

The unprovoked Russian aggression in Ukraine and consequently the resulting high number of exiled people searching for protection in Europe are very closely linked to homelessness. Since the entry of the Russian army into Ukraine on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February 2022, at least 12 million people have fled their homes, with over 5 million arriving in neighbouring countries. While we are still in the process of taking stock of the war's impact on homelessness, both in Ukraine and in Europe, this issue of the 'Homeless in Europe' magazine contributes to a better understanding of the current situation.

The devastating situation in which innocent people have been thrown has sparked unprecedented and unconditional waves of solidarity from EU private citizens everywhere, but especially in the neighbouring countries. Governments and the European Commission have put forward new legislation and measures to facilitate entry for people in search of protection and their access to social rights. For this purpose, for the first time since it was adopted, the [Temporary Protection Directive](#) (TPD) was triggered by the EU. Funding was also announced from the EU and special guidance was established to support MS in receiving, guiding and integrating the newcomers, including for access to housing. A recent guidance published by the EC addresses the topic of housing under the [Safe Homes Initiative](#).

The contributions to this summer's edition of our 'Homeless in Europe' magazine illustrate the **importance of having safe housing in a time of crisis** and the consequences of its lack. As Isaura, the young Roma refugee, put it: "People need to have accommodation to stay in (...)". The changes that service providers have made in their offers to ensure accommodation for refugees underline the same imperative need, as do the dangers that women or people with disabilities are risking when their accommodation is insecure and not adapted to their needs. These and more issues are detailed in this edition.

The destructions caused by the Russian forces have led to **new groups of people in homelessness** within Ukraine, such as international students who became trapped in a war zone in a foreign country. It can also be argued that every individual in Ukraine is at risk of or experiencing homelessness. In an article from Depaul Ukraine we learn about their work with people in homelessness and marginalisation in Ukraine since 2007, how they adapted their services first after the 2014 conflict, and now in response to the full-scale invasion of February 2022. Many members of Depaul Ukraine became homeless themselves overnight and some colleagues are displaced or have lost their homes to shelling.

The **crucial role of homelessness service providers in welcoming refugees** has been particularly observed in the neighbouring countries of Ukraine, such as Poland, which also holds a big Ukrainian diaspora. The Polish Foundation for Activation and Integration (FAI) started their

# EDITORIAL



By **Simona Barbu**, Policy Officer at FEANTSA

work with the conviction that the most needed form of support for refugees is providing long-term, comprehensive housing support with individualised social services. Refurbishing of previously uninhabitable premises was combined with administering apartments provided by private persons. BMSZKI, the largest homelessness service provider in Budapest, opened two centres in February 2022 to host refugees from Ukraine. Initially, the centres were set up as first reception centres, offering accommodation for a few nights; as longer stays were needed, BMSZKI extended their offers and transformed their night shelters for people experiencing homelessness to accommodate families and children.

Within Member States and the UK, the issue of **differential treatment** between refugees with Ukrainian nationality and non-EU refugees comes across as one of the most troubling aspects, including in the area of access to accommodation. The Greek Housing Network discusses the differences between the reception and integration of asylum seekers arriving from countries such as Yemen, Syria, Congo, Somalia and the recent influx of people in search of protection arriving from Ukraine. Among other differences in treatment, we learn how, in the summer of 2021, three-meter walls were built around the existing camps in Greece for “people’s protection”. The Greek response to the Ukrainians has been overwhelmingly positive, publicly acknowledging them to be the “real” refugees. The Salvation Army underlines this issue in France as well, by describing the much simpler and direct route to protection for those with Ukrainian nationality, with easier access to rights and considerably sped up processing times for applications. The argument coined is that “the resources put in place and the way they were rolled out to welcome people coming from Ukraine should be the norm all the time and not the exception”.

In a post-Brexit UK, the TPD provisions do not apply but the United Nations Refugee convention remains in place. However, Ukrainian asylum seekers were explicitly told by the UK government not to come without a visa, though this requirement circumvents the UK asylum system and does not uphold the UN Refugee convention. The UK piece discusses this process as well as the fundamental differences between ‘Homes for Ukraine’ and the Hosting projects where a differential treatment appears as well. We also learn about various scenarios in which Ukrainian refugees could become homeless in the UK under the current asylum provisions.

Beyond the issue of differential treatment of refugees, **discrimination against people belonging to minorities coming from Ukraine** has been observed. This leads to denied support during a war for those who are in the most vulnerable situations. People with disabilities face a variety of new challenges when trying to escape the war and the lack of accessibility, information, and consideration when designing support made it almost impossible to receive care in a war zone. Refusals to evacuate people and no effort to reach out to disability organisations or families to distribute help are reported. The discrimination experienced by Roma in Ukraine extends also during the war, leaving people in such difficult situations that some chose to return to war-torn Ukraine to escape racism: “There were also people who wanted us to help them return to Ukraine because they could not stand the living conditions they were staying in here anymore, sometimes in gym rooms with many others, or because they faced discrimination from the state and asked us to help them return to Ukraine.” reports Isaura, a Roma refugee herself, in an interview given to FEANTSA.



In times of war, **women and girls** are particularly vulnerable and disproportionately impacted, which is why the European Women's Lobby calls for effectively guaranteeing women's rights. Horrid risks appear for women during wartime, particularly regarding sexual exploitation, the use of violence and rape and looming threats of trafficking into prostitution or abduction.

Another consequence of the war is that **energy prices** have increased, which affects all households, including homelessness service providers. FEANTSA colleagues explore how our members have been affected. Among measures adopted we can read about deep retrofitting, renovation work, upgrades in the heating system, installing photovoltaic panels or replacing heating systems with a pellet-fuelled system. These come at a cost and funding is an issue – to make savings shelters reduce their services (e.g.: no use of electric kettles or cooking machines) and some consider introducing additional charges on residents while seeking external sponsorship.

The Russian aggression in Ukraine has led to the destruction of people's houses within the country and immense efforts will be needed to reconstruct Ukrainian homes. Our duty meanwhile is to work relentlessly to support people until they can settle, either in a new country or back home once the war ends. Among **persisting needs underlined in the articles of this edition, we recall** the necessity for assistance in financing specialised medical services, to obtain financial assistance that will secure the key service for all refugees whose income does not allow to pay rent or utilities in rented apartments; fight discrimination against Roma and consider Romani language when developing information resources and especially hiring Roma

in the reception structures for asylum seekers; providing accessible housing for people with disabilities, preventing segregation in “care homes”, as well as eventual homelessness; issue political and policy guidelines to Member States on the provision of services to women and girls in transit and as refugees in EU host countries. The stringent need for improved access to funding for NGOs and the need for higher involvement of governments in managing the reception of asylum seekers and further support need to be addressed.

After the COVID-19 pandemic, the crisis determined by the Russian invasion serves once again to prove that the capacity to support refugees within Europe is a matter of political will and solidarity. We hope that these lessons will be put to good use as the EU moves forward in harmonising and defining its Common European Asylum System.

The EU must also learn from the recent waves of solidarity with the Ukrainian refugees so that we can ensure protection for all people who are searching for safety in Europe. Discrimination and racism must be combated unanimously, and **all refugees should be welcomed** in Europe. We should develop measures to ensure uncontested access to affordable and adequate housing for all, as a gateway to integration in new societies.

FEANTSA would like to thank all the contributors to this issue of the Homeless in Europe Magazine for their time in writing the articles and for their commitment to defending the rights of people experiencing marginalisation and homelessness and who are looking for protection in Europe.

