

GdW resolution on the accommodation of refugees and asylum seekers – German housing providers face their responsibility

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We need

- temporarily lowered standards and accelerated procedures
  - to ensure social support
  - considerably more cost-effective construction
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The influx of people coming to Germany, fleeing war and distress, remains constantly high. On the basis of their social responsibility for society as a whole, the German housing sector has already engaged with great emphasis on their humane and integration-supporting accommodation.

The German housing sector offers homes to everyone in Germany - without discriminating on basis of a person's background, origin, education, or religion. The recent GdW-study "tenants with a migration background" (Mieter mit Migrationshintergrund) describes the past experiences of our member companies in bygone decades and derives recommendations for action. A key message is that we need to see immigration as an opportunity and must not allow undoubtedly existing challenges to dominate public debate.

Given the current situation, however, we must pay close attention to not repeat past mistakes in the continuative accommodation after leaving initial reception centres. That is, no concentration of refugees in individual buildings, no permanent establishment of lodgings on the outskirts of cities, no new large settlements on the margins of society without the necessary infrastructure. This is what happened in the 70s and 90s. With a large, long-term and continuing commitment until today, housing companies with the support of the immensely important federal-state programme "Social City" (Soziale Stadt), have managed to stabilize many residential districts and to turn overburdened neighbourhoods again into functioning ones and thus to maintain social peace.

The German housing industry welcomes the flexibility initiative of its federal government without any restrictions and supports the measures proposed. We have shown that we can provide special services in the field of integration and will be partners for policy-makers.

The integration of immigrants and refugees, however, can only be achieved through a long-term social support and inclusive actions and only by means of stronger financial commitments on all governmental levels. Further social management and accompaniment of immigrants and refugees needs to be supported and handled by the municipalities and / or involved carriers. After all, the goal has to be not only to supply a first accommodation, but long-term integration.

GdW calls for more precise measures:

- We strongly advocate an immediate jurisdiction of the federal government for the financial support of housing. A compensation that is going beyond federal funding should be provided as a grant, and not as interest rate reduction, and should be increased continuously over a period of at least five years. The funding should be earmarked and used for the construction and repair of vacant buildings.
- The next stage of the Energy Conservation Act on January 1<sup>st</sup> 2016 will increase the construction of new dwellings by about 7 percent. Even today's standard prevents the establishment of affordable housing. We therefore propose a temporary reduction of the requirements to 2009-levels until 2020 while maintaining the current funding conditions.
- A temporary exemption from public procurement obligations for public housing companies in order to make accommodation available as quick as possible.

- For rigid specifications – such as protection from noise – the authorities should be empowered to tolerate a deviation of 10 percent.
- The municipal building authorities must be equipped with more personnel to expedite the approval process drastically. In case of doubt, the federal state or the federal government must take over.
- We believe housing supply to be top priority for the mayors in the cities and towns. The municipalities must therefore designate a coordinator for housing, paid by the federal states.
- For the first accommodation of refugees in old dwelling-stocks the protection of continuance (Bestandsschutz) should apply in order to avoid time-consuming construction measures when moving in.
- The maximum residential density of apartments must not exceed the one applicable within the framework of social housing.
- Federal states, counties and county-level cities must be adequately financially equipped in terms of cost for
  - social care (including German courses, etc.) and
  - the reconstitution of uninhabitable homes.
- In some cases it will be necessary to re-think new projects in the outskirts and to re-evaluate the fundamental preference towards the (inner) urban development - regardless of the market situation.
- In case of provisions based on European Union legislation which are not providing exemptions to the current emergency situation, the federal government is called upon to advocate for appropriate exemptions in Brussels.