

Housing is Not a Side Issue

A note from the June 2026 Global Refugee Accommodation Working Group meeting

GRAWG convened a side meeting this June alongside the annual Consultations on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways in Geneva, Switzerland.

The conversation brought together government representatives, municipalities, NGOs, and practitioners from across several regions. What emerged was a straightforward but often overlooked point: housing is one of the conditions that determines whether those systems work in practice.

A common set of pressures

The specific difficulties differ by country and by community, but their shape does not. Participants pointed repeatedly to tight housing markets, uneven local capacity, gaps in policy, and a persistent disconnect between what is prioritized nationally and what is actually feasible on the ground. Wherever the discussion started, it tended to arrive in the same place.

What is helping

Several approaches were raised as genuinely useful, with the understanding that each is only part of a broader response and/or solution:

- Interim and modular accommodation, including the use of public land and assets
- Local coordination networks that link government, civil society, and business
- Sustained engagement with landlords and property managers
- Community-based support, including the role of diaspora networks
- Better use of underused public, private, and community property

The consistent caveat was that no single model carries the weight on its own. What works tends to be a combination, adapted to local conditions.

Connecting policy to local experience

The most practical thread running through the discussion concerned the distance between policy conversations and local practice. Municipalities, civil society organizations, landlords, diaspora communities, and people with direct experience of the housing search all hold knowledge that very rarely reaches the tables where decisions are made. Closing that gap was treated less as a matter of consultation than as a condition for designing anything that works.

Where this goes next

There was a clear sense that global exchange has real value when it is tied to practical action rather than to reporting alone. Participants expressed interest in deepening collaboration across contexts, bringing decision makers more directly into the conversation, and concentrating over the next one to two years on feasible measures that improve affordability, access, safety, and support for those facing the steepest housing barriers.

GRAWG's role going forward is twofold: to keep refugee housing visible on policy agendas where it is too easily treated as a secondary concern, and to help translate promising local practice into learnings that others can adapt to their own conditions.

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