

# City of Refuge? Housing integration and multilevel governance of asylum in Barcelona<sup>1</sup>

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In recent years, Barcelona has made a concerted effort to cultivate an international reputation as a welcoming city for refugees and asylum seekers. Following massive social mobilisations under the slogan *We Want to Welcome*, the municipal government implemented its City of Refuge programme with the hope that other cities and higher levels of public administration would follow suit and meet Spain's largely unfulfilled hosting requirements. However, efforts to accommodate refugees are taking place in a problematic context. Following the housing crash of the late 2000s, there has been a generalised shortage of affordable urban housing that particularly affects low-income households. Moreover, Spain's uneven recovery from the global economic crisis has been characterised by the proliferation of low-wage, precarious work and the persistence of high structural unemployment in even its best-performing cities. Finally, highly centralised while at the same time externalised asylum seekers' accommodation policies leave regional and local administrations out of the governance of asylum, despite being most affected by its malfunctioning. This lack of coordination and spaces for dialogue between administrative levels is further exacerbated by the conflict over Catalonia's right to self-determination.

To analyse the impact of the above-mentioned challenges on the housing integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Barcelona, we adopt a mixed-methods approach. Using semi-structured interviews (with policymakers, representatives of NGOs implementing accommodation policies and asylum seekers themselves) and quantitative results from the CASASIL Survey on Refugee Housing Conditions, we examine the dynamics of differential inclusion (such as residential segregation and housing exclusion) and discuss their relationship with housing and asylum policies in a particularly conflictive context of multilevel governance.

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