

June 2022

Summary of the workshop 'Housing for migrants and asylum seekers during crisis periods'

FEANTSA Policy Conference 2022, held in Dublin on the 3rd of June 2022

This workshop discussed the access to housing for migrants and asylum seekers, including schemes designed and delivered by governments, as well as support solutions identified by civil society organisations. It focused on access to accommodation after the COVID-19 lockdowns and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which led to many individuals fleeing the war and looking for safety in Europe. Against the backdrop of a global health crisis in which housing plays a crucial role and an ongoing war which has led to millions of people being displaced, identifying solutions and policies that ensure adequate accommodation for all is not only timely, but extremely important. The presentations and discussions from this workshop aim at contributing to this goal.

Part 1: Presentations from speakers

Lidia Estévez, Rough Sleeping Migration Manager at the Greater London Authority (GLA)

This presentation focused on the implementation of the 'Everyone In' scheme in London and other measures taken by the GLA since then to support migrants living in homelessness. The 'Everyone In' scheme, put in place in March 2020, consisted in using commercial hotels as self-contained accommodation for people who were previously sleeping rough or staying in shelters or hostels. The aim was to prevent them from contracting COVID-19. A remarkable feature of this scheme was that everyone was accepted regardless of their immigration status. This meant that it was the first time for many migrants with unclear immigration status that they were offered direct housing support.

The scheme unveiled the high numbers of non-UK nationals in need of accommodation and legal advice regarding their immigration status. It also resulted in an unprecedented collaboration among all levels of government and the charity sector, proving that outcomes for this cohort are possible when the right support is available. The exceptional funding for the 'Everyone In' scheme has ended; therefore, as a next step, mitigation measures and new support options are being implemented to continue supporting non-UK nationals with unclear or limited entitlements to find routes out of homelessness. Finally, the three key factors needed to end rough sleeping among migrants in London were highlighted: immigration advice, specialist support and accommodation.

Mauro Striano, Street worker with Infirmiers de Rue, Brussels

Infirmiers de Rue is a sociomedical organisation working to increase access to hygiene measures and health services for people living in homelessness, as an entry to housing. The organisation works with an outreach team and a housing department and is one of the five Housing First providers in Brussels. For migrants living in homelessness, housing solutions are offered through social rental agencies and social housing providers.

In Belgium, possessing a residence permit proves to be crucial: for those third-country nationals and mobile EU citizens without it, emergency accommodation is the only available option. Therefore, regularisation is the key to accessing independent housing. During the COVID-19 pandemic, hotel rooms were used to accommodate people experiencing homelessness (at least 800 in June 2020) with a low-threshold access: no income or residence permit were required, which meant that it was accessible to migrants residing in Brussels irregularly. However, migrants could not regularise their status since it was not possible to register using the address of the hotels, making it difficult for people to access social rights once this scheme came to an end.

In Brussels, two different solutions for migrants in irregular situations were recently tested. The first one is transit housing, such as the one offered under the '[Issue](#)' project, which targets, among others, beneficiaries with no

income, including mobile EU citizens and third-country nationals with no residence permit. The second solution consists in modular housing with low rent. However, these solutions remain inaccessible to people who have different kinds of vulnerabilities and do not qualify for them in any of the existing categories under EU free movement or migration laws, making it difficult for them to exit homelessness.

Katarzyna Przybylska, Senior Advocacy Manager at Habitat for Humanity, Poland

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, an estimated number of 3.5 million refugees have entered Poland, and it is projected that by December 2.6 million will still be in Poland.

Even before the war Poland was facing difficulties in the housing domain, which were exacerbated after the arrival of refugees. Compared to the previous year, rents increased by 20% in Wrocław and by 10.5% in Warsaw, while the number of rental offers decreased by 60% in most major Polish cities.

To fight against these housing limitations, Habitat for Humanity-Poland advocates for: a) unlocking existing housing stock, given that 12.1% of apartments in Poland are vacant (according to a census from 2021); b) developing social rental agencies; c) building new housing stock for non-profit developers in a faster way; d) increasing affordability, e.g., through housing allowances. Projects under options a) and b) are available for Ukrainian refugees receiving support from Habitat for Humanity, with 103 people being accommodated through the social rental programme. In addition, the organisation manages hostel and hotel rooms, which more than 400 people avail of, and it matched over 700 people with host families in Warsaw.

Part 2: Break out groups and discussions among participants

During the second part of the workshop, participants were split into three groups to discuss the following guiding questions among themselves: 1) what type of support solutions have been identified in your countries by civil society organisations and governments specifically for migrants and asylum seekers during the pandemic and the war in Ukraine?; 2) how can you ensure access to adequate housing for all and what key findings or lessons learned in the past several years can be used?

Considering that many of the participants were Irish nationals, a discussion took place about the 'Direct Provision' system, implemented in Ireland to support asylum seekers with basic needs and services (inc. accommodation) while the international protection applications are being processed. Attendees concluded that the emergency response that has remained in place in Ireland after the pandemic is far from ideal, with substandard accommodation.

Regarding this system, participants formulated the recommendation that an integrated approach is needed, including psychological help. They also found it important to increase the housing availability and the social support that migrants in destitution receive in Ireland, especially among asylum seekers.

Regarding measures that could be implemented across Europe to better support migrants and asylum seekers experiencing homelessness, attendees highlighted the following ones:

- Doing case work, including interpretation, networking and advocacy, as well as individual support.
- Advocating for the right to long-term support, involving national and local authorities to influence new policies and procedures.
- Performing adequate needs assessments to look for potential existing solutions to housing.
- Ensuring that migrants in need are not excluded from new initiatives that are addressed to the mainstream population.

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