

Inter-sector cooperation for refurbishment of empty spaces and vacant public housing stock

Context

The initial results of census 2021 indicated that 12.1% of all dwellings (approx. 1.84 million) are uninhabited. According to official data of the statistics office, at the end of 2020 there were 63,739 empty flats in Poland in the municipal housing stock. Habitat conducted detailed research focused on (i) collecting data from owners of public housing (municipalities and State Treasury companies), religious associations, real estate agencies (mostly public owners responded), (ii) in depth case studies of three cities (Warsaw, Katowice and Zawiercie) and (iii) analysis of over 70 revitalization plans. Through the case studies, we identified 4,871 vacant residential premises in the three Polish cities alone.

To date in Poland, the private sector has played a very small role in providing affordable housing, unlike the affordable housing market in Western Europe and North America. The current refugee crisis and increased demand for affordable rental housing creates an opportunity for new partnerships between Polish authorities and the private sector.

After the escalation of the war in Ukraine, necessity to use vacant properties for residential purposes through the renovation and adaptation of dwellings, as well as the adaptation of public facilities with other functions for residential purposes was raised by local authorities and civil society and described in so-called White Book summarizing roundtable organized in Wrocław in May 2022. Similar recommendation was presented by Wise Europe in the report Gościenna Polska 2022+. Public authorities are interested in this solution, e.g. the local authorities in Warsaw in early June 2022 presented a goal of readapting 1,800 vacant premises within municipal housing stock.

How?

Unused flats from municipal housing stock may be rented to NGOs (e.g. in competition proceedings). NGO should act as facilitator bringing together private sector and local community for renovation projects. Private sector companies should provide construction materials, equipment, furniture with margin minimized on every level of the supply chain to lower the general costs of the renovation. NGO may conduct renovations (potentially with support from the private sector) and use refurbished flats to support the refugees (and later on – local communities). After lapse of the rental agreement, municipal housing stock is upgraded and the local authorities may use a flat for social rental.

By involvement in this model, every partner would decide to **contribute its usual profits to lower the overall cost**. The cooperation and synergy on every level, especially of the supply chain, manifested by e.g. partners not making profits, would allow to reduce overall cost by approximately 30-40%. Thanks to that, **every donation for this project would be almost doubled in terms of social impact**.



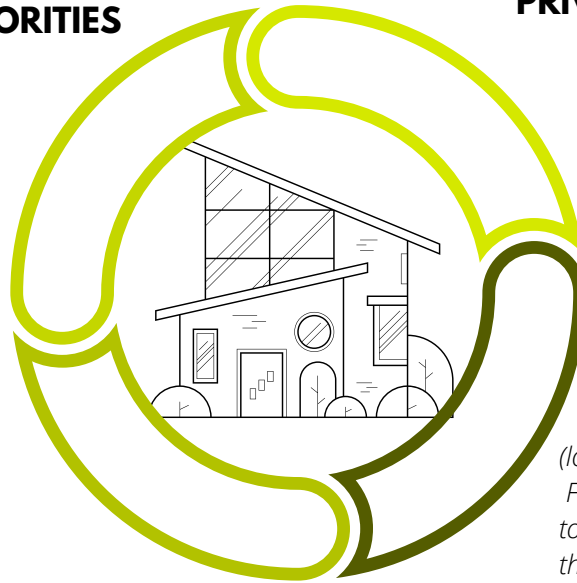
The inter-sector cooperation for refurbishment of empty spaces would engage:

LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Providing vacant premises for refurbishment, upgrading municipal housing stock, lowering or minimizing financial contribution, supporting local communities and refugees, raising public awareness.

LOCAL COMMUNITY AND REFUGEES

Acting together to integrate, cooperate and establish relationships, raising awareness of housing issues and challenges faced by both groups, volunteering at the renovation sites.



PRIVATE SECTOR

Selling products with no-profit – **margin to be minimized on every level of the supply chain** (construction materials, windows, furniture, household items, etc.), providing technical assistance of professionals, in-kind donations, volunteering, fundraising.

NGOs

(local and international)
Facilitating the process, bringing together various actors, organizing the process, engaging local community, fundraising, operating social programs in the refurbished apartments.

Why?

For many reasons:

- to upgrade municipal and public housing stock and enlarge public housing stock,
- to provide affordable housing solutions to the refugees and local communities,
- to establish innovative, inter-sector cooperation,
- to raise public awareness on housing issues and situation of the refugees in Poland.

Examples

In 2020, Habitat Poland started implementation of the Empty Spaces project, building coalition of private partners, public institutions, researchers, and NGOs with an aim of scaling-up the renovation and adaptation of empty spaces for housing purposes. As a proof of concept, Habitat Poland refurbished several apartments from the public stock managed by the City of Warsaw and currently seeks for vacant premises mainly in the Silesia region.