



Innovative Housing Solutions for ORR-Eligible Populations

CASE STUDIES AND BEST PRACTICES



Refugee Housing
SOLUTIONS

Innovative Housing Solutions for ORR-Eligible Populations: Case Studies and Best Practices

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Executive Summary

The global housing affordability gap continues to grow due to myriad contributing factors such as household income, cost of living, and the social and economic support systems in place. Fortunately, housing innovations and best practices with proven success in attaining affordable housing can be learned from, adapted, and implemented to provide housing solutions.

This article examines at the macro level the growing global housing affordability gap and innovative housing solutions as a worldwide framework. Then, by taking a practical and micro-level approach, these solutions can be adapted and implemented to improve housing stability and promote thriving U.S. communities for all.

Introduction

The lack of housing affordability globally continues to be on the rise, as the cost of housing and the demand for affordable housing simply outpaces supply. As noted in a March 2024 article by the Migration Policy Institute, population growth and the number of homes being built are not keeping up with demand, especially in already overcrowded urban areas.¹ Another recent study by the International Monetary Fund on the *Housing Affordability Crunch* highlights that the COVID-19 pandemic and “return of inflation . . . set off perhaps the world’s worst affordability crisis in more than a decade,”² and we see this is true in both the homebuying and rental markets.

A myriad of factors contribute to this affordability crisis such as, but not limited to, mortgage rates, household income, interest, cost of living, and insufficient social support mechanisms. However, these realities are not new and apart from the unprecedented global pandemic, many of the world’s affordable housing challenges were anticipated to hit a peak in 2025. A 2014 study by McKinsey Global Institute estimated that trends in urbanization and income growth would result in approximately 1.6 billion people being impacted by housing affordability in 2025.³

WHAT IS HOUSING AFFORDABILITY?

According to the McKinsey Global Institute, **housing affordability** is often defined as “the difference between the cost of acceptable standard housing unit (which varies by location) and what households can afford to pay using no more than 30 percent of income.”

Confirming this prediction, the World Economic Forum reported that in June 2024, “around 1.6 billion people worldwide lack[ed] adequate housing, and it is expected to rise to 3 billion by 2030.”⁴ Indeed, the need for housing affordability is great worldwide — and growing — however, there are grassroots and government-led blueprints, innovations, and best practices with the potential to alleviate the housing affordability crisis through continued investment and cross-sector collaboration.

Innovative Housing Solutions and Best Practices

Tackling global housing challenges with real-time solutions may be daunting, but there are best practices in place and global learning forums established as a means of adapting and implementing creative and innovative solutions and systems.

One unique collaborative in response to the growing housing crisis and its impact on refugees and other displaced persons worldwide was the establishment of the [Global Refugee Accommodation Working Group](#) (GRAWG) in late 2023. GRAWG’s mission is to lead global cross-sector coordination, communication, and collaboration to identify and innovate opportunities to address refugee accommodation, shelter, and housing challenges. A first-of-its-kind initiative, and with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) supporting its efforts, GRAWG has proven to be an important vehicle driving dialogue and collaboration on accommodation challenges and opportunities across resettlement countries.

A number of initiatives exist internationally that could prove useful in the U.S. context. For example, the [Homes for Ukraine](#) scheme in the United Kingdom offers housing via sponsors. This example of a promising

¹ [Global Affordable Housing Shortages Can Harm Migrant Reception and Integration](#). Migration Policy Institute. 20 March 2024.

² [The Housing Affordability Crunch](#). International Monetary Fund. December 2024.

³ [Tackling the World’s Affordable Housing Challenge](#). McKinsey Global Institute. 1 October 2014.

⁴ [4 practical solutions to the world’s spiraling housing crisis](#). World Economic Forum. 10 June 2024.

initiative out of the United Kingdom as well as a few others from around the world, such as [Australia's approach](#) of service providers exploring accommodation in rural and nontraditional areas and creating housing cooperatives, can be found in a March 2024 article from the [Migration Policy Institute](#).

Learning mechanisms and cross-sector coordination have proven value for sharing innovative housing solutions and global best practices. Several U.S. cities are already implementing creative housing solutions, which could be adapted in other communities and are highlighted in the following case studies.

Understanding Housing for ORR-Eligible Populations

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) promotes health, well-being, self-sufficiency, and stability for refugees and other eligible individuals as they integrate into the United States.⁵ Populations currently eligible for ORR services and support can be found [here](#).

ORR-eligible populations do not need niche or new types of housing but simply housing that is affordable. This often requires working closely with housing providers to understand who refugees, newcomers, and other ORR-eligible populations are. A helpful resource for housing providers on this topic is the [Fact Sheet & FAQ on Renting to Refugees and Other Eligible Newcomers](#).

⁵ [Engaging with ORR-Eligible Populations: A Housing Stakeholder's Guide](#). Refugee Housing Solutions.

Case Studies

As noted earlier, there are many examples of innovative housing solutions and initiatives globally, but the following case studies focus specifically on recent U.S.-based affordable housing initiatives developed to support refugee and newcomer housing.

TACOMA, WASHINGTON

Tacoma-based nongovernmental organization Thrive International purchases, converts, and operates the revitalization of former hotels into housing for newcomer populations. In May 2025, Thrive secured a \$2 million grant to provide housing to refugees by repurposing the former Tacoma Hotel. The grant came from the state capital's budget and will aid the organization in purchasing the former hotel to convert it into additional housing for refugees and other newcomers. In addition to offering housing, Thrive International also offers wrap-around social support services to residents.

CHESTNUT HILL, PENNSYLVANIA

Faith partners transform communities through repurposed housing to create temporary and transitional housing opportunities on a newcomer's road to self-sufficiency and permanent housing. Sisters of Saint Joseph Newcomer Housing Alliance provides safety and shelter through a transitional housing model, operating a 12-bedroom house for individual men and are in the process of renovating a 36-bedroom house. Not only does this program provide transitional housing but also wrap-around community support services during the individual's stay.

SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

The Partnership for the Advancement of New Americans (PANA) is a research, public policy, and community organizing hub dedicated to full integration of economic, social, and civic engagement of refugees and displaced populations in the San Diego region of California and across the country. In 2023, they began the visioning process engaging more than 2,000 community members to design the Global Village. The [Global Village](#) will provide 150 units of large affordable family housing, transitional housing, a global village market to support refugee and immigrant entrepreneurs, community convening spaces including a nonprofit hub for co-locating organizations, family services, and a space to serve families during emergencies. It will be built on 2.2 acres of community-owned land and is currently 60% funded through affordable housing and government sources, with development and construction slated to start in 2026.

“

WE NEED TO THINK ABOUT HOMES THE WAY WE THINK ABOUT WATER AND STREETS. THESE AREN'T NICE TO HAVE — THEY'RE ESSENTIALS.⁶

KEVIN FAULCONER,
FORMER SAN DIEGO MAYOR

⁶ [The Impact of Housing Affordability on Communities](#). Habitat for Humanity.

SALEM, OREGON

In May 2025, a new affordable housing project was developed as a collaborative among community partners in the Salem, OR area. The housing project received \$29.4 million in funding from [Oregon Housing and Community Services](#) through the Local Innovation Fast Track funds dedicated to Culturally Specific Ownership. This innovative and affordable housing solution is a community-designed initiative to support refugees as well as other community members, and it is slated to provide 90 affordable housing units. Specific units will be reserved for refugees; however, the housing units welcome anyone to apply if they meet income eligibility requirements.

“

WE HAVE BEEN DREAMING ABOUT THIS KIND OF AN OPPORTUNITY.

We are excited that Blossom Gardens will not only be meeting the needs of the refugee community, but it also will be increasing the number of affordable units in the Salem area.”

LUKE GLAZE, DIRECTOR OF SALEM FOR REFUGEES

The housing development units were initially designed to be market-rate housing, but the property was acquired by a partnership developed between [Salem For Refugees](#), [Home First Development](#), and [Green Light Development](#). Throughout the process, the property underwent extensive renovation and added amenities tailored to the needs of the refugee community. This initiative is an example of how adding affordable housing units to available housing stock not only impacts newcomers but can also create affordable housing options for the entire community.

Conclusion

Continued collaboration both globally and throughout U.S. local communities is critical for housing success, as it presents an opportunity to adapt promising practices and create innovative housing solutions to address the ongoing housing affordability challenges effectively and efficiently without “re-inventing the wheel.” Housing challenges are not unique to the U.S. and present an opportunity for community transformation and greater sustainability because investment in housing stability creates stronger communities.

Research suggests investing in affordable housing not only reduces homelessness, promotes economic stability, and improves health and well-being, but also strengthens overall communities. When people have stable housing, they are more likely to engage in their communities, as is conveyed in articles such as those by [RHS](#), [Arabella Capital](#), and others. Habitat for Humanity stated, “Homes that are affordable allow families to put a stake in their community, improving the space for everyone living there. Strong neighborhoods exist where residents have quality housing; are invested and engaged in their communities; have access to transportation, employment and educational opportunities and have a sense of safety.”⁷ Thus, by continued investment in partnerships and collaborations to increase available affordable housing, communities thrive.

The opportunity for positive change is powerful and attainable through adapting, creating, and implementing real-time solutions to make stronger and flourishing U.S. communities for all.

⁷ Ibid.

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Refugee Housing
SOLUTIONS

www.refugeehousing.org

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