

Research project

Specific rented housing support for unprivileged groups

supported by the Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning

Summary

Through the Housing Support Act (WoFG), those households “which cannot obtain reasonable living space in the market and are reliant on support” (article 1) are made the sole target group of the social rented housing support. This is a renunciation of support for “broad classes of the people”. However, no new instruments are offered to the local bodies by the WoFG.

In practice, it concerns persons who could represent an economic risk for landlords or who are, as tenants or neighbours, not desired because they do not necessarily relate to the community. The handicap for many does not (only) exist in their individual deviation but in prejudices of landlords and co-inhabitants, and in a social environment which allows such deviation to become conspicuous.

Subject matter of the survey

The survey investigates how the specific support of unprivileged households can be structured. The topics are:

- which groups are they and why does the market not accept them,
- which demands do they make and which help do they need,
- which instruments are necessary and whose job is it to solve the difficulties of these groups.

The basis is formed by the findings of institutions and local bodies which carry out measures and initiate projects for the unprivileged target groups.

Results

In many cities, there are projects for the care of particularly difficult groups. They are mostly carried out in co-operation with the social departments as, here, there are already legal bases and financing possibilities for aid.

It is the aim of most project executing organisations to integrate unprivileged persons and the homeless into normal circumstances. It is generally taken for granted that the “normal” flat with the “normal” tenancy agreement promotes integration and any solutions “below” that are to be rejected for social considerations.

Others are making efforts on the other hand to help target groups which are so far removed from normality that they would be out of their depth in attempting to care for themselves and at the same time manage a flat, household, the contractual obligations or deal with neighbours. The institutions prefer a "practice" situation here to introduce, first of all, the personal stabilisation process.

"Below this", there are groups for which it is not a matter of the integration into society but of humane accommodation with a minimum of a private sphere and protection against the weather and assault (e.g. older, long-term homeless people).

Depending on the previous life careers and perspectives of the people concerned and the individual background, help can be necessary in day-to-day life, mediation in dealing with neighbours or also professional therapeutic support or care. A close dovetailing of housing management and social work is counted on here (social housing administration) because a large part of the need for help is not provided by classical social work.

The projects examined are very successful. Even with the most difficult of clientele, the integration has been successful:

- A large part of those concerned only needs help in finding a flat and increased attention at the beginning. The "landlord risk" is relatively low.
- A part of those concerned is more difficult and needs, for the implementation of its own integration, more and/or long-term, qualified assistance.

The institutions show, however, in general, that "appropriate care" in the sense of the WoFG is determined by "what the welfare offices allow", on the one hand, with respect to the groups which they can help (for many there is not legal requirement for help) and, on the other, with respect to all aspects which are connected with living room (rents which can be taken over often only allow a "negative selection" with respect to standards, situation/environment, stock or new construction).

The projects for young people and young adults are a special case: they can often only be integrated with difficulty, are not willing to pay rent and are resistant against care.

For people who cannot be integrated into society or to not wish to be, special projects or offers are required:

- legalisation of the self-selected solutions for the "right" dropouts
- projects for households with particular expectations of a flat (e.g. family clans) and for people without any perspective in the society (they do not have to be forced into a senseless education process).

Approaches for the care of unprivileged groups

Up to now, structural problems have usually provoked selective aid - from voluntary providers with a self-defined target group. What would be necessary would be a comprehensive network of offers.

The prerequisite for this is "honest" census of those groups which have difficulties under the given housing market conditions of a city.

A main point of emphasis has to lie in the prevention of the loss of a flat.

(The loss of the flat is often the commencement of a spiralling effect: people distance themselves from social values and lose the ability for day-to-day life. With increasing duration, the effort needed to lead them back to normality also increases).

Care for these groups should not be left over alone to the social department because it is often restricted unnecessarily due to its dependence on public funds. The housing management should be integrated more intensively into the tasks of care. Reserves against these groups can be confronted with bonds ("guarantees") and aid in the case of complications. Apart from this, it should be taken into consideration that with traditional landlords, any focus on the target group has to be rewarded (price for occupation rights) or that young institutions need an initial financial basis (equity).

The tasks of support still lie in substantiating occupancy rights. The known instruments have to be combined with expense-orientated remuneration for "social housing administration".

The topic "reduction of costs" arises in the care of unprivileged groups in a particular manner: savings result primarily from

- groups being taken out of superfluous dependence on public benefits,
- support means being used specifically,
- revaluation measures in (residential) stock being waived where they hinder the care of these groups and make expensive alternatives necessary.