

URBAN
HOUSING



Tracing the path of social housing policy in Ukraine



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ABOUT THIS PAPER

Thematic paper series

This paper is one of nine drafted in 2025 by national entities in Ukraine as part of a UN-Habitat-commissioned collection entitled *Thematic Paper Series Informing Urban Recovery Approaches in Ukraine*, comprising:



Urban Governance

- Citizenship: Urban futures in Ukraine
- Municipal Governance Issues in Ukraine
- Decentralization and Recovery: Local Recovery Planning in Ukraine



Urban Land

- Land and Property Issues in Housing and Urban Development in Ukraine



Urban Planning

- Spatial Planning in Ukraine



Urban Housing

- Housing Provision and Outcomes in Ukraine
- Tracing the Path of Social Housing Policy in Ukraine



Urban Skills

- Built Environment Professionals: Education and Practice in Ukraine
- Built Environment Professionals: University Education in Ukraine

Executive summary

Ukraine's housing sector has undergone profound structural pressures over the past century, culminating in a severe crisis following the full-scale Russian invasion in February 2022. Pre-existing weaknesses, rooted in Soviet-era housing provision and post-independence privatisation since 1991, have been sharply exacerbated by war-related destruction, mass displacement, and rising housing unaffordability.

As of late 2025, approximately 3 million dwellings (14 per cent of total stock) have been damaged or destroyed, with reconstruction needs estimated at USD 61.1 billion, the highest of any single sector as assessed by the most recent Reconstruction and Damage Needs Assessment (World Bank Group et al, 2026). Simultaneously, around 4.7 million people are internally displaced and a further 6 million are refugees abroad (World Bank Group et al, 2026). Ukraine now faces a compound and critical housing crisis. The urgent need for sustainable, inclusive, and publicly supported housing solutions has reignited policy debates about the role of social housing in post-war recovery and national development.

This document examines the evolution of Ukraine's housing system, focusing on the historical roots, institutional structures, and contemporary developments in social housing. It examines the legacy of Soviet housing provision, the effects of housing privatisation in the 1990s, the fragmented attempts to create public housing to address the needs of vulnerable social groups in the mid-2000s, and current developments – both legislative and practical – in the field of social and affordable housing. It adopts a broad definition of social housing as below-market rental housing allocated according to eligibility criteria, recognising that in Ukraine the term encompasses a range of legacy and emerging forms.

Historical legacy: state provision and structural imbalances

Historically, Ukraine inherited a housing system shaped by decades of state-controlled housing supply and access under the Soviet Union up to independence in 1991. During this period, most urban housing was publicly owned and allocated through state institutions and workplaces, with rents heavily subsidized; this was sometimes described as 'quasi-homeownership'. This offered long-term tenure security, though

quality and availability varied significantly by region and social status. Allocation was governed by administrative mechanisms centred on the *kvartyrna cherha* (housing waiting list), linking access to need, employment status and social hierarchy. Despite the official goal of universal provision under the socialist housing allocation scheme and large-scale construction – especially during the Khrushchev and Brezhnev periods – chronic shortages, long waiting lists, and administrative allocation meant that provision consistently lagged behind demand and access to housing was often uneven and delayed, with widespread repair and renovation shortfalls in the ever-ageing stock particularly affecting low income households. By the late Soviet period, key structural issues had emerged:

- Persistent housing shortages and overcrowding
- Poor construction quality and energy inefficiency
- Limited diversity in housing types, particularly a near absence of single-family homes
- Weak infrastructure and poor urban environments
- Misalignment between household needs and available housing

These issues were compounded by planning approaches prioritising industrial development over residential quality and diversity.

Post-1991 transformation: privatisation and system fragmentation

The post-1991 transition to a market-based economy saw a sharp restructuring of the housing system, with a near-complete mass privatisation of the state housing stock involving tenants acquiring their properties at little or no cost,¹ shrinking the publicly owned housing stock. Homeownership rates rose to over 90 per cent, creating a system of what may be termed debt-free 'super-homeownership'. While privatisation alleviated the large fiscal pressures of housing provision on authorities and improved household asset positions, it fundamentally reshaped the housing system. With the demise of the Soviet system of large-scale public housing construction, new housing was largely left to the private sector, and no rental alternatives emerged at scale for those unable to access private homeownership. This transition created several long-term challenges:

1 This was enabled by the Law 'On the Privatization of the State Housing Stock' (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 1992) which allowed sitting tenants to convert their apartments into private property, generally free of charge.

- Collapse of public housing provision, with minimal replacement supply
- Emergence of a 'privatisation trap', where legacy allocation systems (i.e the housing waiting lists) persisted without sufficient public housing stock to service the list
- Under-maintenance of housing due to fragmented ownership, continued reliance on subsidised utilities, and limited coverage of residential neighbourhoods by homeowner associations
- Strong policy bias toward homeownership, limiting development of rental and social housing sectors

The social housing sector

In Ukraine, the Constitution (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 1996)² establishes the right to housing, and sets an obligation for the state and – reflecting Ukraine's decentralization reforms - local self-government bodies (LSGBs) to create conditions enabling citizens to obtain housing, including by providing housing for free or at an affordable cost to citizens in need of social protection (UNECE, 2013 p14).

Under Ukrainian legislation, social housing³ refers to dwellings within the state or municipal housing stock of social purpose that are allocated to households requiring social protection⁴ and unable to secure housing independently. Such housing is typically provided for use under social rental arrangements and is not subject to privatization. Social housing may be understood as a subset of affordable housing⁵ that prioritizes households experiencing acute need (Lawson et al, 2023, p5).

A key characteristic of this system in Ukraine is that the stock of social housing is extremely small, mainly due to the post-1991 privatization of the publicly owned housing stock which comprised the majority of urban housing in the Soviet era up to 1991. By 2013, for

instance, 94.7 per cent of households lived in privately owned dwellings (homes acquired either through free privatization or purchase on the free market); 0.2 per cent in departmental⁶ housing; 3.4 per cent in private rental housing;⁷ and only 1.7 per cent in public housing (UNECE, 2013 pp19-20). While the formal system of social housing has long existed in law, it has played a very limited role in housing provision.

In the early 2000s, Ukraine introduced limited legal and policy frameworks to establish public housing, including housing for social and temporary purposes. These measures, however, lacked sustainable financing, clear governance frameworks, and institutional capacity at the municipal level. Moreover, housing and urban planning policies evolved in parallel but rarely intersected, preventing the integration of housing goals into broader spatial strategies. As a result, public housing provision remained negligible, with only a few thousand units available nationwide by 2021.

Governance challenges: weak integration with urban planning

A key structural issue in Ukraine's housing system is the disconnect between housing policy and urban planning. National housing programmes are often fragmented, inconsistent, and weakly aligned with spatial planning frameworks. Urban planning regulations address housing primarily at a technical level (e.g. as relates to zoning, density), without integrating broader housing policy objectives such as affordability or social inclusion.

While some municipalities have developed Integrated Urban Development Strategies (IUDS) incorporating housing priorities, these remain advisory rather than binding; unevenly implemented, and under-resourced. Annex 1 provides illustrative case examples of IUDS.

² Article 47 (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 1996)

³ In Ukraine, the closest official legal definition of social housing comes from the Law of Ukraine 'On the Housing Stock of Social Purpose' (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2006). This law established the concept of a social housing fund (*zhytlovyi fond sotsialnoho pryznachennia*).

⁴ Such groups may include low-income households, people with disabilities, orphans, internally displaced persons, veterans and military families.

⁵ Affordable housing is an essential quality of adequate housing and is gauged relationally between household income and housing costs (Lawson et al, 2023 p5).

⁶ Departmental housing refers to residential units owned by state institutions or enterprises and allocated to their employees as part of employment-related benefits. Departmental housing is not the same as social housing, but it overlaps with it because it provides non-market housing access; and is part of the broader public housing stock.

⁷ The rental sector is likely higher as renting is often conducted informally outside the official tax system, according to UNECE (2013).

Overall, weak coordination between national and local levels limits the effectiveness of housing delivery and the potential for planning to support social housing provision.

War impacts: deepening crisis and changing housing dynamics

The full-scale invasion in 2022 has both intensified existing problems and introduced new dynamics:

- Mass displacement has increased demand for rental and temporary housing
- Housing affordability has worsened, with many households spending 30 to 50 per cent of income on housing
- Rental sector pressures have grown, particularly for internally displaced persons (IDPs), who face insecurity and limited legal protections
- New vulnerabilities have emerged among older people, persons with disabilities, and those in frontline regions

The war has also triggered shifts in tenure patterns, with a gradual increase in renting, though the long-term implications remain uncertain.

Policy response: Renewed focus on social housing

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia from 2022 has dramatically shifted both the scale of housing needs and the political urgency to respond, prompting a significant shift in policy discourse. Social housing, an issue largely absent in post-independence Ukraine, is now recognised as a critical component of recovery and long-term development. The ongoing destruction of the housing stock in general, combined with a growing private rental sector, has reduced housing affordability and tenure security. New tenure patterns are emerging as housing needs increase and diversify.

In response, social housing has emerged in national recovery documents and legislative reforms. Simultaneously, municipalities have begun experimenting with short and medium term housing solutions, often in partnership with international donors and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). These local projects range from the conversion of unused buildings into rental units to the construction of new housing stock for displaced families. While most of these projects remain pilot-scale and face capacity and funding constraints, they represent important entry

points toward institutionalising housing options outside the mainstream market.

Recent developments include:

- Adoption of the Law '*On the Fundamental Principles of Housing Policy*' (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2026), replacing the Soviet-era Housing Code of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (1983).
- Initiation of a *National Housing Strategy*, aimed at creating a comprehensive policy framework
- Legislative measures to support IDPs, including identification of vacant properties for housing conversion
- Recognition in the *Ukraine Plan 2024–2027* (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2024) and international assessments - particularly the fifth *Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment* (RDNA) (World Bank Group et al, 2026) - of the need for sustainable financing of social and affordable housing

These reforms aim to establish new institutional actors (e.g. housing operators), expanded rental and social housing provision; improved housing data systems; and greater alignment with European housing models to support Ukraine's strategic policy goal of European Union accession. However, key elements - particularly governance structures, financing mechanisms, and implementation capacity - remain under development in challenging circumstances of conflict.

Emerging role of municipalities and non-market provision

At the local level, municipalities have become increasingly important actors in responding to housing needs. Since 2022, a range of non-market housing initiatives has emerged, including:

- Temporary accommodation and collective centres
- Rehabilitation and conversion of existing buildings
- Small-scale construction projects supported by international partners

While these initiatives are often fragmented and short-term, they provide valuable insights into implementation challenges and potential models for scaling up social housing.

Conclusion

Ukraine's housing crisis reflects both long-term structural weaknesses and acute war-related impacts. The legacy of Soviet-era planning and post-1991 privatisation has resulted in a system characterised by high homeownership, limited rental options, and an almost non-existent social housing sector. The war has exposed and intensified these vulnerabilities, while also creating momentum for reform.

The current policy shift - centred on new legislation, strategic planning, and renewed attention to social housing - represents a critical opportunity. However, success will depend on developing a coherent governance and financing framework, strengthening institutional capacity, and integrating housing policy with urban planning. Ultimately, housing policy must move beyond emergency response to become a central pillar of Ukraine's social, economic, and spatial development, ensuring access to adequate, affordable, and sustainable housing for all population groups.



A Soviet-era brick apartment building in Kyiv © UN-Habitat Ukraine, 2025

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BMZ – German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development

EEAS – European External Action Service

EIB – European Investment Bank

EUR – Euro

IDP – Internally Displaced Person

IOM – International Organization for Migration

IUDS – Integrated Urban Development Strategy

KfW – *Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau* (German Development Bank)

LSGBs – Local self-government bodies

NGO – Non-governmental Organization

OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

RDNA – Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment

SSR – Soviet Socialist Republic

UN – United Nations

UNECE – United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

USAID – United States Agency for International Development

USD – United States Dollar

USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

ZHEKs – *житлово-експлуатаційна контора* (Municipal housing offices)

General introduction to the thematic paper series

Four years since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine of February 2022 – and close to 12 years since the illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and City of Sevastopol in 2014 – war continues to inflict untold suffering on the Ukrainian people.⁸ Hostilities since 2022 have caused widespread damage and destruction to Ukraine's built environment – from housing, utilities, and transport networks, to social infrastructure and cultural assets. In this compound crisis of urban systems, many cities have shifted focus from long-term development to continuous emergency repair and risk management. Most recent estimates put the cost of reconstruction and recovery at 587.7 billion USD – a figure that has grown year on year since 2022.⁹ The sector incurring highest damage in dollar terms is housing: 14 per cent of the national housing stock, affecting some 3 million households, has been damaged or destroyed, requiring 61.1 billion USD for reconstruction and recovery needs.¹⁰ As at January 2026, around 3.7 million people have been displaced within Ukraine since 2022, with a further 5.8 million now refugees outside the country. This comes in the context of an earlier wave of conflict-related disruption and displacement from 2014.¹¹

In a country that is 70 per cent urban by population,¹² Ukraine's cities are central to both crisis and recovery. Total recovery and reconstruction needs are spatially concentrated in frontline areas and major urban oblasts.¹³ Urban centres are 'facing both supply constraints and high demand from displaced populations'.¹⁴ There is an urgent and pressing imperative to respond to impacts on the built environment and critical infrastructure amidst

large-scale humanitarian need. Even as hostilities continue and despite funding constraints, the Ukrainian Government has a strong ambition to 'build back better' – including a desire to revitalize existing towns and neighbourhoods through area-based approaches that support local-level investment and contribute to recovery,¹⁵ as flagged by the most recent *Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment 5*.¹⁶ The Assessment also highlighted that effective recovery planning requires reforms that enhance the institutional and technical capacity of the country's public sector to prepare, implement and monitor investment projects.¹⁷ Strengthened data collection and research is identified as one of the main priorities for a durable recovery.¹⁸

Addressing the challenges now facing Ukraine demands a long-term analytical perspective stretching back even earlier than 2014 – to factor in Soviet and post-Soviet structural legacies that continue to fundamentally shape the conditions, constraints, and opportunities facing contemporary urban recovery planning. In particular, Ukraine's post-1991 transition produced privatized housing systems with fragmented ownership and maintenance backlogs, aging and underinvested infrastructure, deindustrialized urban economies and shrinking city dynamics, evolving decentralization reforms, and an increasingly mobilized civil society with expectations for democratic governance.

In this historical context, national, sub-national and sectoral recovery strategies need to be developed and implemented in ways that also embed measures to build capacity within the built environment professions.

8 In terms of mortalities, hostilities since 2022 have also left over 15,000 civilians dead, and injured over 41,000 others. (OHCHR, 2026).

9 World Bank Group; Government of Ukraine; European Commission; United Nations (2026)

10 The most recent *Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment 5* indicates that 74% of total damage since 2022 occurred in 4 sectors: housing (requiring 61.1 billion USD for reconstruction and recovery needs over the 10-year period 2026–2035; transport (40.3 billion USD); energy (24.8 billion USD); commerce and industry (19.2 billion USD). (Government of Ukraine, World Bank Group, European Commission & United Nations, 2026 p24). As the report notes, 'The total needs include expenses related to rebuilding with improved standards (...) and account for inflationary pressures' (World Bank Group; Government of Ukraine; European Commission; United Nations, 2026 p30).

11 Ukraine already had the highest number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Europe as at July 2021, with over 1.4 million people fleeing (Mikheieva & Kuznetsova, 2023 [for IOM]).

12 World Bank Group (n.d.) (2023 figures)

13 World Bank Group, Government of Ukraine, European Commission, United Nations (2026 p27)

14 World Bank Group, Government of Ukraine, European Commission, United Nations (2026 p24)

15 World Bank Group, Government of Ukraine, European Commission, United Nations (2026 p54)

16 World Bank Group, Government of Ukraine, European Commission, United Nations (2026)

17 World Bank Group, Government of Ukraine, European Commission, United Nations (2026, p11)

18 World Bank Group, Government of Ukraine, European Commission, United Nations (2026, p42)

The war has affected the availability of Ukrainian expertise within urban development, which was already scarce pre-war. This presents a real risk to the Government's widely supported aim to build back better. While several organizations have emerged to support capacity development in Ukraine on urban and territorial development and management, access to contextually relevant knowledge and best practices on these issues is still limited.

In response to urban recovery needs, UN-Habitat collaborates with the Ministry for Development of Communities and Territories of Ukraine, providing strategy and policy advice. In line with its mandate to promote socially and environmentally sustainable and resilient towns and cities, UN-Habitat supported a variety of not-for-profit and public Ukrainian entities to produce thematic documents on nine inter-related aspects of Ukraine's built environment. Each document considers the historical context and key issues of each topic in relation to urban recovery, presenting authors' valuable understandings of the respective topic.

Under the theme **Urban Governance**, the document *'Citizenship: Urban futures in Ukraine'* examines how civic participation and citizenship may interplay with inclusive and democratic urban recovery processes. The document *'Municipal Governance Issues in Ukraine'* identifies institutional and administrative features as well as opportunities and constraints affecting municipalities' capacity to engage with recovery. The document *'Decentralization and Recovery: Local Recovery Planning in Ukraine'* assesses how historic decentralization reform has shaped the role of local self-government bodies in planning and implementing recovery. Under the theme of **Urban Land**, the document *'Land and Property Issues in Housing and Urban Development in Ukraine'* covers the evolution of land ownership and property rights issues including in terms of their criticality to reconstruction and housing redevelopment. Under the theme of **Urban Planning**, the document *'Spatial Planning in Ukraine'* sets out the planning environment and associated frameworks guiding coordinated spatial reconstruction across national, regional, and local levels. Under the theme of **Urban Housing**, the document *'Housing Provision and Outcomes in Ukraine'* examines mechanisms through

which housing is financed, delivered, and regulated, and is complemented by the document *'Tracing the Path of Social Housing in Ukraine'* which explores the evolution of social housing and implications for expanding affordable housing provision. Under the final theme, **Urban Skills**, the document *'Built Environment Professionals: Education and Practice in Ukraine'* assesses the professional capacity available to plan, design, and implement urban reconstruction, while the document *'Built Environment Professionals: University Education in Ukraine'* evaluates higher education systems preparing future built environment professionals for reconstruction and urban development.

While many documents on recovery and reconstruction in Ukraine start from accounts of damage from 2014 and 2022, this series takes a longer perspective, actively exploring the selected themes across the Soviet and post-Soviet transition and reform periods.

Collectively, the series conveys the voices of academics, practitioners and civil society activists from diverse disciplines and backgrounds, representing local expert knowledge and experience rooted in the Ukrainian context. They offer a multi-dimensional diagnostic foundation and common language to inform evolving and multi-level discussions on the country's urban challenges and opportunities, as well as options for the future and how Ukraine might achieve them. In particular, the series aims to contribute to the continuing processes of decentralization and democratization. If decisions about towns and cities are to be driven locally and with context sensitivity, a wider literacy and shared understanding regarding the built environment, including its planning and management, is needed. The thematic documents respond to this need, increasing the availability and accessibility of knowledge on urban topics, and providing extensive references for further reading. UN-Habitat hopes the series will serve as a knowledge resource for policymakers, local officials, practitioners, development partners, researchers engaged in Ukraine's urban recovery, as well as general readers; and will contribute to recovery discourse, processes and outcomes that are context-appropriate, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable.

Introduction

The start of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine has exacerbated the country's long-standing vulnerabilities in the housing sector – including those related to the pre-war backlog of unmet housing need (Lawson et al, 2023 p2) - and also brought new challenges. Since February 2022, approximately 3 million dwellings have been either damaged or destroyed, amounting to 14 per cent of the total housing stock.¹⁹

Reconstruction and recovery needs in the housing sector are calculated at USD 61.1 billion – the highest for any one sector as defined by the most recent Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment (World Bank Group et al, 2026 p24).²⁰ With an estimated 4.7 million people internally displaced and a further 6 million estimated to be refugees outside the country²¹ as at December 2025, all with various aspirations including integration, relocation and return (Lawson et al, 2023 p2), the need to develop alternatives to commercial purchase or rent is acute.

This document notes the well-recognised need to invest in social housing in Ukraine (see, for instance, World Bank Group et al, 2025; Lawson et al, 2023) and presents a succinct overview of the historical roots and current developments in the social housing sector. The aim is to provide an understanding of the peculiarities, challenges and opportunities associated with the social housing sector in Ukraine.²²

There is no consensus on the definition of 'social housing', with the term encompassing different programmes and policies in different countries. For instance, the term might be used interchangeably with 'public housing' if it is intended to emphasise the public ownership of dwellings (Garg and Singh 2022 p3).

Nevertheless, some common elements across various definitions of social housing include

- Direct or indirect public support
- Operation by mission-oriented public or private landlords
- Below-market rents that might be set on a cost-based approach
- Defined eligibility criteria.

In this document, the definition adopted follows that of the OECD: *residential rental housing for below-market prices allocated following specific eligibility criteria and waiting lists* (OECD, 2020 p4). In some cases, the term 'affordable housing' is used in the current document in relation to publicly subsidized programmes for housing purchase or rent.

In the Ukrainian context, the term 'social housing' may refer to different types of accommodation with context-specific nuances to bear in mind. During the Soviet period up to 1991, most urban housing on the territory of contemporary Ukraine was state-owned and allocated through workplaces or municipalities as long-term rental housing. This may be formally considered social housing insofar as it was constructed by the state and allocated following specific eligibility criteria and/or a general waiting list. Following the post-independence mass privatisation involving the transfer of most of this stock to sitting tenants, and amidst attempts to establish public housing in the mid-2000s, the terms 'housing for social purposes' and 'housing for temporary purposes' appeared in Ukrainian legislation. These types of dwellings may also be classified as social housing as they were built with the intention of being publicly owned and allocated based on eligibility criteria, were occupied as state housing, and were

19 World Bank Group; Government of Ukraine; European Commission; United Nations (2026 p24)

20 The most recent *Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment 5* indicates that 74% of total damage since 2022 occurred in 4 sectors: housing (requiring 61.1 billion USD for reconstruction and recovery needs over the 10-year period 2026–2035; transport (40.3 billion USD); energy (24.8 billion USD); commerce and industry (19.2 billion USD). (Government of Ukraine, World Bank Group, European Commission & United Nations, 2026 p24). As the report notes, 'The total needs include expenses related to rebuilding with improved standards (...) and account for inflationary pressures' (World Bank Group; Government of Ukraine; European Commission; United Nations, 2026 p30).

21 A further 6 million are estimated to be refugees outside the country (World Bank Group et al, 2026 p40).

22 The paper relies primarily on secondary data and research in the field of housing in Ukraine. Some of the findings and arguments first appeared in previous research conducted by Cedoss, including Fedoriv and Lomonosova (2019), Bobrova et al. (2022), Fedorova (2023), Verbytskyi et al. (2024) and others. This paper could not have been possible without the earlier work of Ukrainian housing and urban planning researchers such as Vlasenko (2016) and Liasheva (2019), as well as the ongoing research within the field including recent publications such as Sukhomud and Shnaider (2023), Anisimov et al. (2023).'

transferred as private property at low or no cost. From 2022, acute exacerbation of the pre-existing pressure on the housing sector stemming from the full-scale invasion prompted the appearance of new modalities of housing provision beyond commercial purchase and rent.²³

Even though there is currently no viable social housing sector in Ukraine, some of the ongoing efforts to mitigate the housing crisis may collectively be viewed as falling under the umbrella of social housing in its broadest sense.

This document focuses on housing policy and urban planning as integral themes. It aims to situate current developments in the housing sector within its historical context. While questions of design, infrastructure, construction, and professional education and resilience in the field of housing are important, their detailed

discussion falls outside the scope of the current document.

The document covers the following areas:

- Housing delivery before 1991 and its interface with urban planning;
- Mass free privatisation and its consequences for the housing sector - particularly the social housing sub-sector;
- Attempts to introduce social housing in the mid-2000s in Ukraine;
- The relationship between housing and urban planning policies in Ukraine;
- War-related changes in the housing sector in Ukraine;
- The ongoing municipally-led efforts to mitigate the housing crisis.



Soviet-era residential towers along a street in Kyiv © UN-Habitat Ukraine, 2025

²³ Because of the crisis, new and expanded ranges of housing formats - beyond typical buying or renting modalities - variously emerged, such as government-provided temporary housing; emergency shelters and modular homes; hosting programmes (families taking in displaced people); NGO or humanitarian housing initiatives; collective or shared living arrangements.

Methodology

The analysis is based on a desk review of academic, legislative and grey literature undertaken in March and April 2025. The secondary data reviewed includes previous research by Cedos, as well as earlier and ongoing research by others.

Case examples are included in the current document, illustrating selected aspects of urban recovery practice in the post-2022 non-market housing sector. The examples are intended to provide contextual insights

into emerging approaches and implementation experiences, rather than assessed/evaluated models of best practice.

As for other documents in the current series, a workshop was run to present the document in outline, review preliminary results and gain feedback. The workshop was held in Kyiv on 25 April 2025 with participation by multi sectoral Ukrainian stakeholders'.²⁴



Soviet-era residential district with panel apartment buildings, Kharkiv © Sandsun / Shutterstock

24 A social media post by Cedos on the workshop, entitled 'UN-Habitat Forum 'Navigating the urban field in Ukraine: Where are we now?', can be found here: www.facebook.com/Cedos.org.ua/posts/pfbid02LyRSrDw7FmjczCE6QNsaaGQDgT1AaVBvxUfRiWgdd-EEVhSYJX8Lpawu2A13XQvVtl

Housing planning and delivery prior to 1991

In the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) before its dissolution in 1991, the key feature of the housing model was public control over the housing sector, land and planning. Generally, public housing was available for rent, and prices were kept at extremely low levels. Housing, then, was largely decommodified. Overall, public housing tenants enjoyed high levels of security, and tenancy could be inherited or transferred. This security created what has been termed 'quasi-homeownership' (Hegedus et al., 1997, in Stephens et al, 2015 p1216).

In Ukraine, similarly to other former Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs), centralised housing provision and nominally universal access to public housing with highly affordable rent and utility payments were presented by the Soviet authorities as evidence of the supremacy of socialism over capitalism (Renaud, 1996 p10). Under the Soviets, housing provision quickly came to be considered very important to industrialisation and economic productivity as components of 'five-year plans'²⁵ (Andrusz, 1984). Understanding the position of social housing within Ukraine's contemporary planning and governance frameworks requires appreciation of the history of housing delivery during the Soviet era. Aspects of housing planning and its spatialisation were established long before Ukraine's independence in 1991, and these elements continue to some extent to define and influence its housing system today.

EVOLUTION OF PLANNING AND HOUSING DELIVERY

The vast majority of public housing stock provided during the Soviet era could be classified as social housing: it served those in need of adequate shelter, and was universally affordable. The evolution of housing provision and its planning in Soviet Ukraine²⁶ can be split into four significant periods:²⁷

- In the first ten years (1918–1928), individuals and

cooperatives were responsible for most housing delivery, mobilising private savings and state loans to cover the costs. While the population of the Ukrainian SSR reached approximately 29 million in this period (Tesliuk, 2023) - recovering from the losses of World War I and the Ukrainian-Soviet War (Struk, 1993) in the early years of that decade - housing completions were still modest, and urban living space across the USSR was severely limited at around 5.7 square metres per person (Renaud, 1996). At the same time, nationalised housing stock was placed under municipal control. It was redistributed to groups favoured by the Soviet state, including state officials, academics, and senior and skilled workers. This marked a significant departure from pre-revolutionary²⁸ practices, shifting housing from private ownership towards state-directed allocation. Housing became an instrument of social policy, reinforcing the hierarchy of Soviet society and leaving citizens reliant on state distribution systems.

- Under Stalin's industrialisation era (1929–1953), featuring the transformation of the economy through consecutive Five Year Plans, housing delivery and allocation became fully state-controlled, integrated with land use, urban planning, and the planned economy. By this time the Ukrainian SSR population was around 30 million (Tesliuk, 2023), while the country underwent rapid urbanisation. Cities actively attracted workers to fill factory jobs, but the central state prioritised investment in heavy industry at the expense of investment in housing and infrastructure, meaning that provision in these areas lagged far behind need. By 1953 average urban floor space remained critically low at 4.5 to 6 square metres per person (Renaud, 1996). As in the previous period, housing allocation favoured the military, skilled professionals, and communist party functionaries, while industry workers were a lower priority. The hierarchy also extended

²⁵ 'Five-year plans' were a series of centralized economic programmes implemented by the Soviet Union beginning in 1928. These plans sought to transform a largely agrarian society into a major industrial power through rapid industrialization and collectivization of agriculture.

²⁶ Until 1939, significant parts of Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, Volyn, Rivne, and Ternopil oblasts of Ukraine were part of the Polish Republic. Although comprehensive social housing programmes were limited, targeted housing initiatives for specific professional groups and municipal workers were implemented in urban areas like Lviv during the interwar period (see Kovalska, 2019a, 2019b, 2020 for more detail).

²⁷ For an extended summary, see Liasheva (2019).

²⁸ The pre-revolutionary period refers to the phase before the 1917 Russian Revolution, when the Russian monarch collapsed, setting in motion a sequence of events leading to the official creation of the USSR in 1922.

to urban planning policy for housing: projects in capitals were prioritised over those in the provinces; those in city centres over peripheries; and those in façades over inner courtyards.

- Under Stalin's successor, Khrushchev (1953-1964), housing policies focused on significant investments in construction industries, research, and the training of architects and engineers. With the population of the Ukrainian SSR rising to 45–46 million by 1964 (Tesliuk, 2023), mass housing construction reached a new scale. Yet floor space per person improved only gradually to about 7 square metres per person by the early 1960s (Renaud, 1996). However, the priority was to build as much housing as possible at minimal cost, leading to substandard quality of homes. Housing was provided at low rent by the state or state-run industry or cooperative ownership. Housing became significantly more accessible but still served as a social reward, with better jobs and higher status ensuring quicker access to acquiring a home, while others faced long waiting times under 'housing waiting lists' (*kvartyrna cherha*).
- The Brezhnev and Gorbachev years (1965-1991) sustained mass housing construction while introducing more spacious flats with generally improved amenities. To show the significance of the housing programme pace: by 1989, the population of the Ukrainian SSR had grown to 51.7 million (Tesliuk, 2023), while space per capita more than doubled compared to the previous period, reaching 17 square metres. Although this expanded living space, it also prolonged housing waiting lists as fewer units could be built for the same resources. Despite state-controlled urban planning, cities were sprawling without sufficient infrastructure. During this period - and particularly from the 1970s - housing allocation, which had been politically motivated and coercive under Stalin, became more accountable. This shift created a sense of quasi-ownership, despite residents having no formal ownership rights and instead holding only permanent occupancy rights regulated by the state (Vlasenko, 2016).

Below, the main features of housing policies and their reflections on urban planning policies starting from the

late 1950s are outlined, as these remain as influences on the status quo in housing and planning policies in contemporary Ukraine.

PLANNING FOR INDUSTRIAL GROWTH

In the 1950s and early 1960s, Khrushchev's policies aimed to provide a minimum of 9 square metres per person, later increased to 12 square metres (Varga-Harris, 2015). These targets were embedded in the Five Year Plans, which dictated housing production quotas for Soviet republics and their cities. Geographically, housing was planned in alignment with industrial and economic priorities. The Soviet state focused on expanding urban housing in industrial hubs, particularly in regions with large manufacturing plants, energy infrastructure, or military significance (Gentile, 2019). New housing estates (*mikrorayony*²⁹) were often developed around factories, ensuring workers lived near their workplaces (Morton, 1980).

Housing needs were also formally incorporated into General Plans (*heneral'ni plany*) of cities, which outlined long-term urban development strategies. These plans set housing targets based on projected population growth and economic expansion, defining land allocations for residential districts, transport networks, and social infrastructure (Morton, 1980). However, while housing was a significant component, plans often overestimated industrial growth and underestimated housing demand, leading to persistent shortages and overcrowding (Herman, 1970; Morton, 1980).

DECENTRALIZED DELIVERY; CENTRALIZED CONTROL

In the Ukrainian SSR, the central government formally oversaw national housing policies and planning. However, it had limited influence on its implementation. Social housing was primarily delivered by state-controlled construction enterprises, factories, and large state-owned enterprises. Industrial managers played a key role in housing provision, determining the volume, quality, and speed of construction based on state production priorities (Morton, 1980).

Municipalities had only limited autonomy in the administration of housing policies. Once built, housing was managed and maintained by municipal housing

29 Mikrorayony were Soviet planned residential districts composed of apartment blocks with integrated local services such as schools and shops.

offices known as ZHEKs (from the abbreviation in Ukrainian: ЖЕК - житлово-експлуатаційна контора). While these local agencies handled everyday maintenance, utilities, and repairs, they were chronically underfunded and inefficient (UNECE, 2013). With the state assuming full responsibility for housing provision, the financial burden of maintaining an ageing housing stock grew increasingly unsustainable, in a context of low revenue from state-subsidised rents (*kvartplata*) which covered only a fraction of maintenance costs (Vlasenko, 2016).

Largely codifying pre-existing Soviet practices, the housing allocation process came under the regulation in 1983 of the Housing Code (Verkhovna Rada of the Ukrainian SSR, 1983) which established the legal framework for housing allocation. Prospective tenants were placed on housing waiting lists which were managed by the enterprises they worked for or by ZHEKs. Tenants' position on this list was influenced by occupation, family size, and urgency of need (Morton, 1980). However, those in strategically important industries often received expedited access to housing, reflecting the state's focus on supporting sectors deemed vital to national interests (Herman, 1971).

EVOLVING HOUSING TYPOLOGIES

Housing policies evolved to address acute shortages, leading to various housing types with distinct quality standards. In the early Soviet period, housing took on diverse forms beyond the standardized apartments of later decades. Barracks-style dormitories were rapidly erected around factories to house influxes of industrial workers (Kotkin, 1997). There were even attempts at garden city-inspired low-rise settlements in the 1920s, reflecting contemporary planning ideals, though these experiments were soon overtaken by more centralized communal housing schemes (Didenko et al, 2015). Communal apartments (*komunalky*) emerged after 1918, where multiple families shared amenities, reflecting the state's initial collectivist approach and addressing housing shortages. Additionally, large factories often built their own worker housing – from dormitories to family blocks – creating company towns and residential enclaves integrated into socialist industrial city plans (Didenko et al, 2015). These early Soviet Ukrainian typologies illustrate the mix of utopian vision and pragmatic response that characterized

interwar housing policy, laying foundations for the mass housing to come.

The earlier mass housing developments from the Stalin era were notable for their robust construction and architectural embellishments (commonly called *stalinky*), contrasting with the utilitarian designs of later periods. From the late 1950s and into the 1960s, the state introduced a housing programme, characterised by low-cost, prefabricated designs aimed at rapid urban housing solutions (*khrushchovky*, informally named after Nikita Khrushchev). These structures prioritised quantity over quality, often resulting in cramped living spaces. Subsequently, the Brezhnev era from the mid-1960s saw the rise of typically nine to sixteen storey panel or brick buildings that offered larger apartments and improved amenities. The period can also be characterised by industrialized housing programmes launched under Khrushchev carried forward and refined – for example, the 1970s introduced modular 'block-section' prefabrication methods that produced larger, more varied apartments than the 1960s *khrushchovky* (Malaia, 2020 p8).

ISSUES BY THE END OF THE SOVIET ERA

Overall, despite significant improvements in housing conditions compared to the first half of the 20th century, towards the late 1980s the housing policy generated multiple social, economic and geographical issues for a now larger population. These included:

- **Unresolved housing shortage and poor quality**
Despite decades of state-led housing development, the housing supply never reached Western European levels of 440 housing units per 1,000 people. Supply by the end of the 1980s in the Ukraine SSR was estimated at 250 to 300 units per 1,000 people (Shevchenko, 2022). The unit shortage was compounded by the poor quality of prefabricated panel housing, which was costly and complex to maintain or upgrade, energy inefficient, and often uncomfortable for residents (Renaud, 1996).
- **Housing crisis for young families**
The housing waiting list framework led to severe shortages for young families in the 1980s. Housing allocation often failed to match various

needs of households, and the situation worsened when the completion of new housing declined after 1988³⁰ (Vlasenko, 2016).

- **Lack of single family homes and rural social housing**

Soviet policies discouraged the construction of single family homes, which were considered inefficient in the socialist urban model. As a result, they accounted for only 1.8 per cent of total housing construction. Most were built in rural areas, marginal city zones, or as *dachas*, with poor construction quality and limited access to utilities. State control over land allocation hindered investment in private housing, as urban land was reserved for industrial and collective housing projects (Gentile, 2015; Vlasenko, 2016). While private housing was in principle permitted, it was tightly controlled (Andrusz, 1984 p86), with shortages of building materials, constrained access to credit, and bureaucratic approvals processes having been identified as barriers to meaningful investment (Harris, 2013). Together, these factors reduced system flexibility, alternative housing pathways, and housing stock diversity, with the effect of maintaining housing pressure on cities and on housing waiting lists generally.

- **Poor quality of public space and social infrastructure around housing**

Mass housing estates were built with minimal attention to public space and amenities.

Green areas, playgrounds, and pedestrian zones were often poorly maintained or absent, leading to isolated and monotonous residential environments. Industrial zoning often dictated urban planning, leaving many housing districts surrounded by factories and lacking basic social infrastructure (Tsymbaliuk, 2019)

- **Deteriorating utility infrastructure, including inefficient district heating systems**

The Soviet era left behind extensive centralized utility networks, and particularly district heating systems. While providing at least nominally universal access, these systems were characterized by inefficiency, significant heat losses, and poor maintenance (Semikolenova et al, 2012), hampering the potential for revitalisation. Crucially, the problem was not only physical deterioration but also institutional: following privatization, fragmented ownership undermined the effective maintenance and management of common and centralized services.

- **Neglect of historic housing in city centres**

State policies prioritised new mass housing developments in large cities, while historic housing stock was neglected. Many pre-Socialist buildings deteriorated due to lack of investment, leading to degraded city centres, while resources were directed toward constructing serial housing blocks in peripheral districts (Vlasenko, 2016).

30 Housing completions declined after 1988 due to economic crisis and the breakdown of central planning under *perestroika* reforms, which disrupted resource allocation and weakened enterprise-led construction.

Privatization of public housing in the 1990s

As mentioned above, until 1991 the key feature of the USSR's housing model was public control over the housing sector, land and planning. Housing was central to the socialist economic and welfare model (Stephens et al, 2015 p1215). However, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the period of transition from state socialism towards market capitalism, housing privatisation was a common policy response among former Soviet republics and socialist bloc countries to the changing social, political, and economic environment. Overall, there was a consensus among former socialist national governments that it was necessary to transfer public housing away from the state to private owners and relax rent regulations (Lux and Sunega, 2014 p501).

It is worth noting that social housing and associated maintenance and services imposed a substantial fiscal burden on the state and, post-1991, continued provision became an increasingly difficult prospect for them. Thus, although the rapid and almost comprehensive nature of state housing divestment reflected policy choices, the trajectory was also shaped by severe fiscal pressures.

Public housing privatisation was not a policy exclusive to former socialist countries. Since 1970, many Western European countries had shifted from direct state provision of housing to market provision (Pichler-Milanovich, 2001 p148). An increased reliance on market-based housing delivery and allocation was in some cases accompanied by the privatization of existing public or social housing stock. Privatisation in post-socialist countries coincided, then, with the overall trend of state retrenchment from housing provision in the West. Pichler-Milanovich (2001 p149) describes this gradual withdrawal of government from direct housing provision as a 'policy collapse', conceiving of housing privatisation in transition countries as part of a wider trend of housing policy fragmentation.

Housing privatisation in the former socialist bloc and the USSR countries, however, was a unique policy by virtue of its sheer scale and consequences. Privatisation emerged not only as a way to introduce market reforms but also to address the declining living conditions of the population (Hegedüs et al, 2014). As Lux (2020 p26) argues, privatisation was a 'shock absorber' and a 'hidden economic subsidy' (Lux, 2020 p29).

In Ukraine, following the 1992 privatization law *On Privatization of the State Housing Fund* (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 1992), homeownership increased rapidly rising from around 60 per cent in the mid-1990s to approximately 87 per cent by 2000, and peaking at around 93 to 95 per cent between 2004 and 2010 (Lux and Sunega, 2014; UNECE, 2015). The law allowed sitting tenants to take ownership of their apartment free of charge.³¹ The new owners obtained the immediate right to sell their apartments.³² Housing privatisation was thus a major catalyst for housing commodification. As noted by Sukhomud and Schneider (2023 p644) following Lux and Sunega (2014 p514), 'giveaway' housing privatisation locked housing policy into a 'privatisation trap': once the privatisation process started, stopping it became politically challenging (Lux and Sunega, 2014).

In Ukraine, *kvartyrna cherha* is an example of the 'privatisation trap'.³³ In brief, a 'register of citizens who need to improve their housing conditions', commonly known as an 'apartment queue', is a waiting list for housing which Ukraine inherited from the USSR. During the USSR period, this waiting list was the primary mechanism for housing allocation. The instrument was logical because the state was both the housing owner and developer. Nonetheless, even during the USSR period, housing shortages and imbalances between household housing needs and housing sizes became apparent (Vlasenko, 2016). Post-1991, the housing

31 The 1992 Law states that "Privatization is carried out through: the free transfer of apartments (houses), and residential premises in dormitories to citizens based on the sanitary norm of 21 square meters of total area per tenant and each member of their family, plus an additional 10 square meters per family; the sale of excess total area of apartments (houses) and residential premises in dormitories to Ukrainian citizens who reside in them or are on the waiting list for improved housing conditions." (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 1992). In most countries of the former USSR and socialist bloc, privatisation allowed tenants to take ownership of their apartments for extremely low prices or for free.

32 Article 12 of the Law 'On privatisation of state housing stock' (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 1992) states that "The owner of privatized housing has the right to dispose of the apartment (house), room(s) in a dormitory at their own discretion: to sell, gift, bequeath, rent out, exchange, mortgage, or conclude other transactions not prohibited by law. The procedure for exercising these rights by the owner of the housing is regulated by the civil legislation of Ukraine".

33 This broadly means a public allocation system (the apartment queue) still exists, but the housing it was meant to allocate has largely been privatized and no longer exists in the public sector.

waiting list endured as a contradiction in and of itself. The list persisted after privatisation because the mass transfer of ownership did not address underlying shortages, while reduced construction, affordability constraints, and the continued role of local authorities in allocating residual public housing sustained demand for queue-based allocation.³⁴ Throughout the years of independence the number of people on the housing waiting list decreased from around 2 million to around 600 thousand by 2024 (Kozhemiakin, 2024). However, the reduction mostly pertained to elimination of the waiting lists of industrial enterprises due to their reorganisation (Biliovskiy, 2012 p32); that is, large numbers of applicants simply disappeared from the system not because they were housed, but because the institution holding their claim no longer existed. Further, the declining relevance of the allocation system itself – in a context of little new public housing being built, unreasonably long average wait times, and rare instances of successful allocations – is likely to have meant few new people registering their need.

Even though, on the local level every year some households received apartments via the general waiting list, its potential to address the housing need was limited³⁵. As Fedoriv and Lomonosova (2019) argue, the waiting list-based allocation system did not take into account the real housing need and the overall financial well-being of the household. The allocation was primarily based on the shortage of square metres per person. Legislation (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 1992) allowed, within a few years, the privatisation of public housing that had originally been destined to serve the waiting list. Thus, almost

all newly constructed public housing was bound to be transferred from public to private ownership (Fedoriv and Lomonosova 2019, 30).

It is important to note a key structural tension of Ukraine's housing privatisation: while ownership was privatized, costs were not fully internalised by owners; instead, in practice it remained shared with municipal authorities and subsidized by the state.³⁶ Costs such as building management, maintenance of common areas, fee collection and other services remained partially socialised. Maintenance fees and utilities (heating, water, power) were heavily regulated and subsidised, with collective responsibility for common spaces (such as roofs, pipes, stairwells) weakly and variably enforced.³⁷ This is important because it meant most buildings were not financially self-sustaining. In this essentially hybrid system featuring continued reliance on public support, the housing stock suffered from under-maintenance and deteriorating infrastructure.

Privatisation policy heightened expectations for homeownership.³⁸ Housing policy in independent Ukraine became oriented towards supporting homeownership through various policy instruments, including mortgages as well as low-interest and concessional loans. The government also indirectly supported homeownership through lax regulation of the construction business. Moreover, the restructuring and privatization of industry led to the rise of new local actors who became significant participants in the construction sector and, by extension, in housing policy (see Liasheva, 2019).

34 According to Lawson et al (2023 p9), 'There is a backlog of unmet housing needs from before the invasion, but no official records of need are kept or maintained (UNECE, 2013) (...) According to 2010 data, 1.139 million Ukrainian households were identified as needing housing, of which 779,700 have already been in the housing queue for more than 10 years. (...) Households in the waiting list have the option to either wait for free public housing, where the average waiting period is currently estimated to exceed 100 years, or participate in State-supported programmes using their own means' (UNECE, 2023).

35 For instance, in Kyiv, in 2022 approximately 68,000 people were on the waiting list. In the same year the municipal housing programme was adopted by the Kyiv City Council that aimed to address the need of people on the waiting list and finance the construction of 1,628 apartments. However, as of 2023 the aims of the program were not achieved (Kyiv City Council 2022; 2023).

36 'Municipalities and the state have continued to bear significant responsibility for infrastructure and service provision, particularly where household contributions are insufficient' (Lawson et al., 2023, p9).

37 'The legacy of mass privatisation resulted in high homeownership, but without adequate systems for financing maintenance and renewal of the housing stock' (Lawson et al., 2023 p6).

38 In the Ukrainian SSR, people were used to housing being allocated by the state, often free or heavily subsidised. The norm that waiting long enough may lead to receiving housing may still have prevailed after the Soviet collapse. So even after 1991, many may still have assumed the state would continue to provide housing in some form. While people were aware of the 1992 privatization law, and understood it as a one-off opportunity to gain ownership of their rented housing (rather than necessarily as a full transition to market housing system given the underdeveloped financial mechanisms and generally low incomes for a start), many may still have expected some form of hybrid system offering a degree of continued state provision. However, in the event, while people remained on waiting lists, in reality new state construction collapsed.

Public housing privatisation in the 1990s as well as subsequent policies incentivising homeownership contributed to the high homeownership rate. By November 2021 approximately 95 per cent of Ukraine's population owned their homes; only 4.8 per cent were renting; and a mere 0.1 per cent were residing in public housing (State Statistical Service of Ukraine, 2022). In big cities, the distribution was somewhat different, with the share of tenants reaching at least 8.8 per cent, and

the share of homeowners at 91.1 per cent. In small towns, the share of tenants was a lesser 4.3 per cent; and in rural areas the official figure fell to only 0.5 per cent (State Statistical Service of Ukraine, 2022 p27). However, high reliance on homeownership impeded the development of Ukraine's social and affordable housing programmes. The following section focuses on attempts to introduce social housing in Ukraine in the mid-2000s.



Open green space in a Soviet-era residential neighbourhood (mikrorayon) © UN-Habitat Ukraine, 2025

Housing for temporary and social purposes

In the early and mid-2000s the Ukrainian government started to develop legislation for what was termed 'housing for temporary purposes' as well as 'housing for social purposes'. In post-socialist Ukraine, the need for publicly owned housing went hand-in-hand with the establishment of the mortgage market, noting that standard mortgages cannot be accessed by households below a certain income threshold.

HOUSING FOR TEMPORARY PURPOSES

The programme for temporary housing followed the legislation on mortgage lending (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2003), being concerned firstly with those in need of temporary accommodation due to mortgage defaulting. However, once the regulatory framework was adopted, the target beneficiaries for the 'housing fund for temporary purposes' was expanded beyond mortgage defaulters to include other social groups. In March 2004, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted Resolution 422,³⁹ which defined temporary housing as accommodation for refugees and people who have lost their housing due to natural or other kinds of disaster. Local self-government bodies (LSGBs) became responsible for developing and maintaining temporary housing stock. A separate waiting list was established for people in need of temporary housing.

In 2014, the need for public housing became particularly acute due to the Russian occupation of Crimea and parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions and the resulting tide of internal displacement. In 2014, Verkhovna Rada adopted the Law 'On ensuring the rights and liberties of internally displaced persons', devolving responsibility for housing IDPs to local authorities. In 2018, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted

Resolution 582 "On Approval of the Procedure for Formation of Funds of Housing Intended for Temporary Residence of Internally Displaced Persons and the Procedure for Provision of Such Housing", making IDPs eligible for accommodation from the temporary housing fund. Along with the Resolution, some additional funding was directed towards developing temporary housing for IDPs.

Beneficiaries prioritised were adapted to reflect the emergence of conflict-related vulnerable groups from 2014. In 2018, Cabinet Resolution 422 (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2018) (on temporary housing for IDPs) and Cabinet Resolution 582 (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2018)) created temporary housing funds for IDPs. These explicitly prioritise families of fallen soldiers, veterans, persons with disabilities (especially war-related), and other vulnerable IDPs.

HOUSING FOR SOCIAL PURPOSES

In 2005, a government policy framework entitled the 'Concept of the State Program "Social Housing"' (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2005) was introduced. The Concept aimed at addressing the housing access challenges faced by those already registered on waiting lists through the establishment of social rented housing. The rationale behind the Concept was the need to improve housing conditions for a significant share of the population⁴⁰. It set an ambitious target of providing social housing for those vulnerable social groups⁴¹ on the general waiting list by 2015. The Concept estimated that to achieve this goal, 23,839,000 square metres and approximately UAH 4.9 billion were needed⁴².

39 Resolution 422 refers to that of Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (2004) entitled 'On approval of the Procedure for the formation of housing funds for temporary residence and the procedure for provision and use of residential premises from such funds'.

40 According to the Concept: "Nearly one-third of Ukrainian citizens live in unsuitable premises, dormitories, dilapidated, and outdated buildings. According to the latest annual survey, more than 76 per cent of the population receives income below the subsistence level' (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2005).

41 A number of legislative acts including a Housing Code define categories of people on a general waiting list (so-called apartment queue) who are eligible for receiving priority (*pershocherhovo*) and extraordinary (*pozacherhovo*) housing allocation. These categories include war veterans, persons with disabilities, teachers and many more. The 'Concept of the State Program "Social Housing"' aimed at providing housing for those households that were already registered on the waiting lists and were eligible for receiving *pershocherhovo* or *pozacherhovo* housing.

42 According to the Concept (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2005), 'To calculate the estimated need for total housing area to accommodate vulnerable categories of citizens, indicators of the number of families registered for housing who are entitled to priority and extraordinary allocation of housing were used. It was taken into account that approximately 10 per cent of families are capable of fulfilling obligations under mortgage housing loans provided under state preferential lending conditions, and an average total apartment area per family of 54 square meters was applied. The total housing area required to meet the needs of these categories of citizens amounts to approximately 23,839 thousand square meters.'

Following the Concept, the Verkhovna Rada adopted the Law *'On the Housing Stock of Social Purpose'* (Verkhovna Rada, 2006). The legislation defined housing for social purposes as *'housing of all forms of ownership (except for social dormitories) which is provided free of charge to citizens of Ukraine who need social protection based on a rental contract for a certain period'*. A separate waiting list was established for people in need of housing for social purposes. The eligibility criteria for this type of housing was rather restrictive. Only households whose average monthly income was below the subsistence minimum and the average cost of renting in the area⁴³ were eligible to register for the waiting list.

After 2014, combatants and persons with disabilities due to war gain enhanced priority status (often 'extraordinary priority') in the context of housing waiting lists.

Definition of social housing and target beneficiaries in Ukraine

'In 2006, the concept of 'social housing' was defined at the legislative level, which was intended (...) to resolve the problem of uncertainty and parallel use of the terms 'social housing', 'affordable housing', 'state housing', 'temporary housing' and 'crisis housing'. The Law of Ukraine 'On the Social Housing Fund' (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2006) defines social housing as housing of all forms of ownership (except for social dormitories) from the social housing fund, which is provided free of charge by local governments to citizens of Ukraine who are recognized by law as needing social protection based on a fixed-term lease agreement. According to the law, the social housing stock is formed by local governments. (...) The right to be registered for social housing is exercised by citizens of Ukraine for whom such housing is the only place of residence or who are entitled to better housing conditions; whose average monthly total income for the previous year per person is less than the indirect cost of renting housing; IDPs who do not have other housing in the territory controlled by the Ukrainian authorities or whose housing has been destroyed or damaged' (Zapototska, 2024 p33).

In 2014, the Ministry for Regional Development⁴⁴ drafted the law *'On adopting the nationwide program of social housing development for 2015–2021'* which was planned as the supplement to the *'Concept of the State Program "Social Housing"'*. The draft law has not passed the revisions from other ministries, including the Ministry of Economy and Ministry of Finances. Particularly, they recommended funding social housing from local budgets rather than relying on the state subsidy.

One of the ways to replenish the housing fund for social purposes was for developers to transfer a share of apartments to municipalities. There was also a mechanism of developers' contributions (*paiovi vnieski*). The developers had to contribute to the municipal budget up to 10 per cent of the budgeted costs for non-residential construction projects and up to 4 per cent for residential construction. The developers could make the contributions either in cash or in kind - for instance, by constructing public infrastructure. However, at the end of 2019, developers' contributions were abolished and according to amendments to the Law *'On Regulation of Urban Development Activity'*⁴⁵ local authorities cannot demand any contributions from developers including construction of facilities. Yet, for municipalities there remains a possibility to sign a voluntary agreement with a developer for transferring a share of apartments to the local authority for its use as public housing.

⁴³ Local authorities following the *'Procedure for determining the amount of the average (indirect) cost of renting (leasing) housing in a populated area'* had to set the indicator based on the 'data from organizations that provide services for renting out residential premises, or based on advertisements in local mass media, or based on data from population surveys'.

⁴⁴ Currently the Ministry for Development of Communities and Territories.

⁴⁵ "Authorities responsible for urban planning, architectural and construction control, and supervision are prohibited from requiring the developer to provide any services, material or non-material assets, including the construction of facilities.

Dormitories and residential institutions in Ukraine's housing system

As well as mainstream social and temporary housing provision, the Ukrainian system has retained a range of specialized and institutional housing forms inherited from the Soviet period, including dormitories (hostels) for workers and students, and residential institutions for vulnerable groups such as children without parental care. Dormitories, many of which were originally attached to state enterprises, continued to house significant numbers of low-income and mobile populations after 1991, although their legal status and pathways to privatization or municipal ownership remained complex (UNECE, 2015, p40–42; Biliovskyi, 2012). Similarly, children's residential institutions and orphanages have historically functioned as a parallel housing and care system, reflecting both welfare provision and gaps in family-based housing solutions, though reforms since the 2010s have aimed at de-institutionalization and family placement (UNICEF, 2018). While quantitatively limited relative to the overall housing stock, these forms illustrate the persistence of non-market, needs-based housing provision and the fragmented legacy of Soviet-era social infrastructure within Ukraine's contemporary housing system.

Overall, the rationale behind the housing fund for social purposes and the housing fund for temporary purposes was to absorb the adverse consequences of post-1991 housing commodification and guarantee the right to housing for vulnerable social groups (Bobrova et al. 2022 p8). However, the policy lacked a comprehensive governance and finance framework from its inception. While the responsibilities for housing provision were devolved to local governments, municipalities were left without guidance on sustainable housing management and maintenance. Additionally, limited funding was provided for municipalities to fulfil their roles under the policies. As a result, despite legislative measures, public housing provision remained stalled. According to data provided by The Ministry for Development of Territories and Communities, as of January 2021 there were only 1,098 housing units for social purposes and 1,997 units for temporary purposes in Ukraine (Bobrova et al, 2022 p46). Moreover, a significant share of these dwellings ended up in the temporarily occupied territories after the onset of the full-scale invasion in February 2022. For example, the highest number of temporary housing units in Ukraine were located in the

Donetsk and Zaporizhzhia regions, and Mariupol city was one of the leaders in developing its housing for temporary purposes after 2014 (Bobrova et al, 2022).

Due to limited funding and political support on the national level and lack of internal capacity on the local level, the series of concepts, resolutions, and laws emerged as disjointed efforts that brought limited results. Both the housing fund for temporary purposes and that for social purposes existed primarily on paper.

Local authorities were tasked with managing at least three separate waiting lists: a general waiting list, a waiting list for housing for temporary purposes, and a waiting list for housing for social purposes. However, the *de facto* absence of public housing to allocate impeded municipalities from gaining experience and developing capacities as housing providers in the newly privatised housing sector environment. In the following section, we briefly discuss the positioning of housing within urban planning policies and regulations in Ukraine.

Social housing and the urban planning system

This section examines how housing policies in Ukraine, specifically its social and affordable housing regulations, are connected with its spatial planning policies and planning governance. It discusses how housing is embedded into the strategic planning documents in selected municipalities. This brief outlook shows that national housing policies and strategies are not closely aligned with the country's national urban policies and planning laws, contradicting international best practices. Housing delivery programmes are disconnected from the urban planning system. The urban planning system only marginally addresses housing issues, limiting itself to the technical level. This *status quo* hampers the potential of planning to deliver social housing. At the same time, some municipalities have attempted to set strategic housing trajectories via integrated development concepts.

In Ukraine, housing delivery remains poorly coordinated between national and local levels. Current national housing policy tends to alternate between spatially blind national programmes and place-based municipal initiatives (Seravalli, 2015), with little integration between the two. These programmes are expected to provide foundation mechanisms targeting citizens' housing challenges, both nationally through government regulations and decisions of local authorities⁴⁶. Observers have noted that Ukrainian housing programmes and policies 'are often unsystematic, unpredictable and, in most cases, dependent on political will when making funding decisions at both the state and local levels' (UNECE, 2025 p26). Moreover, the socio-economic objective of those programmes remains unclear, as they primarily aim to support homeownership among particular eligible citizen groups rather than addressing broader social or economic challenges.⁴⁷

As for urban planning policies, there are limited strategic planning regulations. There is a narrow guidance on housing delivery and no comprehensive enforcement mechanisms in place.

Ukrainian planning and development management norms (Ministry of Communities and Territories Development, 2019a) explicitly define residential zones and their permissible building densities, regulate spacing and orientation of residential buildings, and

mandate accessibility and proximity of public amenities within residential areas. Although the same norms do not define explicit planning norms specifically for social housing, comprehensive requirements on building accessibility, community amenities, and open spaces create a general framework for socially oriented residential developments (Ministry of Communities and Territories Development, 2019a). The separate set of norms for housing development regulations (Ministry of Communities and Territories Development 2019b) classify housing into two categories based on comfort standards and social orientation. Category I offers basic minimum standards without upper limits, catering primarily to market-oriented developments; while Category II is restricted by strict sanitary and space standards designed to meet fundamental living needs. This latter category may be considered a regulatory framework for social housing provision, ensuring affordability and basic comfort.

The Law 'On Regulation of Urban Development Activity' (Verkhovna Rada. 2021) is one of the central urban planning documents in Ukraine. The Law features a set of attempts to include housing policy in urban planning. Overall, it aims to ensure that social housing needs are incorporated into broader territorial development strategies, infrastructure planning, and emergency housing responses, addressing the following points:

- Housing needs in spatial planning: The law mandates the rational spatial arrangement of residential, public, industrial, transport, and recreational zones, ensuring balanced urban development (Article 2). The Comprehensive Spatial Development Plan at the municipal level must include calculations for housing needs, including social housing and essential infrastructure (Article 16-1).
- Planning permissions and density regulations: Before any land development, individuals or entities must obtain urban planning conditions that specify maximum allowable population density in residential areas, ensuring planned housing development aligns with urban infrastructure capacity (Article 29).
- Large-scale integrated development projects must incorporate social infrastructure, housing, and public amenities (Article 33).

⁴⁶ See UNECE 2025 for a broad overview of current housing programmes in Ukraine.

⁴⁷ For a detailed overview of various housing programmes including low interest and concessional loans, see either Fedoriv and Lomonosova (2019) or Fedoriv and Lawson (2025) in this collection.

- War-related housing measures: Under martial law, land use changes can be made without strict adherence to prior zoning regulations to expedite temporary housing construction for IDPs. Additionally, emergency housing can be built for evacuated workers and vulnerable populations (Final Provisions 9-3 and 9-4).

The law also defines the integrated urban development strategy (IUDS) as a strategic planning document that sets long-term spatial and socio-economic priorities for municipalities. It emphasizes sustainable development, accessibility, social cohesion, and economic activity, serving as a basis for local urban planning documentation (Article 1-5). By further government regulation (Ministry for Development of Territories and Communities of Ukraine, 2022), IUDS may also include housing needs analysis and a housing ownership structure with the municipality. However, the government prescribes no obligation to include any general housing trajectories or social housing policies when developing the IUDS.

Despite being introduced into law as optional strategic planning documents by the Law 'On Regulation of Urban Development Activity' (Verkhovna Rada, 2020) only recently in 2020, in practice the IUDS are not entirely new to strategic planning in Ukraine. Some municipalities have adopted or at least developed such concepts since the 2010s, while others have incorporated housing trajectories in one form or another. For example, the IUDS for Podilskyi District was adopted by Kyiv City Council in November 2022. It includes a strong emphasis on social housing leveraged within a broader housing policy and highlighting vulnerable and special housing needs in an inclusive urban strategy for all population segments.

The IUDS for *Lviv 2030* adopted in 2021, *Chernivtsi 2030* adopted in 2019, and *Poltava 2030* adopted in 2018 present housing policies addressing urban renewal and sustainable urban growth, affordability and modernisation of the housing stock. Housing was considered central to urban regeneration and urban growth strategies with cities proposing new approaches and regulatory mechanisms to deliver on social housing objectives (see Annex 1). These municipal strategies reflect a growing, though uneven, recognition of housing — and particularly social housing — as a strategic priority in urban planning across Ukraine. However, in the absence of a cohesive national housing policy, most of these initiatives remain aspirational, fragmented, localised and under-resourced.

Planning alone cannot deliver the necessary supply of social and affordable housing but, a comprehensive approach combining planning with regulatory, financial, and institutional measures is needed to address the housing crisis effectively (Whitehead, 2006). Planning remains an essential governance tool for creating broader social value. By accounting for externalities, market failures, and public goods, urban planning can enhance overall efficiency and support the improved provision of adequate and sustainable housing (Whitehead, 2006).

The need for viable housing options has become particularly urgent since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, which has displaced millions and significantly strained the existing housing stock. As a result, the development of robust and scalable mechanisms for social and affordable housing provision has become not only a policy imperative but also a humanitarian and reconstruction priority.

War-induced housing crisis and social housing

As mentioned earlier, the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia in 2022 exacerbated the housing crisis. It also revealed the housing system's internal weaknesses, including its lack of social and affordable housing, lax rent regulations, and limited protection of tenants' rights. The ongoing war has also brought new challenges to the housing sector.

First, the housing tenure structure started to change. Before 2022, the Ukrainian housing sector constituted an example of super-homeownership, with the share of housing that was owner-occupied over 90 per cent due to the legacy of post-Independence mass privatisation. War-related damage and destruction to the housing stock combined with forced displacement have prompted shifts in the housing tenure structure: the share of owner-occupiers is decreasing while the share of renters is increasing. The transformation is particularly visible in big cities. For instance, according to the recent data collected by Cedoss, in regional centres approximately a quarter of people (24 per cent) rent their homes in the private rental sector. Overall, at the end of 2024, approximately 79 per cent of people were owner-occupiers, and 14 per cent renters (*ibid.*). Observed shifts are, however, at least partly temporary related to the cadence of the current war, meaning that any structural shifts in the owner-renter balance in the housing market post-2022 are elusive to determine during the ongoing conflict phase.

Secondly, there is a trend of falling housing affordability. The gap between incomes and housing costs continues to grow. Stagnating or declining incomes coupled with increasing rent prices and living costs across a range of essentials contribute to the overall unaffordability of housing. According to recent findings, 42 per cent of people spend more than a third of their monthly household income on housing, including rent and utilities (Cedoss, 2024). For

low-income households, housing unaffordability is even more acute. Additionally, paying for housing is more challenging for tenants than for homeowners. Regardless of age, renters are more likely to spend more than 30 per cent of their monthly income on housing. However, older renters are particularly vulnerable: most tenants over 60 claim they have to save money on food to pay for housing (Cedoss, 2024). For IDPs, housing affordability remains among their most pressing concerns. According to IOM (IOM, 2024 p1), among IDPs who are renters approximately a third spend more than 70 per cent of their household income on housing, while around half of them spend over half their household income on rent and utilities. For IDPs, housing unaffordability leads to negative coping strategies including moving to poorer quality housing and skipping rent payments (IOM, 2024 p6). It is relevant to note that in response to such challenges, the government has coordinated rental support for IDPs, combining cash assistance and emerging rent subsidies, while humanitarian assistance has also been delivered.⁴⁸ In general, coverage is limited relative to demand.

Finally, since 2022, housing needs have grown and diversified across various social groups. Internally displaced people are particularly vulnerable. As of 2023, the preliminary assessments of the need for social and affordable housing for IDPs was estimated at 500,000 dwellings (Lawson, Nouwelant, Troy, and New Housing Policy 2023, 25). Lack of adequate housing means that people remain in collective sites⁴⁹ for prolonged periods. According to the Ministry of National Unity, as of December 2024, approximately 61,063 people lived in 1,079 collective sites across the country (World Bank and GoU 2025).

Lax regulations⁵⁰ and tenure insecurity in the private rental sector pose significant challenges for IDPs, as

48 For instance, see Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine (2023) Support for internally displaced persons; Ministry for Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories (2024) Rental subsidy for IDPs; UNHCR (2023) Cash assistance programmes in Ukraine.

49 Collective sites are temporary accommodation established after February 2022 in refurbished dormitories, hotels, sanatoriums etc. Initially the residents sign a 6-month contract to live in a collective site. However, the majority remain in collective sites for longer than 6 months (CCCM Cluster, Protection Cluster & REACH. 2024).

50 The detailed discussion about the weaknesses of the private rental sector in Ukraine falls outside the scope of this paper. Nonetheless, it is worthwhile mentioning that in Ukraine there is no rent setting or rent indexation mechanisms in place; there are no quality standards for rental dwellings and no guidance regarding the rent contracts registration. There is also no nuanced data regarding the number of landlords and rental dwelling and their characteristics. The Civic Code provides some regulations and tenants' rights protection. For instance, the Civic Code specifies that tenants cannot be evicted without a court ruling or that rent contracts do not need to be notarized to be considered valid. However, even these regulations are difficult to enforce. The draft law On the Fundamental Principles of the Housing Policy introduces a mandatory registration for all rental contracts. Yet it is unclear how the regulation is going to be enforced.

most currently rent their homes. More than a third of internally displaced tenants lack documents for their tenure status; for instance, they may not have rent agreements (IOM, 2024). Moreover, at least 16 per cent of IDPs who are renting have experienced eviction since February 2022 (IOM, 2024 p4).

The need for adequate housing is also tied to safety. Persons with disabilities and older people residing in municipalities in frontline proximity are in an especially vulnerable position. The lack of adequate housing complicates the evacuation of persons with disabilities and older persons (Ministry of Social Policy, 2024).

CALLS FOR A NEW HOUSING POLICY

Taken together, the adverse trends in the housing sector underline the need to develop a human-centred housing policy capable of addressing a variety of needs. Since the onset of the full-scale invasion, there has been growing support⁵¹ for creating a comprehensive housing policy in Ukraine, including fostering public provision of social housing. The Law *'On Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine Regarding the Protection of Housing Rights of Internally Displaced Persons'*, which aims to create a registry of vacant property available for transformation into housing for IDPs, was adopted by the Verkhovna Rada. The draft Law *'On the Fundamental Principles of the Housing Policy'* (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2026), that aims to replace the outdated Housing Code has been passed to Verkhovna Rada.

Government of Ukraine's progress on a new State Housing Policy Strategy

Ukraine is actively working on a new State Housing Policy Strategy⁵² and legal framework to modernise its housing system in response to war damage and displacement. Since 2024, the government has been developing a State Housing Policy Strategy, alongside adopting a framework law *'On the Fundamental Principles of Housing Policy'* (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2026), which aims to create a modern system of affordable, social, and rental housing, particularly for IDPs and other vulnerable groups. This reform process also includes plans for municipal rental housing, housing funds, and improved data systems, marking Ukraine's first attempt at a systematic, long-term housing policy aligned with EU standards.

There have also been appeals for an urban planning system to incorporate housing delivery, including affordable housing (UNECE 2013, Lawson et al, 2023), as well as regional planning concerns over where new housing should be delivered through the post-war recovery period and how public infrastructure should follow (OECD, 2022).

Today, social housing is enshrined as one of the housing policy priorities in major documents guiding Ukraine's recovery. The Ukraine Plan 2024-2027 (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2024 p8; p128), which sets out key reform efforts to be undertaken, acknowledges that

"The availability of affordable and quality housing is a prerequisite for the return or resettlement of refugees and IDPs. In line with the principle of 'build back better', there is a need for housing policies that can provide sustainable financing for both the construction and long-term maintenance of affordable social housing."

The Plan responds to the ageing nature of much of the existing housing stock and its repair and renovation needs, affecting low income households particularly. Housing access for people in need is to be delivered through the adoption of the Law *'On the Fundamental Principles of Housing Policy'* (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2026), the preparation of a national housing strategy, and associated reforms to build 'usable social and affordable housing systems' (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2024 p128).

51 See research by Cedos (2024); new housing policy (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2026); Lawson and Gajda, 2022; Anisimov et al. 2023; Bobrova 2023; Shnaider 2025.

52 See United Nations in Ukraine (2025) Launch of Ukraine's State Housing Policy Strategy. <https://ukraine.un.org>

The fifth Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment (World Bank Group et al, 2026 p24) report highlights the need to implement planned '*housing sector reforms (such as the Law on the Fundamental Principles of Housing Policy; forthcoming laws on social housing, affordable housing, and management of the housing stock; and strengthening of property rights, rental markets, and housing finance)*'

Finally, the arrival of new institutional actors into housing policy might prompt the discussion on social housing (Anisimov et al, 2023 p31) and its governance framework.

Social housing is also gradually returning to the policy discussion on the national level, as evidenced in statements by the State Agency for Restoration and Development of Infrastructure of Ukraine in 2024, during the *RebuildUkraine* conference in Warsaw.⁵³

In 2023, the Ministry for Development of Territories and Communities of Ukraine started drafting The Law '*On the Fundamental Principles of Housing Policy*'. Adopted in 2026, the law aims to outline the basic foundations for Ukrainian housing policy and replace the outdated Housing Code inherited from the USSR (see Verbytskyi et al, 2023; UN4UkrainianCities, 2024). Enactment of the law abolishes the existing *kvartyrna cherha* and terminates the housing privatization process that practically enabled the privatization of almost all newly constructed public housing. Alongside these changes the document also introduces *affordable housing* as housing provided with state or local authorities' support to individuals based on their income level. The definition of affordable housing includes both social rented housing and subsidised homeownership. The law also defines *social housing* as housing for rent provided to individuals, including those needing social protection, for an affordable price. Finally, the law introduces *affordable housing operators* as entities who will be responsible for construction or management for social and affordable housing.

Additionally, in 2024, The Law '*On Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine Regarding the Protection of Housing Rights of Internally Displaced Persons*' was adopted by the Parliament. The Law sets out to create an inventory of the premises, both publicly and privately

owned, that are available to be transformed into social housing for IDPs.

Even though both documents mention social housing as the policy instrument, neither provides comprehensive guidelines regarding the governance framework. Such a framework is envisioned to be designed within the new 2026 Law '*On Social Housing*' and the upcoming National Housing Strategy.

Indeed, the Law '*On the Fundamental Principles of Housing Policy*' was already adopted by Parliament in January 2026; the National Housing Strategy is already on its way and is expected to be finalised within the next couple of months. The law on social housing is underway to be drafted in 2026

EFFORTS TO ADDRESS THE GROWING HOUSING NEED ON THE LOCAL LEVEL

The war-induced housing crisis prompted the development of various modalities of housing provision including non-market housing provision on the municipal level, from the establishment of collective sites to housing rehabilitation and construction projects. These independent but fragmented initiatives have been useful to mobilise a wide range of stakeholders, inform policy discussions and to identify implementation challenges to be addressed (see description of housing initiatives in Annex 2).

Efforts to draft an updated legislative framework have started on the national level. At the same time, on the local level, some municipalities have strengthened their position as housing policy actors and started to engage in short and mid-term housing projects supported by international and local organisations. There is a need to draw learning from both projects and research, and from multiple levels and types of stakeholders to inform the setting of broader strategic goals for the housing policy, particularly for developing the social housing sector.

In summary, along with the new challenges in the housing sector, the full-scale war has also opened up a space for new non-market modalities of housing provision in Ukraine. Prompted by the deepening housing crisis and the advocacy efforts on behalf

⁵³ In 2024, during the *RebuildUkraine* conference in Warsaw, the head of the State Agency for Restoration and Development of Infrastructure of Ukraine (2024), Serhii Sukhomlyn, announced the plan to construct approximately 6,200 social housing units.

of Ukrainian and international actors, the idea of social housing gradually re-enters the housing policy discussion. Efforts to design an updated legislative framework have started on the national level. At the same time, on the local level, municipalities are strengthening their position as housing policy actors and started to engage in short and mid-term housing projects supported by international and local

organisations. Nonetheless, there remains a need to set broader strategic goals for housing policy, and particularly for developing the social housing sector. In order to scale up and multiply the effects of the ongoing projects, the disjointed efforts need to be guided by a clear framework, which the upcoming National Housing Strategy could offer.



A war-damaged residential building in Borodianka, Kyiv Oblast © UN-Habitat Ukraine

Conclusion

Today in Ukraine housing remains one of the most affected sectors, with millions of dwellings either damaged or destroyed and millions of people displaced. Since the start of the full-scale invasion, housing needs have increased, compounding pre-war pressure in the sector. The ongoing housing crisis has a particularly negative impact on vulnerable social groups, including IDPs. Even though the war has brought new challenges into the housing system, it has also revealed the pre-existing weaknesses. The overreliance on homeownership, poorly regulated private rental sector, and lack of adequate alternatives to commercial purchase or rent are also rooted in Ukraine's post-socialist specificities and associated historical developments in the housing policy.

Certain aspects of housing planning and its spatial organization were laid down well before Ukraine regained independence in 1991. These structures continue to some extent shape and influence the country's housing system to this day. Some of the issues that became apparent by the end of the Soviet era, such as poor quality housing, housing shortage, deteriorating utility infrastructure, and poor quality public space and social infrastructure have not been resolved and have even deteriorated over the past three decades.

Public housing privatisation in the 1990s has been a critical policy decision that influenced the key features of the Ukrainian housing system. Despite softening the economic blow for the population in the early transition years, the policy has facilitated the creation of an unbalanced and weak housing system that is unable to address the growing housing needs. Privatisation and the subsequent policies and programmes further supporting homeownership, and contributed to stalled public housing construction. While there were attempts to introduce public housing in Ukraine in the mid-2000s, they amounted to disjointed efforts with limited results, in the context of limited state funding.

Housing policy efforts have often been disconnected from the urban planning system impeding the potential to effectively utilise planning instruments. The overview of the IUDS in selected cities has demonstrated that even before the full-scale invasion, some municipalities have embraced progressive social and affordable housing strategies, at least on the discursive level. Even though IUDSs are documents of advisory nature, they point to the foundation upon which the further discussion of the future of the housing policy could build, at the local level.

The full-scale invasion by Russia against Ukraine in February 2022 has not only revealed the internal weaknesses of the housing system but also modified the housing policy discussion and reshaped the institutional landscape involved within the housing sector. On the one hand, as a response to the growing housing need, municipalities strengthened their position as housing policy actors providing short- and mid-term solutions. On the other hand, the idea of social housing emerged in the policy discourse due to advocacy actions on behalf of local and international stakeholders. The Ukraine Plan and the fifth RDNA (World Bank Group et al, 2026) have acknowledged housing as a cross-cutting issue for various social groups and have stressed the importance of investment in the social housing sector.

Moreover, the Law *'On the Fundamental Principles of the Housing Policy'* aimed at replacing the outdated Housing Code was passed in 2026. The updated 2026 law *'On Social Housing'* has been passed, and the National Housing Strategy is in the housing policy reform pipeline. The new legislation could develop a comprehensive governance and finance framework for sustainable social housing development.

At the same time, the ongoing war has prompted the appearance of new modalities of housing provision supported by international and Ukrainian organisations on the local level. This trend suggests that municipalities could become leaders in defining the future of social housing in Ukraine, especially if their efforts are supported by national policy frameworks and guidance.

There is a need for further research and analysis within the field. Despite recent advancements, there remains a gap in qualitative research regarding the housing needs of various social groups and problems they encounter in the housing sector, particularly in the growing private rental sector. There is also a need to monitor and evaluate the ongoing housing programmes on the national and local levels to provide insights into the implementation challenges.

In conclusion, access to adequate housing remains an urgent challenge for millions of people in Ukraine. Housing policy, and social housing approaches therein, must address not only recovery but at the same time the broader issues of socio-economic development, acting as a central component of Ukraine's development strategy on the national and local levels.

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Annexes

ANNEX 1: INTEGRATED URBAN DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES (IUDSS) AND OTHER PLANS

Podilskyi district in Kyiv

The IUDS for Podilskyi District⁵⁴ (Kyiv City Council 2022), adopted by the Kyiv City Council in November 2022, outlines a comprehensive housing policy with a strong emphasis on social housing. It suggests increasing the stock of affordable rental units, embedding social housing quotas in development projects, and creating institutional support for fair housing allocation. These measures reflect the strategy's commitment to supporting low-income and vulnerable residents through housing, ensuring that growth and urban development in Kyiv's Podil area remain inclusive and beneficial to all population segments.

The concept prioritises the development of social and affordable housing as a core measure to address housing needs. The plan proposes building a dedicated social housing stock managed by public authorities or non-profit organisations to increase the supply of units available for low-income and special-needs residents. It also proposes an inclusionary housing approach, recommending that up to 25 per cent of units in new residential projects on public or communal land be allocated as social housing, ensuring that new developments incorporate affordable homes for those in need⁵⁵. Finally, the Podil IUDS recommends establishing a municipal agency to oversee the distribution and management of social housing. The plan further stresses the even spatial distribution of social housing across the district to maintain a balanced social mix and promote inclusive communities.

Lviv

The IUDS of Lviv 2030 (Lviv City Council, 2021), adopted in 2021, presents a housing policy aimed at sustainable urban growth, improved affordability, and modernisation of the housing stock. The strategy envisions a compact city model, preventing urban sprawl and promoting well-planned, high-density development that integrates residential areas with public transport and social infrastructure.

A core component of the housing strategy is improving housing accessibility and quality. The plan targets increasing the average housing area per citizen from 23.8 square meters (as of 2019) to 28 square metres by 2030. Those targets will be achieved through new residential development projects, a focus on mixed-use neighbourhoods, and encouraging energy-efficient renovations of older buildings. The plan also promotes residential cooperative ownership (Ukrainian: ОСББ), with the share of cooperative housing expected to grow beyond the 6.15 per cent recorded in 2019.

The document identifies key threats to social housing, such as ageing housing stock, inefficient land use, and increasing social segregation. To mitigate those challenges, the plan suggests creating socially integrated urban quarters and avoiding isolated social housing estates. There is also a push for energy-efficient modernisation of 1960s to 1980s housing stock, alongside the revitalisation of historic housing to maintain affordability while improving living conditions.

Chernivtsi

The IUDS of Chernivtsi until 2030 (Chernivtsi City Council, 2019), adopted in 2019, outlines a housing policy focused on sustainable urban planning, housing accessibility, and social integration. The strategy acknowledges the ageing housing stock and limited affordable housing options and aims to improve housing availability, energy efficiency, and social housing schemes.

54 The nature of IUDS in Ukrainian law remains non-statutory, as municipalities may but are not obligated to develop and adopt IUDS. IUDS is currently set up as a supplementary planning document that helps shape statutory planning and development management documents and integrates them into a coherent strategic direction. However, selected government subsidies and international development support from 2022 onwards have been the subject of municipalities adopting IUDS.

15 A district within a city may be established or dissolved by a decision of the city council to improve governance, ensure the effective exercise of local self-government powers, and provide quality services to residents (Verkhovna Rada, 2023).

55 As discussed above, since 2019 and changes into the legislation concerning developers contributions local authorities cannot demand from developers to contribute a share of the apartments to be transferred into municipal ownership. However, the voluntary transfer of housing by a developer to municipal ownership – such as within the framework of social programs or charitable initiatives – does not contradict the provisions of Article 7 of the Law of Ukraine “On the Regulation of Urban Development Activities”.

One of the primary challenges highlighted is that most of the city's housing stock was built before 1991, with limited variety in residential typologies and a predominance of post-war apartment buildings that require modernisation.

The document notes the absence of a comprehensive social housing programme, with no obligations for developers to allocate a portion of newly built housing for social purposes. In response, the plan prioritises urban renewal projects, particularly in the historical centre and post-Soviet residential areas, encouraging energy-efficient renovations and improved accessibility.

The strategy includes plans for new residential construction to increase the number of affordable housing units. The 'Young People's Quarter' project mainly addresses the social housing policy, which aims to create affordable housing for young professionals and economically active residents. This initiative aligns with Chernivtsi's broader goal of retaining skilled workers and preventing youth emigration. The city also aims to support cooperative housing models, drawing inspiration from European best practices.

Poltava

The IUDS of Poltava until 2030 (Poltava City Council, 2018), adopted in 2018, prioritises sustainable housing development, increased accessibility, and urban densification. Given the city's extensive urban sprawl and low-density residential areas, the plan emphasises optimising existing urban spaces rather than expanding into undeveloped areas.

A key objective of the document is the densification of housing within existing territorial resources, ensuring efficient land use and promoting compact urban growth. This approach aims to reduce infrastructure costs and improve accessibility to services while mitigating the environmental footprint of urban expansion.

Regarding social housing, the concept acknowledges a limited stock of affordable housing and highlights the need for state-supported housing initiatives. While private investment in market housing remains high, there is no improvement in housing affordability, with

a shortage of options for low-income and vulnerable populations. The municipality aims to increase the supply of affordable housing through public-private partnerships and fostering housing cooperatives.

Additionally, the strategy incorporates sustainability principles, encouraging energy-efficient renovations and repurposing brownfield sites for housing development. Infill development in the eastern industrial zone is highlighted as an opportunity to introduce mixed-use residential spaces while ensuring connectivity to urban services and green areas.

ANNEX 2: MUNICIPAL INITIATIVES IN HOUSING⁵⁶

The war-induced housing crisis prompted the appearance of various modalities of housing provision on the municipal level, from the establishment of collective sites to projects of constructing housing by local or international organisations. This section discusses the role of municipalities in housing provision during the war, outlines some of the key challenges they face, and highlights some of the recent social and affordable housing projects on the local level.

With approximately 4.7 million IDPs as of December 2025 (World Bank et al, 2026) and ongoing destruction of residential stock, municipalities have been forced to act independently, providing short- and mid-term housing solutions. Despite this fragmented approach, some municipalities have strengthened their role as housing policy actors, testing social and affordable housing models, including municipal-led projects (Ukraine Business News 2024; EEAS, 2024).

Nonetheless, the lack of a comprehensive governance framework for social and affordable housing on the national level exacerbates housing policy fragmentation on the local level. Lack of policy guidance on the national level also poses significant challenges to the scalability of the ongoing social housing projects. The majority of the *de facto* newly constructed public housing does not pertain to the existing housing funds, and the long-term operating model for this housing remains open. As mentioned

⁵⁶ At the time of writing this paper the updated Law "On Social Housing" was not available for a public review. As for the National Housing Strategy the internal discussion within stakeholders has started, yet the draft was not publicly available.

above, before 2022, social and temporary housing funds were minuscule, and local self-governments did not obtain extensive housing management experience.

Beyond lacking the internal capacity to operate large social housing stock, municipalities also experience a need for financial support. Local governments usually rely on international support to fund new social and affordable housing construction or to reconstruct existing premises. Moreover, even supporting existing temporary housing for IDPs might pose significant challenges, especially for small municipalities in frontline proximity or those municipalities which were liberated (Fedorova, 2023). For instance, those municipalities that suffered significant damages and lost a major part of their budgets have to focus on emergency reconstruction needs. While some municipalities in relatively safe parts of the country have already started to discuss strategic recovery efforts, those in the frontline proximity are still struggling to address emergency needs.

Local governments could play a pioneering role in shaping the future of social and affordable housing in Ukraine. The following examples discuss how selected municipalities are implementing social and affordable housing solutions for IDPs through cooperation with local or international organisations. These cases⁵⁷ highlight policy design, implementation challenges, funding models, and emerging governance structures in municipal-led housing initiatives (for the detailed discussion on the involvement of the humanitarian organisations in the development of local housing programmes see Verbytskyi et al. 2024).

EU support for urgent housing needs

Nefco's projects within the programmes '*EU Support to Urgent Housing Needs for IDPs in Ukraine*' and '*Housing for Internally Displaced Persons and Reconstruction of Liberated Cities in Ukraine*', funded by the European Union and managed by Nefco⁵⁸, focus on both reconstruction of existing buildings and new construction of IDPs' housing. As a result, the programmes aim to house approximately 5,241 IDPs (Nefco, 2024a).

'Housing for Internally Displaced Persons and Reconstruction of Liberated Cities in Ukraine, Component II' includes four projects and a total eight new residential buildings in Ivano-Frankivsk, Khmelnytskyi, Novovolynsk, and Ternopil which will house approximately 1,176 IDPs in 230 apartments (Nefco, 2024a). In one of six projects under the programme '*Housing for Internally Displaced Persons and Reconstruction of Liberated Cities in Ukraine Component I*', Nefco supports the construction of eight buildings for injured IDPs undergoing rehabilitation at the UNBROKEN centre (Nefco 2024b).

The programme also includes reconstruction of the existing buildings and transforming those into housing for IDPs. For instance in Zvyahel a derelict blood centre was transformed into 47 apartments in a short time.

International support covers renovation costs (such as a recent EUR 2.67 million for the site in Zvyahel), while local authorities contributed in-kind by providing existing buildings and land. The partnership ensured that modern energy-efficient features (insulation, solar panels, etc.) were installed without burdening local budgets (Delegation of the European Union to Ukraine, 2025).

According to Henrik Toremark, Senior Programme Manager at Nefco, there are several challenges municipalities encounter within the projects. First, there are war-related challenges including the lack of workers in the construction industry, rising construction costs, and electricity shortages. Additionally, some municipalities have limited internal resources and capacity to implement large-scale projects. Therefore, Nefco ensures that the municipalities have access to significant project implementation support, for instance during the procurement evaluation processes or construction supervision, provided by international technical consultancy firms.

57 This paper highlights the selected few of the ongoing housing initiatives that might be broadly united under the umbrella of social and affordable housing. The list is not exhaustive and the paper does not aim to cover all the existing projects.

58 Nefco is an international financial institution established by the Nordic countries to accelerate the green transition by financing and implementing environmental and climate projects. It provides grants, loans, and equity funding for initiatives that support energy efficiency, renewable energy, and sustainable infrastructure, with a strong focus on impactful solutions in Eastern Europe, the Baltic Sea region, and beyond. [Link](#).

Housing units constructed under the programmes have to remain in municipal use and the housing allocation has to be compliant with existing national regulations⁵⁹ and local social housing procedures. IDP families receive medium-term rental rights (up to ten years), ensuring compliance with Ukrainian law while addressing emergency needs (Nefco 2024a). According to Henrik Toremark, it is required by Nefco that the buildings remain in municipal ownership for at least 10 years after the construction is completed.

So far, the programme delivered refurbished apartments for hundreds of IDP families, easing the shelter crisis in Chernivtsi, Chortkiv, Ivano-Frankivsk, Khmelnytskyi, Kiverts, Kovel, Lutsk, Rivne, Zolochiv and Zvyahel⁶⁰, by converting existing municipal properties. New residential buildings for IDPs are constructed in Lviv, Chernivtsi, Zhytomyr, Dubno, Kovel, Ivano-Frankivsk, Ternopil, Khmelnytskyi and Novovolynsk⁶¹. These projects are at various stages of completion, with some already providing housing to IDPs and others still under development, with the project in Zolochiv expected to be completed later in 2025.

Illustrative case examples

The following case examples illustrate specific aspects of urban recovery practice in Ukraine. These cases are intended to provide contextual insights into implementation experiences and emerging approaches post-2022.

Co-Haty – ‘Community building through buildings for communities’

Co-Haty began as a grassroots response to gaps in Ukraine’s housing policy. Launched in early 2022 by the teams of Ukrainian non-governmental organisation Metalab and members of the Urban Curators agency, the project repurposes neglected or vacant municipal buildings into housing for IDPs – to convert them into social housing after the war. Co-Haty also advocates for regulatory reform to integrate those repurposed and renovated units into Ukraine’s social housing stock.

This public-private initiative involves local NGOs, city authorities, and international donors. Since its launch, it has raised over USD 1.3 million through grants

and donations, enabling the renovation of seven large buildings in Ivano-Frankivsk, Khmelnytskyi, and Vinnytsia—providing shelter for over 1,300 IDPs. Its non-profit model also relies on pro bono support from architects, lawyers, and volunteers. Municipalities provide buildings and utilities, while humanitarian agencies like People in Need, Polish Aid, Habitat for Humanity, and USAID contribute furnishings and materials.

In 2024, Co-Haty also launched its humanitarian foundation. They completed seven major overhauls between March 2022 and late 2024. The latest project aims to refurbish a former kindergarten in Kalush, Ivano-Frankivsk region and provide housing for IDPs. The team is also working with municipalities to secure a legal framework ensuring these shelters remain part of the social housing system post-war.

KfW–IOM Affordable housing project

The project *“Improving Housing Conditions for IDPs in Eastern Ukraine”* initiated in 2022 is implemented by the IOM in coordination with Ukraine’s Ministry of Reintegration. It supports the government’s aim of delivering durable housing for IDPs, returnees, and veterans, complementing state efforts such as youth housing loans and reconstruction grants. Activities span Zakarpattia, Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, Vinnytsia, Chernivtsi, Khmelnytskyi, and Kyiv oblasts (KfW, 2022).

Funded by Germany through KfW27 Development Bank, the project represents an international–national partnership. An initial EUR 30 million grant launched the construction of around 1,800 housing units for at least 5,400 IDPs. This formed part of a larger EUR 170 million+ KfW package supporting IDP housing (KfW, 2024). Ukrainian authorities contributed in-kind support by identifying buildings and land, and facilitating utility connections. Private contractors are engaged via IOM’s procurement, though delivery remains publicly funded and non-profit.

So far, the project has restored 27 residential buildings (housing around 1,000 people) through energy-efficient repairs, and is developing eight more sites for 800 IDPs.

59 For instance, according to a Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated April 29, 2022, No. 495, “Some Measures for the Formation of Housing Funds Intended for the Temporary Residence of Internally Displaced Persons”.

60 These are the cities in the programme “Housing for Internally Displaced Persons and Reconstruction of Liberated Cities in Ukraine”. Cost: EUR 19.0 million for investments in housing.

61 These are the cities in the programme ‘EU Support to Urgent Housing Needs for IDPs in Ukraine’. Cost: EUR 82.6 million for investments in housing.

Implementing housing across multiple municipalities during wartime has posed major challenges. Security risks and infrastructure damage delayed works, while inflation drove up construction costs. In response, the project adopted a flexible approach: if one site was blocked by conflict, activity shifted to safer areas, and modular or prefab designs were used to speed up delivery.

UNECE Initiatives in Mykolaiv and Kharkiv

The UN4Kharkiv and UN4Mykolaiv projects harness the influence of international organisations, experts, and local governments to plan for resilience. A key objective is integrating social and affordable housing into broader urban recovery plans. The projects also support policy reform, UNECE supports the process of drafting national housing legislation (UN Ukraine, 2024). These aim to enable large-scale social and affordable housing by modernising outdated, ownership-focused regulations. Embedding social rental housing in law lays the foundation for cities like Kharkiv and Mykolaiv to grow their social housing portfolios.

UN4UkrainianCities provides technical assistance and planning support, rather than direct construction funding. Financed mainly by the German government through GIZ and delivered by UNECE with local partners, its USD 5 million budget funds expert consultancy, planning studies, and pilot design work. Kharkiv and Mykolaiv city governments provide staff time and local insights, while capital investments are expected from international financial institutions or public-private partnerships.

Both cities now have draft 'master plans', with land and resources allocations for affordable housing included, along with a pilot social rental schemes and retrofitting Soviet-era blocks.

UNECE coordinated international planners and local governments while security remained unstable. Damage assessments and consultations were conducted remotely or during brief lulls in fighting. A further challenge was aligning visionary proposals — such as the Norman Foster Foundation's concept for Kharkiv — with practical, 'build back better' goals on the ground.

THEMATIC PAPER

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