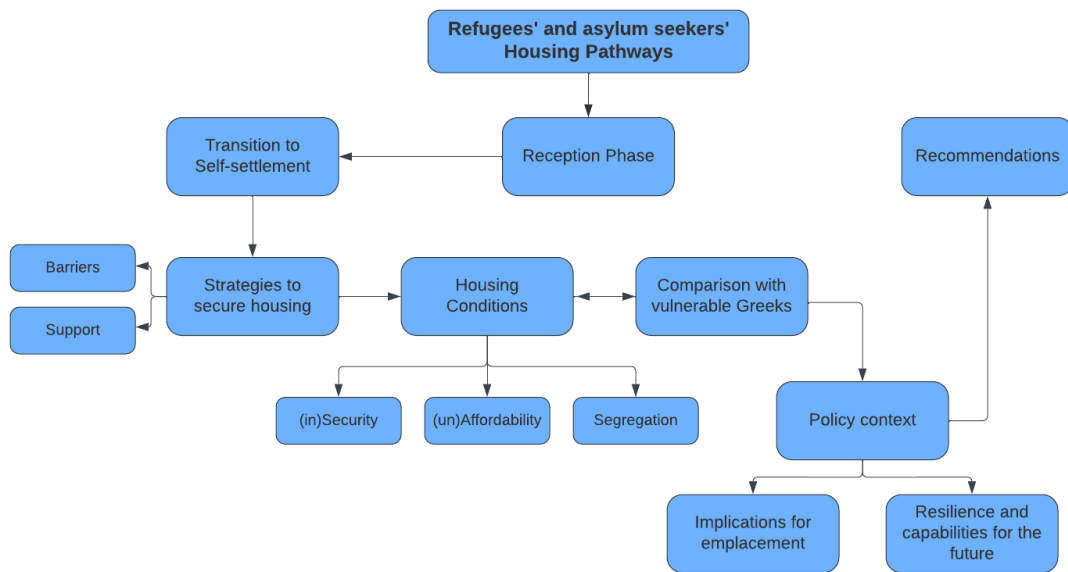


Figure 1: Conceptual model

3. Methodology

This fieldwork study adopted a qualitative research design to delve into participants' perspectives and the contextual nuances of their lives (Hennink, Hutter, Bailey, 2020). That is to say, this approach was chosen to gain profound insights into the housing characteristics of both newcomers and vulnerable Greek citizens, which serves as the central research question guiding our study.

Sampling and participant recruitment

The study population was selected through purposive sampling. The refugee population's eligibility criteria included asylum seekers and recognised refugees with international or temporary status. Efforts were focused on recruiting individuals who had arrived in Greece within the last two years. However, challenges in the recruitment process resulted in the inclusion of earlier newcomers, necessitating a retrospective approach for this population. This approach carries the risk of memory recall difficulties and potential 'biases in retrieval.' (Müggenburg, 2021). Criteria for Greeks were based on their status as beneficiaries of various social services, ensuring the representation of vulnerable groups within Greek society.

Participant recruitment was conducted through various methods. Firstly, gatekeepers working for NGOs (see Figure 2) assisting the study population were engaged. The aim was to connect with grassroots organisations to avoid bureaucratic obstacles and to ensure that key informants could express their thoughts freely and without repercussions. Different NGOs were selected to ensure diverse

representation. As permission was not granted to interview beneficiaries of the HELIOS program, which provides housing assistance for refugees in Greece, we instead spoke with administrative staff to gather information about the beneficiaries' housing conditions and the program's pros and cons. Additionally, snowball sampling was employed to mitigate potential selection biases from gatekeepers (Hennink, Hutter, Bailey, 2020).

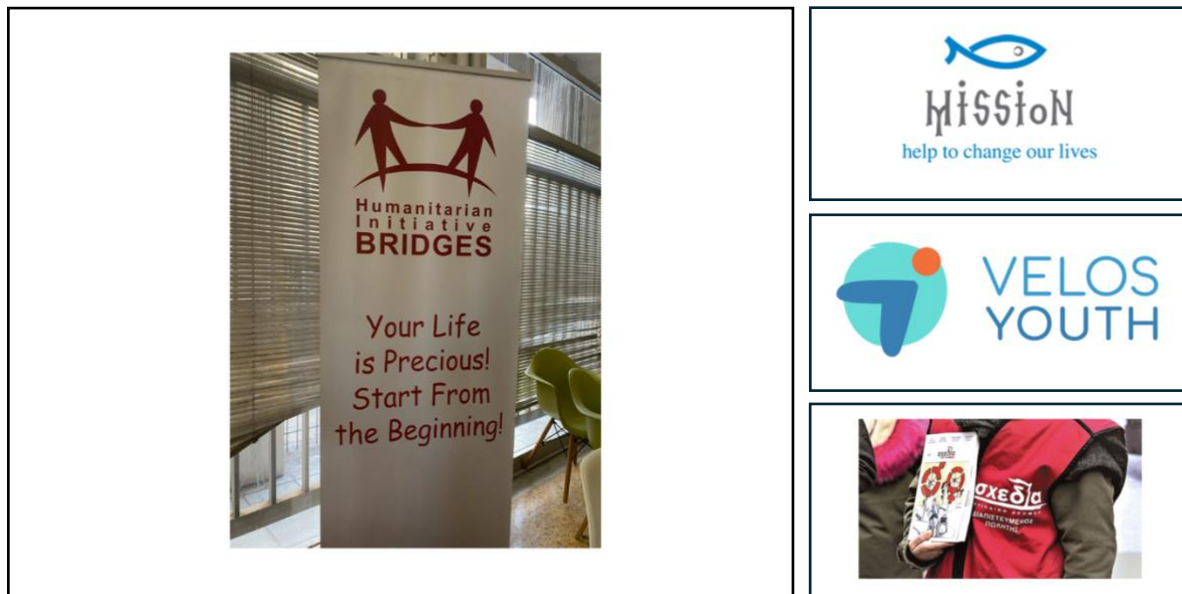


Figure 2: Partner organisations

A total of 26 participants were recruited (see Appendix 1, 2 & 3) with the goal of achieving data saturation. This number was sufficient to provide in-depth insights into the two deductively developed groups of the research, except for the Ukrainian participants, whose sample did not reach saturation. Regarding asylum seekers, we assert that saturation was reached due to the peculiarities of the Greek asylum system, which typically grants refugee status after a long waiting period (see Appendix 1). Consequently, many refugee participants were still asylum seekers when they arrived in Athens. Lastly, the limited number of female refugee participants indicates that this demographic's saturation point was not reached.

Primary Data collection methods

Data were primarily gathered through in-depth interviews to thoroughly understand participants' emic perspectives (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2020). Significant attention was given to establishing rapport with participants before conducting the interviews. Additionally, key informant interviews were conducted with field experts (see Appendix 3) to provide a solid understanding of the local policy context. The interviews lasted between 30'-1.40' minutes. Data were collected through participant observation, informal discussions, and field notes to enhance further contextual knowledge of participants' housing characteristics and daily routines.

The data collection tools included a semi-structured interview guide with open-ended and follow-up questions to ensure all critical themes were covered in detail. The process involved initial contact, obtaining informed consent, scheduling interviews at the participants' convenience, recording the interviews, and transcribing them. During transcription, efforts were made to retain the respondents' literal words, though minor modifications were made when the original wording was unclear. No pilot test was conducted; however, the interview guide was constantly refined based on new inductive insights emerging from the responses.

The data analysis was based on thematic analysis, where deductive and inductive codes with similar characteristics were grouped into broad themes that addressed each of the three research sub-questions. To move beyond mere description and achieve the goal of conceptualisation, inductively developed subgroups were created based on different beliefs, behaviours, or experiences reflected by participants (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2020). Coding was conducted manually by creating a codebook in a Word document, which proved time-consuming and made it difficult to manage large amounts of data. Nonetheless, due to technical issues, accessing the Nvivo application provided by the university was not feasible.

Ethical Considerations

All interviews were conducted at locations convenient for the participants and were based on voluntary participation. To ensure this, a translated informed consent document in both English and Greek was provided to all participants, detailing the study's goals and guaranteeing the confidentiality of their responses. Verbal consent was also obtained before recording. During transcription, all names were replaced with pseudonyms, and any personal information that could identify the interviewees was removed to maintain anonymity, confidentiality, and minimise potential harm to the participants. Subsequently, all modified transcripts were stored on the researcher's laptop and secured with passwords, while recordings were deleted upon completion of the transcription process.

Positionality

I grew up in the Southern suburbs of Athens, spending my formative years there. My life changed significantly when, following my parents' divorce, I relocated with my mother to a new apartment in the centre of Athens. This move marked my first experience adapting to a densely populated and super-diverse city. Living near neighbourhoods with ethnic minorities, combined with pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Social Policy, fueled my passion for understanding the root causes of social inequalities and poverty. I firmly believe that addressing structural inequalities begins with critically reflecting on our positionality. Currently, I am pursuing a Master's degree in International Development Studies and engaging in fieldwork research for my thesis, hoping that this will provide me with the tools to approach

this endeavour professionally. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that my identity, shaped by my life experiences and upbringing context, inevitably influences my perceptions. Hence, despite my intentions to help individuals achieve well-being and empowerment, my positionality may reveal aspects of my social background. It is also inexorable that participants' perceptions of me during interactions will be influenced by my status as a researcher.

4. Regional Context

Over the last two decades, Greece has become one of the main entry countries and an essential part of the broader European reception system (Papatzani et al., 2022). Since 2014, approximately 1.3 million people, predominantly fleeing from countries in the Middle East, have crossed the Greek national borders on their route to Northern Europe (UNHCR, 2024; Vegrou et al., 2021). Greece previously served as a transit country for immigration flows until the EU-Turkey Common Declaration of 2016, which aimed to confine irregular migration towards and within Europe by closing the Balkan route (Van Liempt et al., 2017; Vergou et al., 2021). Consequently, a significant number of people found themselves ‘trapped’ within Greek borders, leading to a rapid proliferation of camps, with the hotspot approach on Greek islands emerging as the overarching mechanism for managing refugee flows (Kandylis & Maloutas, 2017; Kourachanis, 2018; Niemann & Zaun, 2018).

This follows that Greek national authorities were not prepared to effectively host this unprecedented influx of immigrants (Blouchoutzi et al., 2022). Moreover, examining Greece's social protection system requires consideration of austerity measures since the 2008 economic crisis and the unprecedented surge in unemployment rates (Basta et al., 2018; Petmesidou, 2013). As a result, a sharp rise in demand for social services occurred when creditors, the EU, and the IMF mandated fiscal retrenchments for Greece to secure bailout loans (Delmendo, 2023, 16 November). Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the sovereign debt remains remarkably high, standing at 172.6% of GDP in 2022 (Delmendo, 2023, 16 November). This indicates that social welfare provision remains a considerable challenge despite a gradual improvement in the country's economy in recent years. Hence, managing refugee flows occurs within the context of a fragile welfare state and profound economic hardship. Cabot (2018) argues that the intersection of the European refugee crisis and Greece's financial crisis has given rise to ‘humanitarian citizenship,’ redefining traditional social rights for citizens and human rights for refugees through a framework of humanitarian aid logic; thus placing both citizens and non-citizens on a ‘shared continuum of precarity.’ As Kourachanis (2018) indicates, non-state actors have voluntarily undertaken all social integration efforts due to the state's withdrawal from addressing this manifestation of extreme social exclusion.

4.1 Local Housing Market

To gain insights into the ‘‘housing careers’’ of refugees in the city of Athens, it is crucial to provide a concise overview of the local housing context. First and foremost, the combination of a market-led laissez-faire approach and the familistic structure of the Greek welfare system have made affordable housing policies "unnecessary." (Kandyliis & Maloutas, 2017; Vergou et al., 2021). In recent decades, demographic shifts and the decentralised urban development of Athens, along with specific land policies and housing production mechanisms, have led to the widespread dispersion of land ownership and high levels of homeownership (Balampanidis et al., 2021; Emmanuel, 2017). Concerning the dwelling stock in Greece, approximately 72.8% is owner-occupied, 20% comprises the rental market (Delmendo, 2023, 16 November), while social housing accounts for 0%. However, homeownership rates fluctuate among cities, with Athens exhibiting a range of 40% to 50% (Eteron Housing 360, n.d; Papalexatou & Matsaganis, 2023, 14 September). Finally, according to the most recent available census (2011), Athens has a substantial vacancy rate of 31% (Eteron Housing 360, n.d), exacerbating competition for the available housing stock.

The limited policy implementations and the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis have intensified housing challenges in Greece (Balampanidis et al., 2021; Leivaditi et al., 2020). Greece stands out as the only country in the EU where rents declined in the past decade. However, from 2018 onwards, rents started to rise substantially. The surge in rental prices can be attributed primarily to declining disposable incomes, rendering homeownership unattainable and intensifying competition within the rental market (Eteron Housing 360, n.d). Simultaneously, there is a lack of supply of newly built houses and insufficient investment to maintain the existing housing stock (Eteron Housing 360, n.d). Moreover, the surge of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the real estate market, mainly through the Golden Visa Program, is another contributing factor to the escalation of rental prices (Delmendo, 2023, 16 November). Finally, developments in platforms like Airbnb have resulted in a substantial portion of apartments transitioning from the private long-term rental market to the short-term rental sector (Balampanidis et al., 2021). The housing sector has seen significant changes over the past decade, with stricter [regulations](#) on the unprecedented surge in real estate FDI only being recently implemented (Etias, 2024).

Most rental properties are located in areas with the oldest housing stock, hence requiring more maintenance, energy, and renovation (Eteron Housing 360, n.d). Currently, monthly rents for a one-bedroom apartment in Athens start from €500 (Delmendo, 2023, 16 November). In terms of unaffordability, Greek tenants stand out compared to European standards (19.6%), as they end up paying 34.2% of their disposable income for housing (Eurostat, 2023). Renters are more likely than homeowners to live in overcrowded conditions, be at risk of poverty, and experience housing

deprivation (Eteron Housing 360, n.d). Hence, escalated housing costs have rendered affordable housing unsustainable, leading to housing insecurity, especially among the lower socio-economic groups (Wetzstein, 2017). As scholars (Kourachanis, 2018; Leivaditi et al., 2020) notice, the failure to enact effective housing policies for both Greeks and refugees has resulted in a surge of homelessness in major urban centres.

4.2 Segregation

Segregation in Southern Europe is often linked with peripheralisation (Arbaci, 2008). However, Athens deviates from this trend as it experiences a concentration of various ethnicities and lower socioeconomic strata in its central areas (Balampanidis & Polyzos, 2016). Moreover, contemporary academic literature on segregation in Southern European countries contests the notion of horizontal ethnic spatial segregation (Arbaci, 2008; Papatzani et al., 2022). In Athens, while ethnic minority clusters are visibly concentrated in specific areas, a diverse interethnic coexistence and spatial proximity with locals characterise the urban fabric (Balampanidis & Polyzos, 2016; Dimitrakou et al., 2020; Papatzani, 2020). This context has given rise to a new concept called micro-segregation or vertical segregation (Dimitrakou et al., 2020; Dyas, 2019). According to this approach, coexistence in space reflects social stratification and ethnic inequalities through residence patterns within buildings (Balampanidis & Bourlessas 2018). Scholars discuss the composition of apartment buildings, highlighting that low-income inhabitants and migrants typically reside in the basement, rear-facing, and lower-floor apartments (Bakogiannis et al., 2022; Dimitrakou et al., 2020; Dyas, 2019). These sociospatial dynamics of urban diversity, in turn, contribute to an ongoing urban transformation, which either creates opportunities for bridging social networks and harmonious coexistence or, conversely, fosters social tensions and exclusion (Balampanidis & Bourlessas 2018; Balampanidis & Polyzos, 2016; Dimitrakou et al., 2020; Papatzani, 2020; Papatzani et al., 2022).

4.3 Policy Context

In Greece, there is no integration policy *stricto sensu*. Instead, the Ministry of Migration and Asylum implements the current National Integration Strategy (Hellenic Republic, 2022), which only targets recognised refugees and includes provisions for housing. This strategy, however, is not a legally binding document but serves as a guiding framework. Following the directions of the strategy, the HELIOS¹ program stands out as the sole initiative dedicated to facilitating the housing transition from camps to Greek society. The program assists recipients in maintaining independent living through a rent subsidy, the amount of which is contingent on the composition of the household (IOM, n.d). The program is implemented in collaboration between the International Organization for Migration (IOM, n.d) and the

¹ Hellenic Integration Support for Beneficiaries of International Protection and Temporary Protection

Greek Government, receiving funding from the Directorate General for Migration and Home Affairs of the European Commission (DG HOME) (Leivaditi et al., 2020). Specifically, the program “aims at promoting the integration of beneficiaries of international protection and temporary protection into the Greek society, through the following components: integration courses, employability support, integration monitoring, sensitisation of the host community, and accommodation support” (IOM, n.d).

5. Analysis- Newcomers’ Housing Pathways

Transcription keys:

(...) long pause

[] laughter, sadly, etc.

All photographs in these three chapters were taken by the researcher.

Our fieldwork findings are analysed across the following three results chapters. Each chapter is structured to address one of the three research sub-questions, with the overall aim of answering the overarching research question: “What are the housing characteristics of refugees, asylum seekers, and other vulnerable groups in the city of Athens?”

The first chapter addresses the primary research question: “What housing strategies are employed by distinct refugee sub-groups and asylum seekers, and what are their current housing conditions?” The Housing Pathways Approach provides an overview of refugees' and asylum seekers' housing trajectories in Athens, from initial reception to urban integration. Concepts like self-settlement, social capital theory, and precarious housing conditions are used to explore how newcomers navigate Athens' housing sector. Section one presents the array of micro and macro-level barriers to housing access. Section two examines newcomers' strategies to secure accommodation, focusing on how these networks provide resilience to individuals. The final section analyses the housing outcomes, assessing newcomers' living conditions in relation to precariousness.

5.1 Context- Greece, A Destination Country (?)

Understanding newcomers' challenges in rebuilding their lives initially requires examining Greece's role as a transit country. Our data indicate that despite the EU-Turkey deal, most newcomers still enter Greece with onward migration plans. However, their ability to move further depends on their legal status. Those lacking refugee status cannot travel, whereas under the Dublin III Regulation, recognised refugees with travel documents can move within the EU for up to three months but can seek asylum in

only one Dublin country (European Commission, n.d). This context illustrates how individuals are effectively "trapped" in Greece, unable to restart elsewhere in the EU.

A stark contrast exists for Ukrainian refugees, who receive temporary protection status through a fast-track process, unlike other newcomers (see Appendix 1 for asylum processing times). Their choice to come to Greece reflects deliberate decisions influenced by cultural or family ties and previous experiences. As a HELIOS program social worker noted: *“They wouldn’t choose Greece for employment reasons; however, they already have established communities and are typically better off than other refugees, so they weighed the pros and cons.”* This highlights disparities in capabilities and treatment by the Greek state between refugee sub-groups.

5.2 Reception Phase and Camp Conditions

Accommodation is strictly in camps for international and temporary protection applicants, except for asylum seekers arriving on mainland Greece (Aida, 2024). However, bureaucratic intricacies initially exempt eligible individuals from accessing camps. A legal representative of an NGO explained:

“Those arriving by sea must first wait for the asylum application platform to open. They then receive a camp registration appointment about a month later, creating a gap during which they must fend for themselves without provisions like shelter or food.”

Conditions in camps vary significantly between refugees with international and temporary protection. The former have voiced serious complaints about food provision and other issues, including geographical constraints on island camps, overcrowding, inadequate quality and sanitation, lack of protection for vulnerable groups, shortage of employment opportunities, and lack of guidance regarding integration. Moreover, camps are located far from cities, and transportation is not provided. Although participants receive a small monthly allowance, it is deemed insufficient, as noted by one participant, *“Camps are out of the city where we often had appointments with lawyers. So, these 75 euros, if you take a taxi, are a one-time transportation.”* (Milad, male, 64). Finally, Ukrainian refugees experienced distinct treatment in camps, as the HELIOS project manager revealed: *“Dealing with Ukrainian refugees was completely different. In some regions, camps were evacuated and renovated before their arrival.”* The conditions described by Ukrainian participants also validated this difference.

Conditions in minors' shelters show some relative improvements, though opinions vary. However, all young participants reported a waiting period ranging from two weeks to one and a half months before being transferred from camps to underage shelters. This delay is concerning, particularly for unaccompanied minors vulnerable to abuse (Xythali, 2017). Notably, although asylum seekers

universally have access to schools (Karzi et al., 2018), language barriers prevented two out of three minors from attending.

Reason to settle in Athens

Primary reasons for settling in Athens include job opportunities and the presence of co-ethnic enclaves and social networks, aiding the relocation process. These factors are well-documented in migration studies on urban settlement patterns (e.g., Kobia & Cranfield, 2009). However, interviews with non-Ukrainian newcomers revealed a new insight: the accessibility of smugglers in Athens. It appeared that Greek authorities often overlook irregular migration at airports, especially during peak tourist seasons when Athens sees an influx of visitors.

5.3 Access to Housing

Financial barriers

Financial constraints due to high rental prices were widespread, often compounded by unemployment and the 60-day delay asylum seekers face before they can legally work (Hellenic Republic, n.d.). Recognised refugees also struggle due to Greece's lack of integration policies, forcing them to find low-paid, part-time, or informal work. Additional financial burdens include down payments and commissions demanded by landlords and real estate agencies. However, minors with relatives in Athens and Ukrainian participants reported no financial difficulties, the former having been recognised as refugees before leaving shelters and the latter having saved money for housing upon arrival.

Legal status barriers

Securing rental accommodation is significantly hindered by the lack of legal status and a tax identification number, a problem not faced by Ukrainian refugees. For other international protection participants, waiting times for legal status ranged from 2 months to 3.5 years, depending on factors like the country of origin's conflict status. For example, a Palestinian refugee missed expedited asylum procedures by arriving shortly before the Gaza conflict. Cyrus (37), an asylum seeker in Athens for 3.5 years, criticised the asylum system for its perceived unfairness: *“The system is not fair. The interview lasts 10-20 minutes, and people can just lie [laughter].”*

Language barriers and discrimination

Language barriers significantly hinder communication for almost half of the participants when dealing with landlords or real estate agents. Amir (17) stressed the importance of language proficiency in securing housing: *“I don't speak Greek, so I couldn't negotiate with landlords who also didn't speak English.”* However, language barriers often intersect with discriminatory practices by housing providers: *“Even those who spoke English would reject me once they realised I was a foreigner.”* (Joaddan, 20). Discrimination

is also evident, with house providers preferring affluent or student tenants. A social worker from the HELIOS Program noted a preference for renting to Ukrainians: *‘Landlords tell us ‘We only want blond-haired, like Ukrainians’.*’

Housing Search and Stock Limitations

Participants expressed frustration over the lack of guidance on housing search procedures in camps and the limited availability of housing options. Observations include numerous vacant buildings owned by the private sector and a tendency for landlords to renovate apartments for Airbnb use, leaving these properties vacant for extended periods. An NGO director noted that many apartments remain vacant as foreign investors prioritise residency permits over financial gains, often leaving properties unexploited while focusing on investments in other EU countries.

5.4 Housing Strategies

Despite encountering substantial housing obstacles, refugees and asylum seekers demonstrate resilience in securing accommodation through their social networks. As discussed in the literature, social capital includes bonds, bridges, and links (Cheung & Phillimore, 2013). Our research found that all participants, regardless of ethnicity or status, actively sought rental properties rather than homeownership. It's crucial to note that newcomers frequently change residences, employing various strategies detailed below.

Mobilising Social Capital Bonds

Social capital bonds emerged as a prevalent strategy for securing housing. Many relied on connections with acquaintances vacating apartments or formed friendships in camps to arrange shared living arrangements. This highlights that despite arriving alone, camps facilitated networking, revealing individual agency crucial for navigating the housing market amid challenges. Jamal, a 20-year-old asylum seeker, explained:

‘I knew friends from the camp who had documents. So, I reached out to them, and we agreed to rent together and split expenses.’

This strategy often involved mobilising both strong ties, like family and close friends, and weak ties, such as acquaintances with shared cultural backgrounds. Half of our non-Ukrainian participants initially received financial assistance from relatives, but this assistance was short-term. Nevertheless, reliance on social capital bonds proved indispensable, showing no significant differences between subgroups; young refugees and two of three Ukrainians utilised this strategy.

Mobilising Social Capital Bridges

Illegal subletting of properties by pre-settled refugees and migrants was widespread among most newcomers, with Ukrainians being the exception due to better financial resources and lack of legal status uncertainties. Established migrants familiar with the housing market often lease short-term properties and sublet them to multiple newcomers, each contributing a portion, resulting in high total rents. While exploitative, these arrangements provide a crucial, albeit temporary, solution to housing insecurity, hence participants refrained from lodging complaints as it represented their only alternative to avoid sleeping rough. Cyrus (37)² shared his experience:

“I went to Victoria Square and started talking with refugees. I found an Afghani man who rented me a room for 100€.” (Cyrus, 37)

Mobilise Social Capital Links

Another common strategy is seeking assistance from NGOs. However, despite offering various services (e.g. legal and humanitarian aid, language courses, etc.), housing assistance from NGOs remains minimal. According to a scholar, NGOs prioritise vulnerable groups due to budget constraints reliant on donations, while some organisations allocate funds for emergencies; for instance, Milad, a 64-year-old houseless refugee, received funding for temporary accommodation in a hostel.

The HELIOS program provides a housing allowance for recognised refugees who arrived after January 1, 2018 and lived in designated accommodation systems supported by authorities or NGOs. Despite potential eligibility, only two Ukrainians benefited from this allowance, significantly aiding them during their first year. Other participants were unaware of the program's existence or believed it had ended, a misconception clarified by the HELIOS project manager:

“The program has faced funding shortages, currently extended for the third six-month period. Misinformation circulates, leading communities to believe HELIOS will cease operations. Additionally, the mandatory nature of language courses proves ineffective; attendees must dedicate three hours daily to Greek classes while balancing work responsibilities. This inadvertently creates barriers to employment, contrary to program goals. Other issues arise as well, such as the inability of informal workers to provide certificates for nonattendance.”

We followed up with the social worker of the HELIOS, who emphasised the distinct treatment that Ukrainians receive. Notably, Ukrainians were exempt from attending the mandatory Greek courses,

² This participant arrived in Athens over 3.5 years ago. Empirical findings confirm that prices have since increased to 200-250€ per month.

and the housing allowance increased upon Ukrainians joining the program, a change that had been sought for years. She also acknowledged that the Helios program's viability owes much to Ukrainian refugees, as it remains less attractive to other refugee groups. Lastly, an NGO director informed us of an -unsuccessful- government initiative launching an online platform for Greek citizens to host Ukrainian refugees, anticipating greater societal openness.

Searching Houses on the Internet

The internet proved invaluable for refugees seeking housing, with rental platforms and social media commonly used. This strategy was particularly effective for those with digital literacy. Although fruitful for Ukrainians, legal obstacles hindered asylum seekers' access to housing through these channels.

Finding Jobs in Athens

Newcomers in Athens typically prioritise immediate employment to cover initial rent payments, often relying on social connections for job placements. Without documentation, job options are limited, leading to informal work facilitated by acquaintances or well-established migrant mediators. This entails the risk of being exploited by mediators, as Anwar (24) explained:

‘‘The Pakistanis speak Greek and bring them people for work. The Greek man pays 50€; however, the Pakistani keeps 20€ and gives you the rest.’’

Despite challenges like informal jobs, poor working conditions, and low salaries, these jobs provide essential income for most newcomers. Employment is more accessible during the summer due to seasonal job vacancies in the construction and car washing sectors. Data from two minor participants who had relatives in business suggest significantly improved employment prospects, including formal jobs and higher wages, thereby easing housing challenges. Finally, Ukrainian refugees also reported initially working informally to make ends meet.

Finding Jobs in Mainland Greece/Islands

Three participants sought informal employment in mainland Greece, primarily in the agriculture sector, facilitated by migrant intermediaries. Ukrainian participants did not report encountering this situation, as they initially had some financial resources. Additional employment opportunities arose on the islands during the summer, mainly in tourism and construction. However, this option was initially limited due to document and language requirements, utilised only by recognised refugees, including one Ukrainian participant. Working conditions on the islands were better and usually involved formal employment.

5.5 (Precarious) Housing Conditions

Housing inadequacy

All three interviewees working in the agricultural sector reported living in overcrowded garages and segregated by cultural background. Further, participants observed segregation patterns even within these garages, with individuals of the same ethnicity sleeping in specific corners. Moreover, these makeshift, unfit accommodations lacked basic furniture and appliances like beds and fridges, with sanitation being poor, and reports of destroyed toilet facilities:

“ We lived like 30 people inside; Nigerians there, Congo here, (...). Nobody had a bed; you would just put furniture together to make a surface to sleep on. And it's dirty. When you sleep, you see the mice jumping.” (Joaddan, 20).

Housing conditions were reported to be much better on the islands. Despite concerns about privacy and some irresponsible behaviours from flatmates, such as issues with cleanliness, housing was provided free of charge and did not fall into the category of overcrowding (defined as more than two people per bedroom, according to Blake et al., 2007).

Issues encompassing overcrowding and uninhabitable conditions (see Figure 3) were common among participants residing in shared houses leased from sublessors or acquaintances with legal documentation. We assessed overcrowding using the definition by Blake et al. (2007), which considers more than two people per bedroom as overcrowded. In this study, the number of occupants per room ranged from three to six, raising serious concerns about privacy, safety, sanitation, and insufficient sleeping space.

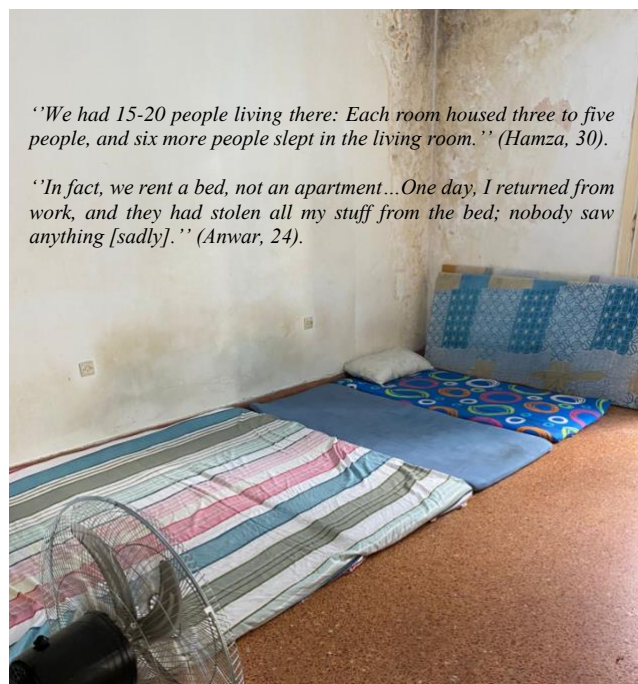


Figure 3: Overcrowding housing conditions

Overcrowding is closely linked with unaffordability, as individuals share apartments to meet housing costs (Aigner, 2019). We evaluated unaffordability using Eurostat's housing cost overburden rate (Eurostat, 2024), where housing expenses exceed 40% of disposable income. All participants faced persistent unaffordability, with housing costs ranging from 40%-100% of income, except for two minors employed in their relatives' businesses. Ukrainian refugees also faced significant unaffordability, with costs between 50% and 100% of disposable income. All participants stated that employment status critically affects housing affordability and the share of income allocated to housing:

‘When you don't work, even 1€ is a lot. After seven years, this still happens sometimes. For example, we don't have many job opportunities in winter, so sometimes, we cannot even pay 100€.’
(Samir, 31).

Unfit housing emerged as the last major issue, with problems including poor construction, ageing buildings, substandard amenities, and adverse conditions like dampness and water-damaged walls. Aleksander (33) described the living conditions in a basement apartment: *‘It has a lot of humidity. In winter, we don't have heating, and the house is so wet that mushrooms grow on the walls.’*

The only participants who reported no unfit housing issues were two Ukrainian women and one of the two minors employed by his relatives, all renting apartments with contracts. Additionally, the other minor and two non-Ukrainian refugees initially lived in unfit dwellings, such as inside stores where they worked. Thus, having a relative did not guarantee better housing conditions, at least initially.

The Helios program beneficiaries generally enjoy better housing quality due to a comprehensive checklist ensuring sanitation and safety standards before publishing listings. However, beneficiaries are also free to search for houses independently, which means the program cannot always control the quality of chosen homes. Finally, despite the checklist, hidden problems can still arise, while beneficiaries sometimes reported bringing in additional tenants to make a profit.

Housing insecurity

Housing insecurity pertains to unreliable contracts, unstable tenures, and frequent relocations (Murdie, 2008; Ribera-Almandoz et al., 2022). All participants in overcrowded arrangements lacked rental agreements, leading to ambiguity about sublessors' responsibilities and no support for housing issues. Informal agreements offer no legal protection against eviction or poor living conditions, allowing sublessors to pressure tenants for rent and threaten eviction. Moreover, these agreements are inextricably short-term, leaving tenants in a constant state of uncertainty and instability. Hamza (30),

who has resided in Athens for three years, encapsulates this struggle: *'I am always looking for a house [laughter].'*

Nonetheless, seven participants reported having rental contracts in their names, including all Ukrainian participants, three young refugees who initially lived in underage shelters, and one refugee residing in Athens for seven years. However, only the Ukrainians and the two minors have stayed in the same house since arriving in Greece. Also, young refugees mentioned their contracts range from one to two years, indicating that housing with contracts is not a long-term solution, a concern not raised by Ukrainians. Noteworthy, a Ukrainian woman (Anna, 55) reported frequent contract modifications, causing her insecurity: *'The rent will increase every two years by 5%. My salary doesn't stretch far, but I agreed.'*

Housing insecurity leads to frequent relocations, with relocation frequency depending on circumstances like sublessor or contract agreements and financial capabilities rather than legal status. Participants reported an average of 2.5 moves per year. Relocations are driven by inhumane living conditions in sub-rented houses, showcasing resilience in seeking better opportunities. Conversely, individuals living in shared housing with friends cited one additional reason: frequent departures of co-tenants who often travel abroad:

'I changed seven houses in five months because contracts from the booking app are short and because housemates leave Athens, forcing those of us remaining to find smaller, more affordable apartments to cover the rent.' (Jamal, 20).

Concerns have arisen regarding the sustainability of housing stability for HELIOS program beneficiaries beyond the maximum one-year housing allowance period. Vlada (47) voiced these concerns: *'I think it's time to relocate after two years because I feel stressed with the housing expenses.'* As for international protection beneficiaries, a scholar suggested that the program strategically extends the transitional period for refugees awaiting resettlement. Hence, despite receiving integration support, many beneficiaries depart for other countries upon receiving their passports, resulting in program "leakages" rather than successful "outflows."

Homelessness

According to the ETHOS³ typology (FEANTSA, 2005), housing inadequacy and insecurity constitute homelessness due to the absence of legal tenant rights and inhabiting unfit housing. Interestingly, newcomers did not classify doubling up as homelessness, commonly associating it with rough sleeping. The Ethos typology defines two additional categories of homelessness: rooflessness and houselessness.

³ European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion

Rooflessness, defined as sleeping rough in public spaces or night shelters, was reported by three participants. Two of these participants also experienced houselessness after enduring rooflessness. Houselessness was evident in two individuals residing in homeless hostels, one of whom was elderly. Anwar (24) described the poor conditions in a homeless hostel:

‘The mattresses were not clean and full of bugs. You live with four people inside a small room. Also, there are a lot of thieves there.’

In summary, refugees and asylum seekers face significant housing challenges. Their resilience and adaptability in seeking better living conditions highlight the critical role of social networks, employment and legal status in addressing these issues.

6. Analysis- Housing Conditions of Vulnerable Greeks and Implications for Emplacement

The second chapter addresses the research sub-question: ‘How do the housing conditions of different refugee subgroups and asylum seekers compare to those of vulnerable citizens within Greek society, and what are the implications for local emplacement?’ The first section critically examines the housing conditions of vulnerable Greek citizens, focusing on precarity, and contrasts them with those experienced by newcomers. The second section of this chapter delves into social cohesion in neighbourhoods where newcomers settle. Using concepts like Segregation and Emplacement, it examines whether these areas reveal a spatial concentration of ethnic communities and evaluates newcomers' integration from a mutual process perspective.

6.1 Greek Residents' Housing Characteristics

Barriers

The aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis and persistent inflation pose significant barriers to decent housing for vulnerable Greek citizens. Participants noted a shrinking housing supply as landlords sold properties or converted them to Airbnb rentals, exacerbating the scarcity of the available stock. Additionally, high upfront deposits and a preference for stable tenants, especially civil servants, intensify these challenges. Many expressed frustration with landlords prioritising profit over considering the dire housing needs of renters (See Figures 4 & 5). Furthermore, cohabitation is uncommon in Greece, limiting alternatives for this demographic. Single mothers face housing struggles

due to childcare responsibilities, hindering their employment capabilities, while the unstable nature of informal employment worsens housing instability due to fluctuating demand for these services.



Figures 4 & 5: Random writings on the wall. Figure 1 translation: “No more Airbnb’s, enough”. Figure 2: “Decrease the rents, evict the landlords”.

Housing Strategies

Greek individuals primarily search for housing through real estate advertisements and websites, with social capital also playing a significant role. For instance, Socrates (47) saved diligently while sharing temporary accommodation with friends before renting independently, Ifigenia (49) secured rent-free housing working as a maid, and an ex-homeless individual received long-term housing assistance from an acquaintance. Moreover, some homeless individuals accessed temporary housing through organisations or benefited from the integration Housing and Work integration program. Finally, some vulnerable Greeks receive social benefits, offering crucial but limited financial aid unavailable to newcomers.

(Precarious) Housing Conditions

Housing Inadequacy

Similar to newcomers, most participants are renters, with only one being a homeowner. Yet, three former homeowners were forced to sell their property due to financial challenges since the 2008 crisis. None of the Greek participants lived in overcrowded conditions, a disparity attributed to the absence of legal status-related uncertainties experienced by newcomers. Notably, while cohabitation is uncommon, those interested in it are often individuals who have previously faced homelessness.

Nonetheless, striking parallels emerge with newcomers’ narratives regarding housing conditions per se. This similarity arises as most participants reside and share the housing stock in

neighbourhoods where immigrant populations settle. Therefore, many reported experiencing housing inadequacy: *‘I live in a house built in 1926. Yesterday, it was raining, and the water was leaking from the tile roof inside the bathroom.’* (Socrates, 47). Moreover, Many households lack heating due to maintenance issues, and basement apartments often have poor ventilation, natural light, and increased vulnerability to break-ins (see figures 6, 7 & 8):



Figures 6, 7 & 8: Basement apartments as seen from the sidewalk

‘It has moisture coming from the ground. Ventilation cost me a lot this December because one night, while I was sleeping, burglars broke into [laughter].’ (Hercules, 65).

Half of the respondents face housing costs exceeding 40% of their disposable income, ranging from 40% to 120%. All mentioned struggling to afford their homes, with some allocating their entire income to housing expenses: *‘All my pension goes to the rent. There is no money even for food. In a few days, the bills will come; what will I do?’* (Afrodite, 68). Nonetheless, the other half of respondents spend less than 40% of their income on housing, including those supported by the Housing and Work program or housed for free by acquaintances. Overall, housing inadequacy shows no noticeable distinction between newcomers and vulnerable Greeks.

Housing insecurity

Greeks typically engage in long-term lease agreements with landlords, contrasting with newcomers who often lack formal contractual arrangements. They are also familiar with managing utility bills, unlike newcomers who may be unfamiliar with these expenses. However, residential mobility is a common theme, exemplified by one individual moving eleven times in nine years, yet Greeks relocate less frequently compared to newcomers who face legal status issues and seek short-term shared housing. Reasons for relocation include landlords' refusal to renew leases, substandard housing conditions, or

evictions and moves due to financial constraints or property sales. Interestingly, individuals adapt to such challenges, as shown by statements like: *‘I have mastered making boxes...,’* echoing sentiments shared by refugees. Of note, several participants voiced frustrations about landlords withholding security deposits, fabricating outstanding debts and neglecting property maintenance responsibilities: *‘They don’t repair anything, and the houses are wrecked. Before renting this apartment, I asked the landlord if the radiator works, but he lied.’* (Nefeli, 54)

Homelessness

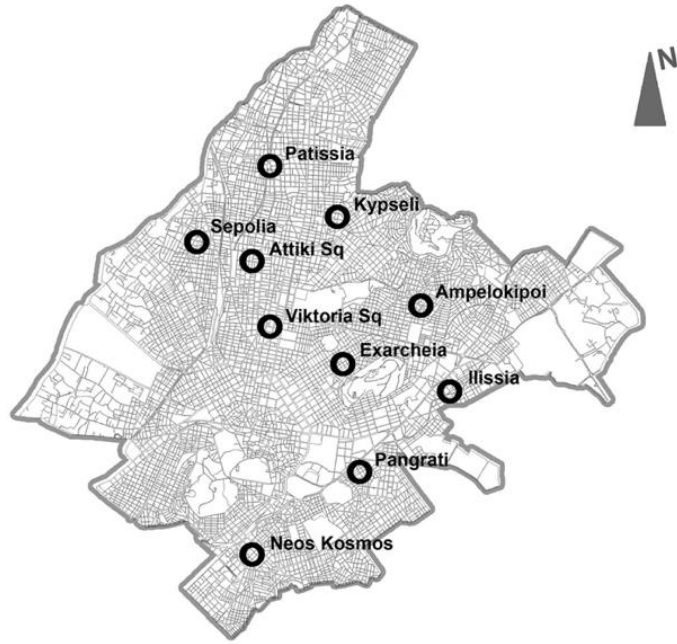
Five participants were affected by homelessness: three were roofless, sleeping rough; one was houseless, residing in NGO-provided accommodation, and two lived in unfit conditions without contracts or energy supply. Unlike newcomers, these individuals acknowledged their homelessness despite having a place to live.

Regarding rough sleeping, participants sought access to night shelters but were denied due to strict entry requirements or bribery, while some hesitated to use shelters due to strict schedules and coexistence challenges. While homelessness among Greeks is not as recurrent as among newcomers, three of the five participants expressed concerns about facing it again, including the two beneficiaries of the Housing and Work program. This demographic includes men and women aged 54-68, highlighting older individuals' susceptibility to homelessness due to employment challenges compared to younger jobseekers.

6.2 Implications for Local Emplacement

Segregation

An initial step to assess social cohesion in neighbourhoods where newcomers settle is to examine the presence of horizontal segregation to the extent that qualitative research allows. Our data indicate that newcomers and vulnerable Greek citizens predominantly inhabit specific neighbourhoods in Athens (see Map 1 and Tables 1 & 2). Interestingly, Ukrainians tend to reside in more affluent areas, typically in the southern suburbs, a trend confirmed through discussions on their co-ethnics' settlement preferences.



Map 1: Central neighbourhoods of the Municipality of Athens
(source: Balampanidis & Bourlessas, 2018)

Legal Status	Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity	Area of Residence	Apartment floor
Asylum Seeker	Jamal	Male	Syrian	Attiki Square	2nd floor
Asylum Seeker	Cyrus	Male	Iranian	Victoria Square	2nd floor
International Protection	Anwar	Male	Palestinian	Attiki Square	1st floor
International Protection	Milad	Male	Syrian	Houseless	
International Protection	Amir	Male	Iran	Kypseli	5th floor
International Protection	Hamza	Male	Syrian	Attiki Square	2nd floor
International Protection	Joaddan	Female	Cameroon	Patissia	Ground floor
International Protection	Ali	Male	Afghani	Attiki Square	Basement
International Protection	Samir	Male	Syrian	Attiki Square	2nd floor
Temporary Protection	Aleksander	Male	Ukrainian	Pangrati	Basement
Temporary Protection	Vlada	Female	Ukrainian	Hellinikon (Southern suburbs)	3rd floor
Temporary Protection	Anna	Female	Ukrainian	Kypseli	Basement

Table 1: Newcomers' residence patterns

Pseudonym	Gender	Area of Residence	Apartment floor
Athina	Female	Attiki Square	2nd floor
Socrates	Male	Pangrati	2nd floor
Diogenes	Male	Patissia	1st floor
Ifigenia	Female	Attiki Square	Basement
Nefeli	Female	Sepolia	2th floor
Afrodite	Female	Patissia	2nd floor
Hercules	Male	Kypseli	Mezzazine apartment
Tilemachos	Male	Patissia	2nd floor

Table 2: Greeks' residence patterns

According to scholars (Balampanidis & Polyzos, 2016), Athens' diverse cultural and ethnic mix defies conventional segregation criteria. Nonetheless, without aiming to challenge this assertion and acknowledging qualitative limitations, in-depth interviews with both demographics revealed a belief that foreigners outnumber Greeks in these areas. Remarkably, African communities appear to cluster around Patissia and Kipseli, while Middle-Eastern populations concentrate in Attiki and Victoria Square. Many Greeks characterised these neighbourhoods as "ghettos" and noted a decline in the local population, suggesting demographic shifts. Finally, our findings indicate widespread residency on lower floors among participants within apartment blocks (see Tables 1 & 2), suggesting vertical segregation (Dimitrakou et al., 2020), though Greek participants seem to challenge this, arguing that foreigners reside on upper floors as well.

Racism

Before delving into interethnic coexistence, we asked key informants concerning the openness of Greek society to the refugee population. According to a legal representative of an NGO, solidarity toward refugees has lessened:

“Fear has been amplified by the media linking foreigners with criminality. Media reports often highlight issues like the border wall, terrorism, and the refugee crisis, thereby fueling security concerns.”

Racism, particularly against Middle Eastern individuals, was prevailing among half of the Greek participants, many of whom disclosed extremist beliefs. However, we acknowledge the roots of racism being multifaceted, influenced significantly by socioeconomic struggles since the 2008 crisis, with newcomers often blamed for this predicament. Participants' responses reveal the prevalence of such sentiments in public discourse, amplified by misinformation about refugee benefits, including housing: *“Everyone talks about this housing crisis, but I see that they give houses to foreigners. Why am I disadvantaged in my own country?”* (Diogenes, 65). Ultimately, other factors contribute as well, such as daily interactions and familiarisation with multicultural environments. For instance, two Greeks with diverse ancestry and two individuals with work-related interactions with immigrants did not express racist views. Interestingly, none of the newcomers reported experiencing racism.

Structural barriers to integration

Structural impediments, such as the conditions prevailing in refugee camps and the lack of a robust integration policy, pose significant barriers to social integration. Similarly, the geographical isolation of camps from major urban centres hampers refugees' ability to establish connections within the host society. Upon leaving camps, individuals often find themselves ill-prepared for self-sufficiency, lacking vital information and resources. This abrupt transition and discontinuity exacerbates feelings of

instability, prompting many to resort to illicit activities out of desperation, as stressed by Anwar (24): *‘‘If you don’t guarantee house or work, especially in the beginning, people will have a bad mood and will need bad people to survive.’’*

Undocumented newcomers face more challenges, resorting to overcrowded living conditions and prolonged waits for asylum decisions. To sustain themselves during this period, many turn to informal work, which, according to Samir (31), implicates community cohesion: *‘‘Some spend a year at home doing nothing. Others suffer from depression or war-related trauma they can’t overcome. Most do illegal jobs for income. This creates problems in the neighbourhood, as they go the wrong way.’’* Therefore, these structural impediments not only hinder opportunities for improving livelihoods but also impede newcomers and the host society from envisioning their future mutually and with respect to one another.

Housing Precariousness and Social Cohesion

Informal cohabitation poses significant issues for coexistence, with neighbours reporting frequent disturbances and disregard for shared spaces. Furthermore, problems with unpaid bills from previous tenants have resulted in threats and demands from landlords, adding financial pressure on current residents. Ifigenia (49) shared her experience of newcomers failing to pay maintenance fees, leading to the termination of electricity contracts in communal areas: *‘‘The contract was terminated three times because they didn’t pay maintenance fees. So, we didn’t have electricity in common spaces of the apartment building.’’*

This situation also adversely affects landlords, who find their properties in disrepair or burdened with unpaid bills. Some landlords have been unable to afford the costs of renovating apartments damaged by tenants, resulting in these units being left vacant: *‘‘Two flats owned by the same landlord were destroyed, and now she doesn’t rent them because renovation is expensive.’’* (Athina, female, 61). Likewise, such issues arise among the non-Ukrainian beneficiaries of the HELIOS, who typically seek to secure travel papers and often slip away unnoticed without settling outstanding bills. Nevertheless, according to a social worker, attributing blame solely to refugees overlooks a crucial aspect: *‘‘It’s a mirroring of how we deal with these people. We never explained how to live here because we face them as intruders.’’*

Vertical interethnic coexistence

In areas with significant minority presence, newcomers generally perceive peaceful coexistence with neighbours, largely due to the absence of cultural conflicts. Yet, almost all expressed that long working hours limit opportunities for neighbourhood interaction. Only one young participant reported enjoying positive relations when queried about their relationships with Greek neighbours. The majority cited difficulties with a noteworthy exception: elderly Greek individuals who often show sensitivity towards newcomers. Joaddan (20) exemplified this: *‘‘We don’t talk with Greeks; when I say ‘good morning,’ they don’t*

respond. I only have a good relationship with an old man; he's so nice.” Notably, one participant who has lived in Athens for several years recounted initially feeling isolated but gradually establishing harmonious relations over time.

In contrast, Ukrainian women reported excellent relationships with neighbours, while once again, the role of elderly Greeks was highlighted in building community bonds: *“The old ladies adore my daughter, and she loves them too. They meet every day and exchange ‘I love you’s’ [laughter].”* (Vlada, 47). Although Aleksander (33) confirmed this sentiment with older adults, he generally offered a different perspective, observing irresponsible behaviour and disrespect among residents, creating a gap between them.

All Greek participants expressed complete isolation and unfamiliarity, with daily interactions limited to typical greetings. Diogenes (65) captured this sentiment: *“I don’t know, and I don’t speak with anyone. Sometimes there’s a language barrier, but mostly, people don’t bother to engage in conversation.”* Interestingly, these perceptions contrast sharply with newcomers’ perceptions of interactions with Greeks. Finally, it is notable that all Greeks mentioned problems regardless of their neighbours’ ethnicity, expressing dissatisfaction regarding interpersonal relationships and solidarity among Greeks.

Horizontal interethnic coexistence

Neighbourhood perceptions vary based on demographics. Areas with higher native presence are usually perceived as safer than those mainly inhabited by ethnic minorities. Interestingly, African-populated neighbourhoods are viewed more favourably, while Muslim-populated regions are seen as unsafe by locals and newcomers. Most Greek participants living in the latter areas mentioned rarely venturing out after nightfall due to crime concerns and inadequate police presence: *“I am locked in my house because there’s no police patrol. If I need to buy cigarettes at 6 p.m., I can’t go out. My friends are afraid to visit me here.”* (Athina, 61). Also, half of the Greeks feel pressured to adapt to dominant foreign lifestyles in their neighbourhoods, exemplified by statements like: *“We are forced to follow their way of life.”* (Nefeli, 54). Finally, all Greek participants, along with some newcomers -including the sole Ukrainian resident in these areas- stressed issues with poor urban planning (e.g., blocked pedestrian pathways, inadequate sanitation facilities, and a lack of green spaces).

Hence, evidence suggests that Greeks hardly envision a shared future with newcomers. Many participants pointed out that newcomers’ desire to leave Greece is another hindering factor: *“They don’t want to stay here. For us, this is only a disturbance. So, both sides lack the motivation to come closer.”* (Socrates, 47). This sentiment was also echoed by Amir (17): *“Whoever says that Greece is bad is because they want to leave the country and don’t want to try it here.”*

Therefore, we sought to understand if integration burdens fall solely on newcomers or if they also avoid envisioning a future with Greeks. Data indicate that only one participant preferred living in ethnic minority areas, valuing the community and familiarity provided by ethnic shops and co-ethnics. Most participants, however, desired to adapt to Greek life, challenging the assertion that Greeks adopt newcomers' lifestyles. They felt that living among co-ethnics hindered their ability to integrate, as Samir (31) articulated: *'Living among Syrians feels like being in Syria.'* Moreover, the high rates of informal work among newcomers contribute to their stigmatisation and association with criminality. Cyrus (37) remarked: *'Many who remain in Greece are bad people. Despite exceptions, this is the norm.'* Finally, Ukrainians did not show a distinct preference on this matter.

Emplacement

As argued in the literature review, successful integration requires reciprocal effort from both sides. Similarly, Greeks emphasised that while coexistence can improve with time, it requires proactive engagement from foreigners, which is not always the case. Tilemachos (54) expressed his opinion: "Some have lived in Greece for years without learning Greek. They also prefer to stay within their comfort zones, the ghettos." Likewise, newcomers stressed the importance of the host society showing genuine interest in them: "It's all about psychology. If you show interest in me, I'll do the same." (Milad, 64). Encouragingly, positive stories were shared about Greeks and newcomers forming strong bonds over time. According to newcomers, learning Greek and being helpful to neighbours is crucial for fostering these relationships. Finally, beyond newcomers' socio-spatial integration, inclusivity emerged as a broader societal challenge due to urban superdiversity. Accordingly, a scholar raised concerns about neighbourhoods blending different ethnic, cultural, and social backgrounds, creating a complex cohabitation web further intensified by diverse housing arrangements within apartment buildings.

In summary, Athens' socio-spatial dynamics present complex challenges for emplacement. Addressing these issues requires concerted efforts from both newcomers and the host society, alongside structural changes to improve living conditions and foster mutual understanding.

7. Analysis- Resilience and Capabilities for Improving Livelihoods

The final chapter addresses the last research sub-question: "What is the level of resilience exhibited by each demographic, and what plans and capabilities exist for improving livelihoods?" The Capabilities Approach provides a comprehensive overview of how structural barriers and precarious housing conditions impact people's opportunities to improve their livelihoods. This chapter begins with the premise that housing is intrinsically intertwined with employment and legal status, influencing everyone's capabilities to enhance their conditions in these domains. In this chapter, distinctions

between groups will not be made except for undocumented asylum seekers and specific cases, as we intend to analyse how these issues affect everyone in the same community through Emplacement theory.

Structural Barriers and Resilience

Integration into the job market poses a significant challenge for newcomers, severely impacting livelihoods and aspirations and with the constant threat of homelessness looming. Hamza (30) has lived in Athens for three years, facing constant difficulties: *‘I’m always stressed about money and housing.’* Even those with full-time jobs struggle to save money, except for the two minors working in family businesses who manage to save and send remittances. Greece's employment conditions make achieving a decent life difficult for vulnerable individuals, regardless of nationality. Roughly all feel abandoned by the state, as stated by Milad (64): *‘When a country shows no interest, especially at this age, it’s like finding a tap that doesn’t work.’* Apart from asylum seekers' legal challenges, single mothers -except the Ukrainian- and older individuals face more significant barriers to employment. The former lack childcare support, hindering their ability to work, while the latter struggle to accumulate sufficient pension contributions.

Lacking documents further limits one’s capabilities. Jamal (20) described the perilous nature of the asylum waiting period, particularly for youth: *‘Not having papers opens dangerous doors for children. I know girls becoming prostitutes or boys selling drugs just to survive.’* Renewing refugee status also presents challenges, with bureaucratic delays and missing paperwork being reported. These circumstances highlight the ongoing obstacles the Greek state imposes, impacting individuals even after being granted international refugee status.

Despite significant financial hurdles, individuals exhibit remarkable resilience. Many express determination to endure challenges and maintain optimism for better opportunities: *‘We live with the little we have and don’t lose hope.’* (Socrates, 47). Those lacking legal documents navigate the informal job market, with some successfully negotiating higher salaries, whereas legal status enables refugees to consider temporary work abroad for financial improvement. Lastly, strong social bonds provide vital support during tough times: *‘In winter, I spent my last money on clothes for my friend; If we die, we die altogether.’* (Anwar, 24).

Impact of (precarious) housing conditions

As discussed in chapters 5 and 6, vulnerable individuals in Greece face significant housing challenges, especially those in overcrowded conditions. These challenges impact their well-being, leading to heightened privacy and safety concerns, along with emotional and psychological issues: *‘You can’t find the housing environment you would like. Every Friday, Muslims pray in the house, and as an atheist, I’m afraid.’*

They often ask me, 'Why don't you pray? Are you a Christian or what? (Jamal, 20).' Participants also struggle managing relationships with fellow occupants and face difficulties sleeping and relaxing due to excessive noise, as Joaddan (20) explained: *'Everyone has a different mood; At that time, I was a student. Sometimes, I couldn't sleep because others were smoking, drinking, and playing music.'*

Moreover, unfit housing conditions caused health problems like humidity-related respiratory diseases. Hercules (65) recounted his struggle: *'I ended up in the hospital three times because I couldn't breathe. At night, either I stayed awake or slept sitting on my knees.'* Others, like Ifigenia (49), echoed frustrations with substandard conditions affecting their mental and physical well-being: *'I am exhausted, mentally and physically. Lately, even the smallest things easily irritate me.'* Moreover, challenges were exacerbated for those facing neighbourhood insecurity. Remarkably, the freedom to choose their residence location was limited to only two Ukrainian women and one of the two minors among the participants.

Despite the challenges, several individuals have shown resilience by leaving substandard housing to find better conditions. Many also reported staying outside their homes until late at night to avoid being inside, while others have shared stories of gradually improving their living situations: *'Step by step, I had to fix it and make it habitable.'* (Ali, 19). This adaptive practice was also noted by the Helios project manager, who argued that some people rent problematic houses because they have the skills to repair them. Furthermore, many residents expressed contentment with their current living situations, acknowledging that things could be worse: *'When you consider the circumstances, you don't complain; you're happy with what you have.'* (Tilemachos, 54). Positive aspects, such as small courtyards, were noted for those living in basement apartments. Anna (55) commented how this helps her forget the poor conditions: *'It's not completely depressing because we have a small courtyard. So, at least, we have the sky above us.'*

Financial instability exacerbates participants' hardships and limits their ability to pursue long-term goals. Many reported difficulties balancing housing expenses with other basic needs, often resulting in debt and psychological issues: *'We need to borrow to pay bills. This is difficult, especially for me because I have no job and can't help my wife.'* (Aleksander, 33). Over half of those facing affordability issues stress limiting electricity usage. Diogenes (65) described: *'I don't consume more than 580 kWh because I can't afford it. That's why I bring my clothes to the Social Laundry.'* The latter highlights the importance of social services and NGOs in meeting the needs of vulnerable populations, though many consider the assistance inadequate, especially regarding food quality for age-related and health concerns. Finally, frequent relocations cause both practical and psychological effects. For Greeks, moving furniture is costly, and valuable pieces often don't fit new apartments. All

participants expressed that relocating disrupts social networks, causes distress to children, and impedes minors' studies, particularly for those exiting shelters.

Homelessness

Many participants indicated that heavy bureaucracy often creates problems in accessing social benefits. The House and Work program is unique for Greek standards by offering housing and employment to all beneficiaries. Still, its short-term duration—two years for housing and one for employment—creates future uncertainty, as Athina (61) stated: “I don’t see a future for me. While I was homeless, I hoped for something better, but now, what hope? I know that I will be homeless again because I won’t find a job due to my age.” Employment integration is also defective, with the program offering four-hour employment that doesn't allow for savings. Furthermore, the program collaborates only with the private sector, which is highly competitive for older individuals to be recruited afterwards, while typically provides housing in segregated neighbourhoods, leading to feelings of isolation among beneficiaries.

Challenges are particularly daunting for those experiencing rough sleeping, with individuals facing social stigma, psychological distress, lack of cleanliness, and limited access to basic goods. These factors impede access to employment, as Nefeli (54) argued: *“You’re constantly thinking, ‘What am I going to eat? Where am I going to sleep?’ Employment comes second. It’s very difficult to move forward in this situation.”* Despite these adversities, some found occasional jobs, sought help from NGOs, or relied on social networks. Others coped independently, like Athina (61): *“I lived in my car. In the summer, I would wet my clothes and hang them from the car window to sort of iron them, so I could look somehow presentable to find a job.”*

Future aspirations

Participants' future goals vary significantly. Initially, all international protection beneficiaries wanted to leave Greece, but now only three still express this desire owing to ongoing hardships and limited job opportunities. Consequently, these participants focus on short-term plans, like securing housing and employment for the upcoming months.

Conversely, the majority have decided to stay in Greece, appreciating the kindness of the Greek people, the favourable weather, and the country's rich history. Although challenges persist, they have adapted to the local culture, built meaningful connections, and see potential for a future in Greece. Ali (19) reflects this sentiment: *“I already spent three years investing time to learn the Greek reality. If I invest a little more, things will get better.”* Short-term plans include finding better housing, learning Greek, and continuing their studies. Some aim to learn new skills or specialise in their work domains to improve employment conditions, while many see potential in obtaining citizenship and starting businesses with clear plans and understanding of the necessary bureaucratic steps. Notably, one minor even dreams of

buying a house. Likewise, although two out of three Ukrainians are unsure if they want to stay in Greece, depending on the outcome of the war in Ukraine, they all show a willingness to start their own businesses, with one already doing so. They also noted having assets in Ukraine that could provide funds for investments in Greece. Aleksander (33) explains: *‘If the war doesn’t end, I will sell my apartment in Ukraine, and with that money, I’ll start a business here.’*

Looking ahead, Greek participants' opinions also vary. Some express determination to improve their lives, while others fear enduring their current situation. Many recognise that their academic backgrounds may not suffice for better employment opportunities. All participants wish Greece's financial status to return to pre-2008 levels, with decent salaries, pensions, and social benefits. Finally, a common sentiment among many participants, regardless of ethnicity, is the desire to live in mainland Greece, preferably in villages. However, the scarcity of job opportunities in these regions discourages relocation.

8. Discussion

This chapter discusses the implications of the findings in relation to the research questions and literature review, aiming to enhance understanding of the importance of housing for refugees. The housing aspect of integration was chosen to illustrate how states use population-centred control strategies to include or exclude newcomers from civil rights and essential services. Moreover, nowadays, securing housing is increasingly vital due to the current context of the housing crisis. Hence, it's of utmost importance to discuss newcomers' housing characteristics vis-a-vis vulnerable individuals within Greek society and highlight their implications for livelihoods and social cohesion amidst urban landscape restructuring.

Theoretical implications

Our findings align significantly with existing literature on refugee housing pathways (Adam et al., 2021; Aigner, 2018; Brown et al., 2022; El-Kayed & Hamann, 2018; Ribera-Almandoz et al., 2022), which predominantly examines self-settlement patterns and the importance of social capital in overcoming housing challenges. However, our research extends these studies by incorporating the host society's perspectives and interactions between the demographics. Utilising the Emplacement theory to explore societal dynamics offers an advantage, diverging from conventional migration studies that use the integration theory. Greece's unique context—struggling with the aftermath of a financial and housing crisis and facing an unprecedented influx of refugees due to its geographical proximity to conflict zones—offers a unique setting to examine severe livelihood struggles and housing precariousness. In exploring these repercussions, the significance of the Capabilities approach becomes well-embedded, a concept previously unused by the aforementioned authors. Additionally, incorporating the theory of internal borders to compare different refugee subgroups offers a qualitative analysis that strengthens

studies revealing the differential treatment of immigrant populations (Costello & Foster, 2022; De Coninck, 2023; Sparke, 2006). Thus, this research addresses two increasingly critical issues in the global policy agenda: housing and migration.

Key findings

In the results chapters, we demonstrate that housing is intrinsically linked with access to employment and civil rights (Ager and Strang, 2008), ensuring one's capability to secure decent accommodation. The analysis suggests that newcomers and vulnerable locals live in precarious housing conditions, supporting our hypothesis about their spatial coexistence, and potentially contributing to segregation patterns. The findings provide new insights into interethnic coexistence, indicating that social integration of newcomers is rarely achieved. An interesting finding is that coexistence in central Athens' neighbourhoods represents a broader societal issue. Hence, both precariousness and lack of social cohesion significantly impact individuals' well-being, while reliance on social capital and non-state actors is imperative due to neoliberal policies causing welfare state retrenchment and a humanitarian approach to social policies (Cabot, 2018). An important observation concerns refugees granted temporary protection status. We argue that, apart from disparities in their financial means, current policies and societal attitudes are notably more favourably for this particular group.

Discussing asylum seekers and refugees with international protection status

Based on the analysis, it is evident that the EU-Turkey Common Declaration and the Dublin Regulation have confined refugees in Greece, an assertion also made by Kourachanis (2018). We argue that the European reception system is structurally designed to create crisis phenomena. The refugee crisis trope (Bhagat & Soedeberg, 2019) aptly explains the deterrent and exclusive nature of policies, such as stringent eligibility criteria and poor camp conditions (Blouchoutzi et al., 2022; Milton et al., 2017; Newhouse, 2015), and delays in asylum processes (Dotsey & Lumley-Sapanski, 2021; Kourachanis, 2018), all adversely affecting the livelihoods and long-term integration of newcomers (Bakker et al., 2016; Campesi, 2015; Kreichauf, 2018; Szczepanikova, 2013). However, since integration is a national policy, examining the National Integration Strategy reveals that Greece further restricts refugees. Notably, Greece has never implemented an integration policy, opting instead for ad-hoc procedures, which can also be interpreted as a preventative measure to avoid making Greece an attractive destination for refugees.

The data suggest that the HELIOS program, which serves as an integration initiative, primarily assists recognised refugees who wait for their travel papers to leave Greece. Subsequently, it mainly targets individuals without aspirations for a future in Greece. Therefore, we assert that the program's primary goal is not integration but rather facilitating the departure of refugees from Greece. Additionally, the program's short-term nature, coupled with funding gaps and the heavy workload for

beneficiaries (e.g., language courses), make it unappealing to the general refugee population. Moreover, the inefficient reception phase, which fails to provide adequate recourse and information to asylum seekers, further hinders their ability to transition to autonomy—the ultimate goal of integration. Hence, the lack of continuity in the reception system raises additional concerns about the integration goals in Greece. With regard to housing, the lack of language training, employment integration, and skills necessary to find housing highlights a significant gap in the system.

Refugees and asylum seekers navigating the housing market without state assistance face even more significant challenges. As outlined in the literature review, accessing the housing market involves severe obstacles due to recent developments that have constrained the rental housing stock. We contend that this, combined with the absence of a social housing institution and the commodification of housing promoted by neoliberal states, has incentivised housing providers to profiteer from the free rental market. Moreover, Greeks historically view housing mainly as a commodity, evidenced by high homeownership rates, yet the recent trend of "touristification" and the rhetoric of development through attracting investments have intensified this perception, leading to skyrocketing prices. Nonetheless, as housing is a social right, states must implement policies that, albeit minimal and inefficient, guarantee a safety net for the most vulnerable individuals. In this context, parallels can be observed in policies targeting extreme poverty (Cabot, 2018), with Greeks being provided with shelters and refugees being housed in camps.

Relating findings to prior studies

Following insights from scholars (Aigner, 2019; Brown et al., 2022; Clair et al., 2019; Dotsey & Lumley-Sapanski, 2021; El-Kayed & Hamann, 2018; Fozdar & Hartley, 2014; Robinson et al., 2007), we examined whether newcomers in Greece face similar challenges as other vulnerable groups, confirming their indications. However, newcomers are more disadvantaged in navigating the housing market due to their pre-migratory experiences and socio-legal status (Brown et al., 2020; MigrationWork CIC, 2022; Powel & Robinson, 2019). Our findings align with these indications yet posit an additional differentiating factor: the absence of familial support among newcomers, which typically compensates for social policy shortcomings in Greece. Throughout our results chapter, we consistently pinpointed distinct experiences of refugees with relatives in Athens, noting their low risk of housing precariousness. For the refugee population, migratory networks respectively facilitate access to housing and employment opportunities in urban centres (Kobia & Cranfield, 2009). Our study identified similar motives for choosing Athens while also uncovering a new influential factor, which is accessibility to smugglers in major cities.

We applied Bolt et al.'s (2010) framework to examine barriers to accessing housing, emphasising that immigrants' settlement patterns depend on institutional structures, host society

dynamics, and individual characteristics. Regarding the former, access to employment and legal status critically determine newcomers' ability to secure housing. Our data indicate that refugees often encounter limited job opportunities, frequently falling into seasonal, temporary, and informal work, consistent with prior research (Carter et al., 2008; Dotsey & Lumley-Sapanski, 2021). Consequently, refugees prioritise rental properties over homeownership, aligning with findings from other studies (Balkan et al., 2018; Dotsey & Lumley-Sapanski, 2021; Finney & Harries, 2013). Regarding host society barriers, we identified discriminatory practices and racial harassment from housing providers toward refugees, conforming to numerous studies (Adam et al., 2019; Bolt et al., 2010; Fozdar & Hartley, 2014; Murdie, 2008; Texeira, 2008; Phillips, 2006; Ziersch et al., 2017). Finally, individual characteristics such as language barriers and a lack of understanding of local housing market intricacies (Aigner, 2019; Fozdar & Hartley, 2014; Ribera-Almandoz et al., 2022; Texeira, 2008; Ziersch et al., 2017) were identified as micro-level barriers.

Comparison of findings with other studies (Adam et al., 2019; Aigner, 2019; Bolt et al., 2020; Dotsey & Lumley-Sapanski, 2021; Texeira, 2008; Zierch et al., 2017) confirms the crucial role of social networks in providing refugees with essential information and housing assistance. Nevertheless, the prevalence of precarious housing conditions shows that relying solely on social capital bonds is not a sufficient long-term strategy for acquiring affordable, good-quality housing, as emphasised by Murdie (2008). Another significant finding is that many better-established migrants have developed an informal rental submarket, similar to Vienna's case (Aigner, 2019). Likewise, newcomers, despite recognising exploitation, often refrain from complaining to avoid homelessness. Finally, in the absence of adequate housing and social policies, both Greeks and newcomers have turned to NGOs for assistance. However, as noted by scholars (Aigner, 2019; Brown et al., 2022; Kourachanis), the capacity of these organisations was found to be constrained by available funds, resulting in minority and temporary solutions.

Confronted with multifaceted challenges in their housing pathways, our findings match with scholars' (Francis & Hiebert, 2014; Flatau et al., 2015; Murdie, 2008; Ribera-Almandoz et al., 2022; Texeira, 2008), underscoring that many newcomers experience inadequate and insecure housing conditions. A distinct observation is that newcomers frequently reside in overcrowded conditions without formal rental agreements, which contrasts sharply with local residents. Interestingly, our findings coincide with those of Flatau et al. (2015), suggesting that refugees may not perceive doubling up as homelessness. Privacy concerns in cramped environments (Lombard, 2023; Waldron, 2021) were prevalent in our study, alongside safety concerns. Beyond overcrowding, (un)affordability emerged as a prevalent challenge, compounded by substandard quality and insufficient amenities, aligning with evidence linking these factors to deteriorating physical and mental health conditions or the emergence

of new ones (Brown et al., 2022; Carr et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2007; Waldron, 2021; Ziersch & Due, 2018).

Residential mobility was a common experience among all participants, who reported struggling to establish a sense of belonging as their social networks were ‘cut short,’ coinciding with findings from other studies (Adam et al., 2019; Ager & Strang, 2008; Fozdar & Hartley, 2014; Phillips & Harrison, 2010). Homelessness, also identified in other studies (Ribera-Almandoz et al., 2022; Dotsey & Lumley-Sapanski, 2021), emerged as a recurring issue predominantly for newcomers (Couch, 2011; St. Arnault & Merali, 2019a). A notable distinction from these studies is that none have incorporated the ethos typology to examine the different types of homelessness more thoroughly.

As observed in our research, the emplacement theory suggests that locals and newcomers coexist spatially, forming a community with shared problems and interests (Schiller et al., 2011). However, racist behaviours from the locals indicate a divergence in mutually envisioning the future, contradicting Wessendorf & Phillimore's (2019) assertion. While smaller-scale instances of harmonious coexistence do occur, true inclusivity remains elusive.

We suggest that the media contribute to fostering fear toward Middle Eastern refugees, yet our research indicates that such fear diminishes over time through interactions. Contrarily, we argue that the fundamental issue lies in deficient policy implementation. Moreover, our findings show that settlement is closely linked to the reception system. Harsh living conditions in isolated camps, restrictive measures affecting livelihoods, and inadequate support like language education and cultural orientation hinder the ability and aspirations to integrate into Greek society. Consequently, many newcomers leave the reception phase -often falling into the gap of non-documented- and relocate to major urban centres with established ethnic communities. Challenges in securing housing perpetuate a state of precariousness, potentially reinforcing segregation patterns and stigmatisation of these individuals who are often accused of urban and social decay. This being said, foreigners are perceived as disrupting the host society's cultural homogeneity, as Scheel & Tazzioli (2022) asserted.

Furthermore, as living conditions worsen for Greek citizens, existing pressures on a populace already harbouring prejudices against migrants intensify. Interestingly, our research indicates that tensions do not solely emerge with foreigners. Our findings are in line with previous studies (Balampanidis & Bourlessas; Balampanidis & Polyzos, 2016; Dimitrakou et al., 2020; Papatzani, 2020; Papatzani et al., 2022), underscoring that urban diversity's sociospatial dynamics contribute to ongoing transformations, likely fostering social unrest and exclusion. For instance, Greek participants' responses mirror those documented by Balampanidis & Bourlessas (2018), highlighting feelings of isolation and limited interaction among Greek neighbours.

Thus, our empirical findings reveal superdiversity and heterogeneity in Athens. Nevertheless, participant responses reveal horizontal segregation in two neighbourhoods, which partly contrasts with findings in other studies (Arbaci, 2008; Balampanidis & Polyzos, 2016; Papatzani et al., 2022). Additionally, the data suggest vertical segregation (Balampanidis & Bourlessas; Bakogiannis et al., 2022; Dimitrakou et al., 2020; Dyas, 2019), though, notably, participants noted that foreigners reside on every floor, further supporting our observation of horizontal segregation.

Discussing refugees with temporary protection status

Ukrainian refugees' experiences highlight several distinctive aspects. Unlike others, Ukrainians arrived voluntarily and did not face the aforementioned restrictive measures, as argued by scholars (De Coninck, 2023; Walker, 2022b). Their participation in programs like HELIOS underscores this differential treatment. Additionally, they encountered minimal challenges in securing housing due to their comparatively better financial circumstances. Nevertheless, like other vulnerable groups, they faced difficulties integrating into the job market, relying on social capital from established Ukrainian communities in Athens. Similarly, many Ukrainians live in precarious conditions, albeit not involving overcrowding, which mirrors broader livelihood challenges in post-crisis Greek society. Lastly, Ukrainians settled in more affluent neighbourhoods and fostered positive relationships with their neighbours, indicating they are not perceived as disrupting cultural homogeneity (Costello, 2022).

Limitations

As with any empirical study, this research has several limitations that must be acknowledged. Firstly, a notable constraint stems from the limited participation of female refugees and the insufficient saturation point of Ukrainian refugee perspectives, thereby restricting the generalisability of findings within the bounds of qualitative research. Another limitation concerns Greek participants, where a blurred distinction between refugees and other migrant populations may have influenced the accuracy of their perceptions regarding the demographic under study. Moreover, the absence of recent secondary data from the 2021 census hindered drawing definitive conclusions on segregation theory, despite qualitative findings supporting it. Similarly, the lack of secondary data on the percentage of vacant state-owned buildings complicates proposals for utilising these properties to address the current housing crisis. Lastly, the researcher's familiarity with the research site may have influenced how the empirical findings were framed, potentially reflecting personal biases. These limitations underscore the necessity for a cautious interpretation of the study's findings.

Policy recommendations

These recommendations emphasise key areas that need immediate attention based on our qualitative research findings. However, one must consider that these suggestions are intended as initial guidance rather than a comprehensive policy plan.

Firstly, concerning refugee policies, we urge the Greek state to establish a comprehensive National Policy that ensures holistic integration for newcomers. This should commence upon their arrival, covering essential aspects from the reception phase through to long-term integration. Language acquisition should be mandatory but approached in a more supportive manner than the current HELIOS program, emphasising its role in enhancing newcomers' knowledge of their rights and facilitating interaction with the host society. Integration programs should be designed for long-term sustainability, aiming to foster refugee autonomy. Drawing successful paradigms from other countries while considering Greece's unique historical and socioeconomic context is crucial.

Regarding housing policies, it is essential to pursue both immediate actions and long-term strategies aimed at achieving sustainable solutions to housing challenges. Therefore, it is imperative for the Greek state to establish a social housing institution capable of undertaking the construction and distribution of low-cost rental housing. Additionally, this institution should develop tools to monitor market and societal conditions, which is essential for understanding and addressing the evolution and intensification of housing problems and their causes. Emphasising quality over quantity, social housing initiatives should prioritise meeting genuine needs based on specific percentages rather than merely increasing the number of units. Similarly, drawing insights from successful international models can provide valuable guidance in these goals.

To effectively tackle the current housing crisis, the state should consider stringent regulations for platforms such as Airbnb and reconsider the abolition of the Golden Visa program, with a primary focus on increasing housing stock and ensuring affordability. Strategies could also include leveraging state-owned vacant buildings, incentivising landlords to convert properties into social housing instead of Airbnb rentals, and supporting housing cooperatives through incentives for producing additional housing units.

Ultimately, addressing interethnic coexistence requires placing these issues on the policy agenda to deepen understanding and foster social cohesion. Moreover, as discussed, improving the reception system could significantly enhance emplacement and promote positive interethnic interactions. Equally important is raising awareness within the host society about refugees and their challenging experiences. NGOs could also be crucial in organising events and initiatives that facilitate

meaningful interactions between the two demographics, contributing to a more inclusive and cohesive community fabric.

9. Conclusion

This chapter will summarise the study's key findings in accordance with the research objectives and questions, as well as their significance and contribution thereof. It will also recap practical applications and propose directions for future research.

This study aimed to explore the housing trajectories and characteristics of refugees and asylum seekers in Athens, Greece. The results indicate that newcomers exhibit self-settlement patterns due to inadequate governmental support, primarily relying on social networks to navigate the housing market. This approach often leads to precarious living conditions due to intricate legal status-related issues and financial hardships. Further findings show that vulnerable Greek citizens face similar housing predicaments, which fosters adverse sentiments toward newcomers. Conversely, Ukrainian refugees typically enjoy better living conditions and benefit from a more welcoming stance from the Greek government and society. The study also suggests that effective two-way integration, or emplacement, is not achieved in neighbourhoods with immigrant populations. Instead, social cohesion has emerged as a significant societal issue due to the ongoing restructuring of the urban fabric. Consequently, both the lack of community connectedness and housing precariousness severely affect individuals who, despite exhibiting resilience, lack the resources to achieve their desired quality of life.

The findings contribute to three different theoretical underpinnings. First, they support a strand of studies focusing on the housing pathways of refugees and provide new insights by examining a South European country where neither refugees nor the state envisions a shared future. Moreover, this study was conducted in a unique research context due to Greece's difficult financial situation and current housing crisis, and it's the first of its kind to compare newcomers with low-income local citizens. Second, despite significant limitations due to the small sample size, it illustrates how, in the EU context and amid global affairs like the Ukraine war, states employ racialised border enforcement and inclusive practices only for specific refugee groups. Finally, it advances the understanding of the emplacement theory through qualitative analysis, emphasising the pivotal role of reception and integration systems, as well as the peculiarities of each host country, in achieving inclusivity in today's ever-expanding superdiverse urban societies.

The research findings suggest that policy actions should reform the current ineffective refugee and housing systems to enhance livelihood opportunities. Implementing a national migration policy

with continuity from reception to integration, alongside equal asylum processing for all refugees, will protect newcomers' human rights and benefit the host state and citizens. This being said, this approach will help newcomers overcome trauma, feel respected, and motivate them to contribute to their new country. Housing demands specific attention, serving as the cornerstone for fulfilling stability and fundamental human needs. Addressing housing issues systematically and focusing on coexistence will enhance living conditions, particularly for vulnerable individuals, and prevent social tensions. These measures are crucial in mitigating extremism, especially amid declining living standards and the potential emergence of new crises stemming from the volatile global developments.

This research lays the foundation for interdisciplinary studies to build on and offer further profound insights. Future studies should particularly examine the refugee housing pathways through an intersectional lens, with a focus on gender dynamics, offering novel perspectives on the study population. Longitudinal research could also investigate whether housing conditions for newcomers improve over time and if homeownership becomes achievable. Including landlords' perspectives to analyse profit motives and attitudes toward various refugee subgroups and Greeks would provide further valuable insights. Moreover, it is strongly recommended that researchers conduct discourse analysis to examine underlying power relations and the role of the media in perpetuating fear towards specific refugee groups. Finally, employing mixed methods research with quantitative data to assess horizontal segregation and qualitative analysis to study whether recent housing developments (e.g., gentrification) lead to displacement and peripheralisation of low-income citizens would deepen understanding of urban societal changes.

Beyond the case study, refugee and housing systems in European countries face ongoing challenges, leading to social resentment among EU citizens and political turmoil, as evidenced in recent national and EU elections (Stamouli, 2024, 10 June). Even more, refugees and EU citizens encounter increasing difficulties, prompting room for discussion on the EU's paradigm in promoting democracy and human rights. Housing, migration, urban inclusivity, and decent employment are integral to the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2024), obligating the EU collectively and member states individually to uphold these rights. As for migration, its importance lies in becoming aware of its intrinsic role in human history, shaping civilisations through patterns of human mobility (Harari, 2011). Recognising this stresses the imperative to address these issues to foster inclusive and sustainable societies in Europe.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: List of newcomer participants

ID	Legal Status	Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity	Age	Time in Athens	Time Awaiting Refugee Status
P1	Asylum Seeker	Jamal	Male	Syrian	20	6 months	8 months
P2	Asylum Seeker	Cyrus	Male	Iranian	37	3.5 years	4 years
P3	International Protection	Anwar	Male	Palestinian	24	5 months	2 months
P4	International Protection	Milad	Male	Syrian	64	3 years	4 years
P5	International Protection	Amir	Male	Iran	17	6 months	3 years
P6	International Protection	Hamza	Male	Syrian	30	3 years	1.5 years
P7	International Protection	Joaddan	Female	Cameroon	20	2.5 years	6 months
P8	International Protection	Ali	Male	Afghani	19	2.5 years	5 months
P9	International Protection	Samir	Male	Syrian	31	7 years	1.5 years
P10	Temporary Protection	Aleksander	Male	Ukrainian	33	1 year	1 week
P11	Temporary Protection	Vlada	Female	Ukrainian	47	2 years	1 week
P12	Temporary Protection	Anna	Female	Ukrainian	55	2 years	1 week

Appendix 2: List of Greek participants

ID	Pseudonym	Gender	Age
P13	Athina	Female	61
P14	Socratis	Male	47
P15	Diogenis	Male	65
P16	Ifigenia	Female	49
P17	Nefeli	Female	54
P18	Afroditi	Female	68
P19	Hercules	Male	65
P20	Tilemachos	Male	54

Appendix 3: List of key informer participants

ID	Pseudonym	Gender	Position
P21	Iole	Female	Founder & legal representative of NGO
P22	Aristotelis	Male	Scholar
P23	Iris	Female	Social Worker
P24	Periklis	Male	Project manager of HELIOS
P25	Paris	Male	Scholar
P26	Lefteris	Male	Director of NGO