



SUMMARY

Green Social Housing Lessons from Vienna

June 2025

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Climate &
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Vienna is the global capital of social housing.

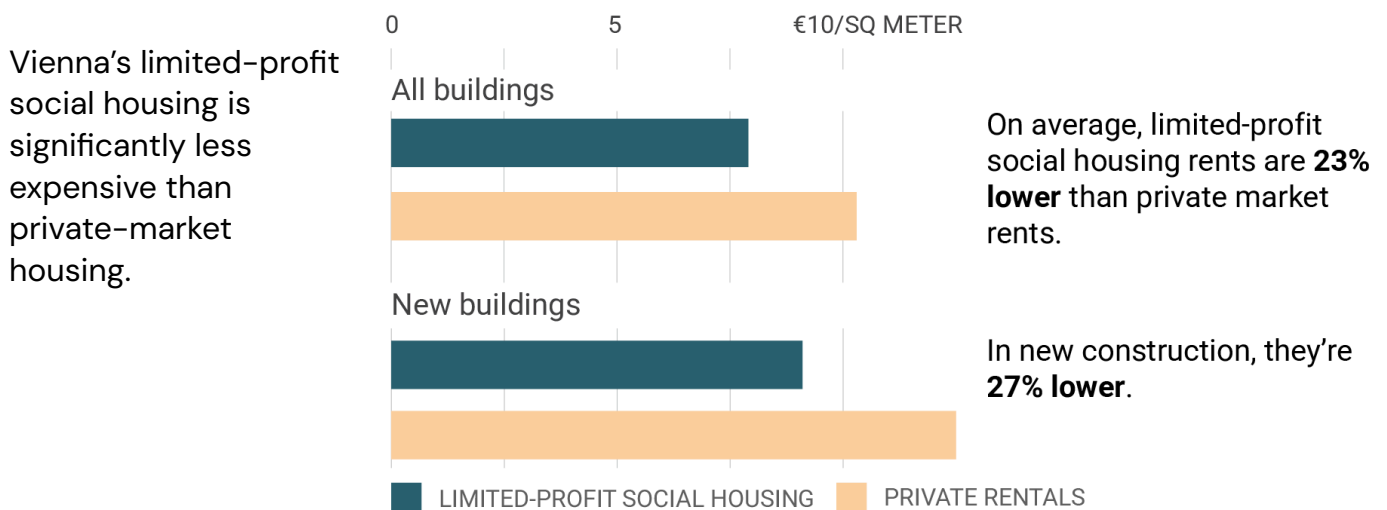
Over 40 percent of the city's housing units are social housing, providing permanently affordable, publicly subsidized, climate resilient homes for the majority of the city's renters. Vienna is regularly ranked as the world's most livable city and, as the city's population has grown over the past two decades, it has continued to build affordable, beautiful housing, where doctors live next to janitors and grandparents live down the street from their grandkids in homes that are energy efficient.

Our research outlines the key features of Vienna's green social housing system, and emphasizes its lessons for the US context. Vienna's municipal green social housing system provides an example of how, in the context of a conservative national government, states and cities can still take bold action to tackle the housing and climate crises together.

Today, Vienna's social housing shelters residents from both real estate speculation and climate breakdown. Four strengths of Vienna's green social housing model stand out:

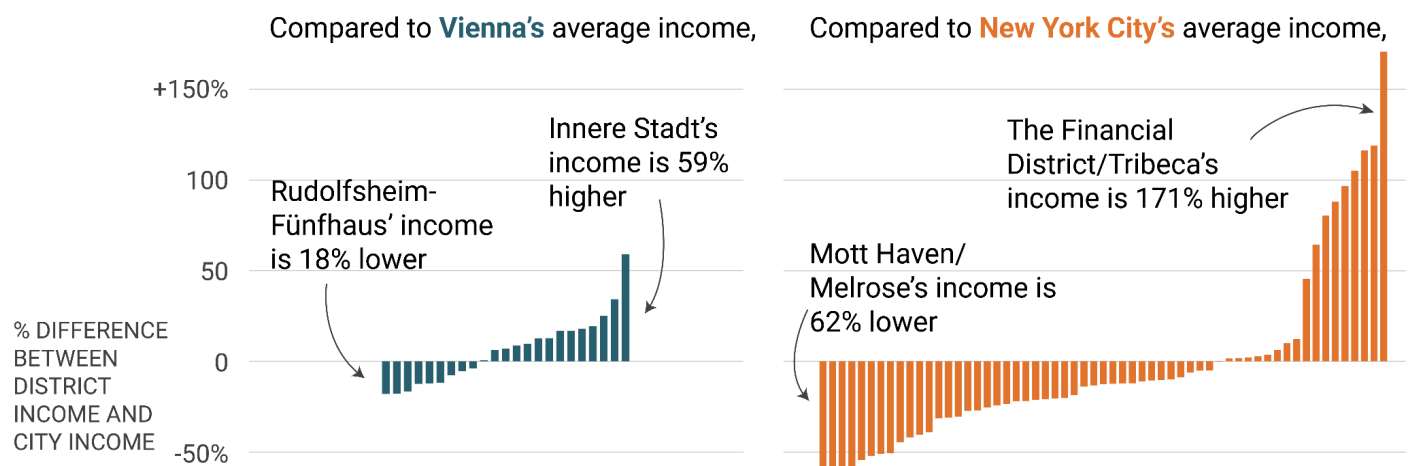
1. Green social housing ensures permanently affordable housing for a range of residents.

Thanks to a large supply of both municipally owned and “limited-profit” social housing and strong rent regulations, Vienna is able to provide permanently affordable, high-quality homes to households earning a broad mix of incomes. Overall, in 2023, the average rent per square meter in Vienna was €10.5, by far the lowest rate among major cities in Western Europe.



Source: Climate and Community Institute, adapted from Austrian Federation of Limited Profit Housing Associations (2022)

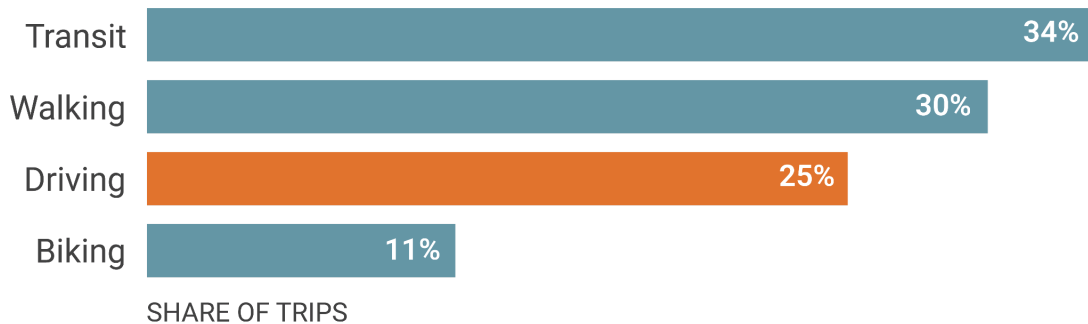
In Vienna, social housing is spatially distributed throughout the city, anchoring relative spatial equity. Thanks to its social housing and related policies, Vienna has a far more equitable distribution of income across neighborhoods than New York.



Sources: Climate and Community Institute, using data from City of Vienna (2024), NYC Department of City Planning (2023), Census ACS (2023)

2. Livable, inclusive, and sustainable communities are created by comprehensive planning and anchored in social housing.

The city's social housing anchors a progressive urban planning regime that has emphasized sustainability, gender equity, low-carbon mobility, and other public goods.



Source: Climate and Community Institute, adapted from Christoph Engelmaier (2025)

3. Green social housing provides a foundation of climate action.

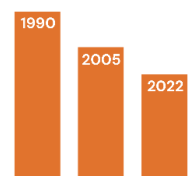
Vienna shows how public ownership and regulation, a strong civil service, and a hefty social housing sector can accelerate climate action.

“Developers’ competitions in subsidized housing sector drive social innovations and new solutions for mitigating and adapting to climate change—especially greening measures.

City of Vienna Climate Guide (2022)

As of 2024, there were **80** retrofit and upgrade projects underway in Vienna’s social housing, representing **€800 million** of investment.

Since 1990, Vienna has cut heat-trapping carbon dioxide emissions from its largest emitter—its buildings sector— by **37 percent**.



Sources: Climate and Community Institute, using data from Kaja Šeruga (2024) and City of Vienna (2022)

4. Durable political alliances sustain green economic populism over time.

The Social Democratic Party kickstarted the city’s social housing boom over a century ago, and voters have rewarded them with victories in every free election since. Thanks to the social housing’s direct, widespread, and literally tangible social uplift, the city has continued building social housing at scale despite neoliberal pressures, and irrespective of national political swings.