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### How to guarantee adequate reception conditions of asylum seekers? A homeless service providers' perspective

The European Union has been facing a serious humanitarian crisis that concerns hundreds of thousands asylum seekers who escape from conflicts and risk their lives to get to a safe place. Already in 2014, the total number of asylum applicants was 626 000, the highest number since 1992 and that marked an increase of almost 195 000 applicants in relation to the year before. This was in part due to a considerably higher number of applicants from Syria, Eritrea, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Ukraine.<sup>1</sup> According to Eurostat, the number of first time asylum applicants increased by 85 % in the second quarter of 2015 compared with the same quarter of the previous year and 15 % compared to the previous quarter of 2015. In the third quarter, the number increased by more than 150 % compared with the same quarter of 2014 and almost doubled compared with the second quarter of 2015. Overall, the number of persons seeking asylum from non-EU countries in the EU-28 during the third quarter of 2015 reached 413 800 and this was 250 400 more than in the same quarter of 2014.<sup>2</sup> In reality, the numbers are even higher. Only in Germany, according to its interior ministry, 1.1 million asylum seekers were registered in 2015, with Syrians making up almost 40 percent of arrivals.<sup>3</sup> Greece registered more than 700,000 people having crossed over in 2015 from nearby Turkey.<sup>4</sup>

A number of standards for the reception of asylum applicants are provided in EU law. Besides ensuring proper information, family unit, education of minors, access to the labour market no later than 9 months from the start of the application procedure and access to health care, a set of material reception conditions should be implemented in order to prevent asylum seekers from living in inadequate housing and sleeping rough. Indeed, not only accommodation must be available but it has also to ensure an adequate standard of living which should be provided in specific premises, accommodation centres or private houses, in flats or in hotels.

In order to provide the accommodation and basic services described above, public authorities of several EU Member States rely on homeless service providers, which are often under pressure because they are unable to guarantee the necessary number of beds and quality of services. In countries such as Romania, emergency shelters for homeless people are not available at all in certain regions. These aspects make it even more difficult to cover the basic needs of persons entering the country. Moreover, getting the status of refugee does not necessarily mean applicants no longer risk being on the streets: besides the structural lack of adequate housing, refugees generally have to leave within a short time the accommodation provided during the asylum procedure and because of lack of sufficient resources to pay a rental guarantee and discrimination in the private rental market, they are vulnerable to homelessness. Those whose asylum application are refused and end up residing irregularly are in an even worse situation and low threshold services are often their only recourse, if national

<sup>1</sup>Eurostat Asylum Statistics [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum\\_statistics](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum_statistics)

<sup>2</sup>Eurostat Asylum Quarterly Report [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum\\_quarterly\\_report](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum_quarterly_report)

<sup>3</sup>Wall Street Journal, *Record Number of Asylum Seekers Flood Germany* <http://www.wsj.com/articles/germany-records-rise-in-asylum-seekers-to-postwar-high-1452081246>

<sup>4</sup>Associated Press, <http://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/latest-greeks-recover-migrants-body-3-still-missing>



**FEANTSA**

## Policy Statement

**European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless**

Chaussée de Louvain, 194, 1210 Brussels - Belgium

Tel: +32 2 538 66 69 | [information@feantsa.org](mailto:information@feantsa.org)

[www.feantsa.org](http://www.feantsa.org) | @FEANTSA

legislation allows it. Homeless services therefore are one of the main providers, not only during the asylum procedure but also at the end of it.

In its migration packages, the European Commission does not foresee any measure to strengthen the capability of reception services and that leaves homeless structures unable to protect people who are in urgent and serious need. Capacity limits push service providers to rely on emergency solutions such as tents and containers, which do not allow for adequate living and raise significant ethical issues. Moreover, a lack of resources and effective strategies can lead to a downward spiral that lowers the quality standards of services provided, meaning for instance, the acceptance of overcrowding, too high client-to-user ratios or accommodation provided in emergency shelter tents.

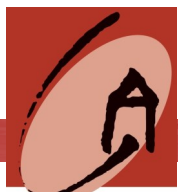
According to the reception conditions directive, persons working in accommodation centres should be adequately trained but this does not often happen. Homeless services that provide accommodation to asylum applicants in many cases do not have necessary intercultural skills as well as legal competence and human resources to deal with sufferers of traumatic experiences

Even without the current humanitarian crisis, it is well understood that structural problems in MS' housing markets generate housing exclusion amongst people facing poverty and/or social exclusion. 40% of poor people in the EU experience housing cost overburden, meaning that they spend more than 40% of their income on housing. Depending on the country, poor people are 4 to 20 times more likely to experience this than others.<sup>5</sup> The humanitarian reception crisis further adds to the urgency of addressing this. In the medium-term, pressure on housing markets is set to increase. Structural challenges vary between Member States but include a lack of affordable supply – particularly in growing urban centres and a stock of inadequate quality and regulatory contexts that fail to ensure adequate security of tenure to vulnerable people. Solving these problems would have a significant positive impact, not only on newcomers but also on those who have already been facing homelessness and housing exclusion in the EU. Failure to properly plan for and address these emerging housing needs will compound existing problems. Moreover, by addressing structural housing problems, the EU could develop a long-term strategy that would help avoiding other humanitarian crises in the future.

Therefore FEANTSA calls on the EU to:

- Acknowledge the important role played by the homeless sector in providing accommodation and other basic services to asylum applicants, to refugees as well as to those whose asylum application is refused.
- Involve the homeless sector in the development of asylum and migration policies since the homeless sector has a specific knowledge of how to plan for the reception of people in urgent need.
- Invest in reception capacity to prevent newcomers from becoming roofless and to improve quality of services,

<sup>5</sup>FAP and FEANTSA (2015) An Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe 2015, available at <http://www.feantsa.org/spip.php?rubrique171&lang=en>



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thus to ensure adequate living standards

- Acknowledge that migration policies based only on expulsions and voluntary returns will not solve irregular migration. To develop an effective migration strategy it is necessary to provide legal ways to access residence rights can a migration strategy can be effective in the long-term.
- Develop policies and instruments to support investment in affordable and quality housing, including for asylum seekers and refugees
- Not criminalise service providers that support irregularly residing migrants
- Set-up measures aimed at accompanying new refugees in their access to housing and generally in the integration into the host country.

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