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The state of emergency shelters in Europe

By **Chloé Serme-Morin**, *FEANTSA*

According to FEANTSA & Foundation Abbé Pierre estimations in their 4th Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe, at least 700,000 homeless people are sleeping rough or in emergency/temporary accommodation on one night in the European Union. It is an increase of 70% compared to ten years ago.

Over the last ten years, the number of homeless people has increased at an alarming rate in almost all European Union countries: broadly speaking, this increase has led to the explosion in the number of people needing emergency shelter. In Italy in 2016, 75% of homeless people were permitted access to emergency accommodation. In Ireland, between February 2015 and February 2018, the number of homeless people in emergency accommodation financed by the State increased by 151% and by 300% for children. 9,968 people (6,157 adults and 3,811 children) were in emergency accommodation in November 2018. In Spain, the number of people taken into emergency and temporary accommodation centres each day on average increased by 20.5% between 2014 and 2016, reaching 16,437 people in 2016. In Poland, according to a flash survey carried out in February 2017 by the Polish Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, 26,900 people were counted in emergency or temporary accommodation (ETHOS 2.1 and 3.1). The number of beds in emergency accommodation increased slightly from 22,529 beds in 2010 to 23,589 beds in 2016. On the other hand, in the United Kingdom and in France, where the traditional emergency accommodation system is completely oversubscribed, local stakeholders and associations have increasingly had to resort to costly and highly insecure solutions to provide emergency shelter to homeless people: renting rooms in hotels, B&Bs and apartments on the private rental market on a very short-term basis. In France, 101,826 places were open and financed in emergency accommodation on 31 December 2017. Within these emergency places, hotel accommodation has seen the highest increase from about 13,900 places in 2010 to more than 45,000 places in 2017 i.e. an increase of 224% in seven years. In England, on 30 June 2018, 82,310 households were placed in temporary accommodation, i.e. an increase of 71% since December 2010.

The shortage of decent and truly affordable housing available for all, combined with the saturation of temporary and emergency accommodation services, are at the core of the housing exclusion scandal in Europe.

Our 4th Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe shows that although the right to shelter is supposed to be a fundamental right, access to emergency

accommodation in Europe remains genuinely conditional. The conditionality of access to emergency accommodation is mainly demonstrated in the way the public response is structured to deal with homelessness: seasonal management that responds to weather conditions, which undermines the need to adopt continuous strategies in the fight against homelessness. Access to emergency accommodation is also determined by a difficult admission process, where multiple selection and prioritisation criteria limit access and exemplify the selectiveness of the right to accommodation.

Emergency accommodation services, in the sense of temporary accommodation infrastructures taking in people who need emergency shelter, covers a multitude of realities in Europe. This is the case not only in terms of status and funding, but also regarding the services offered, the conditions of access and the quality. The following articles help us understand those different realities. Francesca Albanese from Crisis presents the element of intentionality in the homelessness system across Great Britain, which adds unnecessary conditionality and judgement on individuals who are often seeking help as a last resort. Marjolijn van Zeeland from Stichting De Tussenvoorziening describes the ways in and out of shelters in the Netherlands, and how to guarantee dignified, meaningful and independent living conditions to users. Mauro Striano from FEANTSA compares several national legal frameworks in Europe to scope out the level of access to shelters for irregular migrants, highlighting the fact that emergency accommodation is a matter of life or death. He advocates for the European Union to urgently adopt a common framework providing a minimum set of rights, including access to shelter, for all, regardless of their administrative status. Jakub Wilczek, from the Polish National Federation for Solving the Problem of Homelessness, explains how the recent homeless services reform in Poland have had a significant impact on the entire homeless support in the country and on the unconditional right to emergency shelter. Preben Brandt, from the Project OUTSIDE Fund, takes us on a tour of the Danish shelter system. Finally, Javier Prieto from Saint John of God Social Services Barcelona argues why we must propose a future without shelters.

Emergency accommodation is indeed a short-term solution, therefore unsuited to long term needs. Emergency accommodation in its rightful place must become a short-term transition service, accessible to all, and a platform for redirecting people to appropriate solutions. The inability of emergency services to reduce homelessness is a global failure of public policies to prevent situations of extreme insecurity and the loss of one's home.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We would like to give you the chance to comment on any of the articles which have appeared in this issue. If you would like to share your ideas, thoughts and feedback, please send an email to the editor, laura.rahman@feantsa.org

The articles in *Homeless in Europe* do not necessarily reflect the views of FEANTSA. Extracts from this publication can be quoted as long as the sources are acknowledged.