

REFUGEE CRISIS CAUSED BY THE WAR IN UKRAINE

An expert from UIC Barcelona poses a long-term and inclusive strategy for the urban placement of Ukrainian refugees

The assistant director of the UIC Barcelona School of Architecture, Carmen Mendoza-Arroyo, holds that the situation requires a “positive sociocultural process” that promotes their integration into cities.

According to this expert in emergency architecture, what is most critical at this time is to guarantee people’s wellbeing and ensure that the makeshift camps do not become a long-term solution.

She cites Germany as an example, which decided to implement a decentralised housing model by districts, encouraging the integration and adaptation of those refugees who have arrived since 2015.

Barcelona, xxx April 2022.- According to the assistant director of the UIC Barcelona School of Architecture, Carmen Mendoza-Arroyo, Europe must commit to an inclusive and sustainable model for receiving refugees from the war in Ukraine that enables these displaced people to resolve their flight situation and live “as normal a life as possible.” This expert in strategies for the urban integration of displaced people and refugees recalls that, according to the UNHCR, conflicts last an average of over 11 years, meaning that the “perspective must be long-term, not temporary.”

With regards to the makeshift camps that have sprung up in countries on the border with Ukraine, such as Romania and Slovakia, Carmen Mendoza-Arroyo asks that they not be viewed as long-term solutions, but as a response to a temporary emergency situation. “Unfortunately, in recent years, we have seen refugee camps on certain European borders become veritable detention camps, generating inhumane situations which fail to comply with minimum living conditions,” she denounces.

According to this expert, the situation calls for a “positive sociocultural process” that takes into account location factors that promote these people’s urban integration, such as, for instance, easy connections to facilities (schools and health centres), public spaces and transportation systems, and which ensure that the homes are distributed as broadly as possible throughout the cities’ districts to avoid creating ghettos.

“In Europe, the country that accepted the greatest number of refugees during the war in Syria was Germany, whose policies differed by state, city and district. However, on the whole, it decided to implement a decentralised housing model by district for refugees, which encouraged their integration and adaptation,” she exemplifies.

Permanent housing solutions

Based on her line of academic research, Carmen Mendoza-Arroyo is committed to finding permanent solutions and homes for refugees. “We are studying alternative housing programmes that range from the assignment of flats to participation in home financing schemes, land entitlement and protection against discrimination,” she explains.

Press release

According to this expert, the inclusion of refugees into new urban environments is strongly influenced by the context and social mix, and, as a result, “efforts must be made to give these people the opportunity to receive language classes and learn about local cultures, as well as ensure access to employment and social and health services.”

The ongoing crises

According to Carmen Mendoza-Arroyo, while it is good news that the European Union has activated the Temporary Protection Directive in the face of the refugee crisis triggered by the war in Ukraine, there are still thousands of refugees from other conflicts who remain stuck at Europe’s borders and are yet to be given a solution. “A great deal of problems would be solved if all asylum seekers were treated equally. The Syrian refugee crisis continues to exist, and, today, thousands of internally displaced people and asylum seekers remain in refugee camps along the borders and are unable to enter Europe,” she asserts.

“From the point of view of placement, the important thing is to respect all people’s right to asylum, irrespective of race, religion or country of origin, and provide reception or temporary placement solutions that ensure their wellbeing,” she concludes.

About Carmen Mendoza-Arroyo

Carmen Mendoza-Arroyo is the assistant director of International Relations at the UIC Barcelona School of Architecture and, for over ten years, has directed the Official Master’s Degree in International Cooperation: Sustainable Emergency Architecture. She combines teaching with research on methodologies that incorporate community participation into urban regeneration projects. Her most recent research focuses on reconstruction and resilience in the field of emergency architecture, as well as the development of urban integration strategies for displaced people and refugees.

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