

Situational Update

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Use of temporary reception structures during the winter season

The provision of accommodation for applicants for international protection is an essential component of an asylum system. The Common European Asylum System (CEAS) is governed by directives and regulations which ensure standards across EU+ countries. The Reception Conditions Directive,¹ in particular, guides Member States on how to ensure fair access to reception provisions.



¹ [Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection \(recast\)](#)



Over the years, EU+ countries have developed various models for reception structures based on changing needs and flows of new arrivals. One solution has been the use of temporary structures (as defined in the Reception Conditions Directive, Article 18(9)), particularly when there is a sudden rise in applicants for international protection. In addition, social distancing and isolation requirements during the COVID-19 pandemic – coupled with an existing lack of reception places in many countries – were instrumental in driving reception authorities to establish a new, immediate reception mechanism as part of contingency plans.² Against this backdrop, national administrations turned to movable structures (such as tents, containers and modular houses) and permanent facilities for a temporary duration (such as hotel rooms, hostels, sport halls, schools and barracks).

Soon after the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic were lifted, EU+ countries faced three additional humanitarian emergencies with the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, the instrumentalisation of migrants by Belarus and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The sudden influx of migrants in countries at the borders with Belarus increased pressure on national asylum and reception systems, especially in countries which do not commonly receive such high numbers of third-country nationals trying to enter their territory. In addition, the arrival of millions of displaced persons from Ukraine added pressure on already-stressed mechanisms, which resulted in overloaded reception systems in most EU+ countries.

To cope with the sharp rise in arrivals, EU+ countries needed additional reception places rapidly. Some countries resorted to already-available resources, while others opened new temporary facilities to shelter applicants for international protection and beneficiaries of temporary protection, before moving them to a more permanent reception or accommodation facility.

The upcoming winter will require countries to adapt their temporary reception systems in order to cope with harsh weather conditions and the higher costs of energy. The winterisation process and improvements to existing solutions will undoubtedly require additional resources and material.

² <https://euaa.europa.eu/asylum-report-2022>, <https://euaa.europa.eu/easo-asylum-report-2021>



Key findings

- ✓ EU+ countries have adapted their temporary reception facilities to address different emerging needs. Structures set up during the COVID-19 pandemic were used in the summer to accommodate people fleeing the war in Ukraine and at times repurposed to receive new flows of applicants for international protection.
- ✓ In practice, two different types of temporary reception structures are used: movable (such as containers, tents and modular houses) and immovable for a temporary duration (such as barracks, schools and sport halls). Immovable facilities may also consist of hotels, motels, student dormitories and private houses or apartments.³
- ✓ The authority in charge of establishing temporary structures is usually different for applicants for international protection and for beneficiaries of temporary protection. Reception authorities take the lead in finding temporary solutions for asylum applicants, while for beneficiaries of temporary protection, the local authority is responsible, supported in certain cases by the Civil Protection Department.
- ✓ Most countries use temporary reception structures to accommodate both applicants for international protection and beneficiaries of temporary protection. This may include vulnerable individuals as a measure of last resort.
- ✓ The majority of temporary reception structures are already set up with heating systems and insulation. Where this is not in place, countries have planned to equip the facilities over the coming weeks for the winter by contracting private or public companies or with the support of international or aid organisations.
- ✓ Only a small number of Member States plan to set up new structures for the winter. The majority of countries have contingency plans in place should the need arise.

³ According to the Reception Conditions Directive, Article 18: Where housing is provided in kind, it should take one or a combination of the following forms:

(a) premises used for the purpose of housing applicants during the examination of an application for international protection made at the border or in transit zones;
(b) accommodation centres which guarantee an adequate standard of living; or
(c) private houses, flats, hotels or other premises adapted for housing applicants.

1. Triggering events



During the refugee crisis in 2015-2016, several countries, such as France, Greece and Italy, set up emergency reception systems to manage the high number of applicants for international protection. These contingency measures became permanent components of current reception systems and are still used today during emergency situations.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, social distancing and isolation measures compelled several countries to adjust capacity in their reception systems in order to increase space. This was observed, for example, in Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Germany and Switzerland.

More recently, the high influx of migrants and refugees arriving from Belarus over 2021 and 2022 required Lithuania to set up containers to accommodate third-country nationals who were crossing the border with Belarus. The containers were gradually dismantled as the needs reduced. Similarly, the Swedish Migration Agency used temporary structures only between March and August 2022 mainly for beneficiaries of temporary protection. Temporary solutions were also established in Croatia, Luxembourg and Sweden to accommodate displaced persons from Ukraine. A severe shortage in reception places led to temporary solutions also in Belgium, Cyprus, Czechia and the Netherlands.

In some federal states in Germany, temporary reception facilities which were essential during the COVID-19 pandemic were used to accommodate displaced persons from Ukraine. Similarly, Switzerland activated its temporary reception during COVID-19 and continued to use the structures to shelter people fleeing the war in Ukraine.

Despite the decrease in the number of people arriving from Ukraine during the summer, some federal states in Germany continued to use temporary structures as the number of asylum seekers sharply increased.

2. Types of temporary structures used by EU+ countries



Despite the increasing number of applicants for international protection, some countries – such as Latvia, Lithuania, Spain and Sweden – are not currently using temporary solutions in their reception systems. All asylum seekers or beneficiaries of temporary protection are accommodated in public or private facilities or centres within the ordinary reception system.

This situation, however, may change depending on migratory patterns. In Spain, for example, there are plans to re-open a temporary centre on the Canary Islands due to the increasing flows,⁴ and Sweden will set up new structures if capacity in permanent structures becomes saturated with future arrivals.

⁴ <https://cadenaser.com/canarias/2022/09/14/el-gobierno-reabrirá-el-centro-de-acogida-de-migrantes-de-las-caneras-en-respuesta-a-la-presión-migratoria-en-canarias-radio-club-tenerife/>



Several countries, however, are currently using temporary reception structures. Belgium, Cyprus, Greece, Malta,⁵ the Netherlands, Poland⁶ and Slovenia have purchased containers to reinforce capacity in their reception systems.

In the framework of operating plans with certain countries, the EUAA provided support to Belgium, Cyprus, Greece, Italy and the Netherlands in setting up modular houses and containers. In Czechia, 100 temporary structures were requested through the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism.

In addition to containers, Austria, Cyprus, and the Netherlands also use tents. This solution is also used in Czechia, Luxembourg and Ireland, where a relatively small number of tents were set up by some municipalities to accommodate beneficiaries of temporary protection. In Romania, tents were used to set up mobile camps in cities at the borders of Ukraine and Moldova.⁷

The use of tents for housing asylum seekers is also an important contingency measure in Norway. While it is not ideal for much of the year due to the climate, using tents allows the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration to increase reception capacity by 3,500 places.

Army barracks and multi-purpose facilities are used in Switzerland. In Croatia, asylum applicants are temporarily accommodated existing facilities, such as hotels, motels, student dormitories, private apartments or sports halls. Venues for indoor sports are also used in Ireland⁸ and the Netherlands to accommodate people fleeing from Ukraine.

For displaced persons from Ukraine in particular, the majority of EU+ authorities operated temporary structures to shelter this group and provide first aid during the initial phase of reception until a more suitable solution was found. This was the case in Belgium,⁹ France,¹⁰ Greece, the Netherlands,¹¹ Norway¹² and Switzerland¹³ (for more information, please refer to the EUAA's [Who is Who in Temporary Protection](#)).

The private sector collaborated with civil society and international organisations to provide temporary accommodation facilities in Cyprus and Czechia,¹⁴ where Refugee Housing Units were provided by the Better Shelter Organization together with UNHCR and IKEA. Czechia received 500 units, 30 of which are currently built, while the rest remains in stock. Poland¹⁵ also benefitted from this project, with some structures established in the south-eastern region of the country.

⁵ <https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/migrants-sleep-outside-as-containers-lack-fans.883345>

⁶ <https://notesfrompoland.com/2022/04/19/poland-launches-container-towns-for-internally-displaced-ukrainians/>

⁷ <https://www.igsu.ro/Media/Stire/2503>

⁸ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/62512-accommodation/>

⁹ <https://info-ukraine.be/fr/aide-en-belgique/jai-besoin-dun-logement>

¹⁰ <https://www.ecologie.gouv.fr/crise-en-ukraine-faq-lattention-des-collectivites-territoriales>

¹¹ <https://ind.nl/en/ukraine/coming-to-the-netherlands-and-reception#emergency-reception-centres-in-the-netherlands>

¹² <https://www.udi.no/aktuelt/nye-avtaler-om-akuttinnkvartering/>

¹³ <https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/fr/home/sem/medien/mm.msg-id-87854.html>

¹⁴ https://bettershelter.org/projects_/2022_unhcr_czechia/

¹⁵ https://bettershelter.org/projects_/2022_unhcr_poland/



Practices in Germany vary depending on the federal state. If temporary reception facilities are in place, heated containers are used together with lightweight halls and tents. These are placed near existing reception premises as movable accommodation in case of emergency situations.

Temporary immovable structures, such as gyms, hotels, hostels, unused commercial properties, former schools and nursing homes, are used in many countries as arrival centres during mass influxes, especially to accommodate individuals fleeing from Ukraine. Luxembourg currently uses rented hotels, modular buildings and private households to accommodate beneficiaries of temporary protection. In Italy, they are accommodated both in the facilities of the national reception system or facilities provided by civil society organisations, solidarity associations, religious bodies or private entities contracted through a public tender launched by the Civil Protection Department.

Different models are in place across EU+ countries to address emergency situations faced by national reception systems. In Italy, for example, applicants for international protection and beneficiaries of temporary protection are accommodated in the so-called 'extraordinary reception centres', which were established in 2015 in response to the EU migration crisis. Since then, these reception centres, consisting mainly of houses and apartments, became a part of the common reception system.

Similarly, France has established emergency reception centres in houses, apartments and hotel rooms as a temporary solution. This measure has been integrated into the French reception system.¹⁶

Greece used a different approach, using movable structures as a long-term solution. Indeed, containers set up years ago for the first line reception provided in the Reception and Identification Centres in the islands are still used.¹⁷

3. Authorities in charge of setting up temporary structures



The authority in charge of setting up temporary structures varies across EU+ countries but can be divided into three main categories: reception authorities, local authorities and civil defence.

During emergency situations, roles may become diversified. For example, different authorities may work in close coordination, with the support of civil society organisations, depending on the profile of persons accommodated and national policies.

Local authorities and municipalities are usually responsible for the establishment of temporary structures for beneficiaries of temporary protection. This is the case in Italy, where prefectures work with the Ministry of the Interior and the Civil Protection Department. In Germany, the different Land's approaches are coordinated at a regional level.

In Czechia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Switzerland, local authorities are supported by the civil defence department (including firefighters and safety networks). The Civil Defence is

¹⁶ <https://www.immigration.interieur.gouv.fr/Asile/Schema-national-d-accueil-des-demandeurs-d-asile-et-d-integration-des-refugies-2021-2023>

¹⁷ [Chios](#), [Lesvos](#), [Samos](#) [Leros](#), [Kos](#) and [Filakio](#) in [Eyros](#)



the main authority in charge of setting up temporary facilities in Cyprus, and they also play a role in Slovenia, where they are supported by the Ministry of Defence.

Reception authorities are responsible for the temporary accommodation of applicants for international protection in Belgium, Greece, Lithuania and Slovakia. In the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland, reception authorities are supported by municipalities.

4. Profiles of people who may be accommodated in temporary reception



Different policies are in place across EU+ countries to determine who is accommodated in temporary facilities. Greece, Slovenia and Slovakia, for example, use temporary reception structures to accommodate both third-country nationals waiting to make an application for international protection and beneficiaries of temporary protection. Similarly, Croatia, Czechia and Luxembourg use temporary structures to accommodate beneficiaries of temporary protection.

Belgium, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands and Switzerland use temporary reception facilities to accommodate applicants for international protection in all stages of the asylum procedure, while, depending on the federal state, Germany uses temporary structures for the above-mentioned profiles, including rejected applicants waiting for repatriation.

Due to emergency situations in 2022, the majority of countries had to use temporary reception structures to also accommodate vulnerable individuals. This is currently the case in Croatia, Italy, Luxembourg, Slovakia, certain regions in Belgium, some federal states in Germany and Switzerland, with the exclusion of unaccompanied minors. Czechia may accommodate vulnerable individuals once the containers are received as long as they are designed to host these profiles.

Only Slovenia does not use temporary structures to accommodate vulnerable individuals. As an exception to the general Dutch standards of reception, in 2022 the Netherlands resorted to temporary structures to shelter unaccompanied minors due to the lack of reception places. Due to the high migratory pressure and the shortage of specialised reception places, unaccompanied minors are accommodated in temporary structures also in Cyprus.

5. Use of temporary structures during the winter season



The unpredictability of humanitarian emergencies may mean that national authorities need to resort to containers, tents or other movable structures to house people seeking protection, even during the winter period. Currently, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Luxembourg, Slovakia, Slovenia and Switzerland plan to use these types of structures in the long term, including the 2022-2023 winter season.

In Italy, existing buildings only are used as a temporary solution, therefore they are already suited for the winter season, in compliance with the housing regulation. This is also the case in other EU+ countries where hotels, apartments and other immovable structures are used as temporary reception facilities. In Switzerland, applicants are accommodated in immovable



structures, while some registrations may take place in tents, which are currently being prepared for the winter season by adding heating.

To equip temporary movable structures for the winter, Slovakia will include window insulation and reconstruct the roof and Slovenia will install a heating system. Cyprus will improve the insulation of the Refugee Housing Units and supply each bed with special blankets and quilts.

In Croatia, Germany, Greece and Luxembourg, facilities are already equipped with insulation and heating or a connection to the gas supply system. This is also the case in Belgium, where containers from Fedasil are already prepared for the winter. Containers provided by the EUAA already have insulation and hot/cold air conditioning, however additional measures may be implemented by the Agency depending on a country's needs.

Winterisation work is generally carried out by private or public companies contracted by the managing authority. In addition, aid organisations are involved in Germany and Switzerland. Belgium involved various actors which work with homeless and unsheltered persons, and the Civil Protection Department in Luxembourg supports the Red Cross and Caritas in improving facilities.

International organisations, such as UNHCR, funded the heating system in Slovenia and is involved with the IOM, UNICEF and private donors to equip temporary structures in Slovakia.

6. Conclusions



Between May and July 2022, the number of applications for international protection which were lodged in EU+ countries reached monthly highs which were last seen during the 2015-2016 refugee crisis.¹⁸ The sharp rise in arrivals, combined with the number people fleeing Ukraine who are in need of accommodation, is threatening the functioning of reception systems in the EU, which are already saturated in some countries.

To improve reception capacity, several EU+ countries have set up temporary reception structures, while other countries have managed to cope with the increasing arrivals and the shortage of places by using other temporary solutions or adopting more structured approaches. For example, Norway activated a mechanism for simpler regulations and requirements to contract providers which establish reception centres in a short timeframe in case of an emergency.

Lithuania moved residents directly to permanent accommodation structures. In Latvia, current temporary structures for reception are not planned for the winter period, since asylum seekers and beneficiaries of temporary protection can be accommodated in the common reception system.

The reception authority in Poland has not and is not planning to activate any temporary structure in the coming months as the vast majority of persons in need of temporary protection have been accommodated through dedicated local and private initiatives. In the Netherlands, a new plan is being drafted within the national crisis structure and the country is ready to set up temporary structures in the winter only if absolutely necessary.

¹⁸ <https://euaa.europa.eu/latest-asylum-trends-asylum>



In summary, the majority of EU+ countries will not increase their emergency reception capacity during this winter. However, some federal states in Germany are planning to open new structures in the coming weeks or open them in case of additional pressure on the reception system. Belgium plans to rent new accommodations, and Italy is seeking to increase the capacity of non-movable solutions which are used for temporary accommodation.

The information available on temporary solutions which have been adopted and future developments at the local level are very limited and may require more broad analysis.

Methodological note

The EUAA's Information and Analysis Sector and Reception Team launched a survey to gather information on the use of temporary reception and accommodation structures in view of the upcoming winter season. The survey was disseminated to the members of the EUAA Reception Network, who were requested to coordinate with various stakeholders involved in the establishment and management of temporary reception structures in their country.

The information presented in this Situational Update is based on the results of the survey and information available in EUAA products and public sources. The information has been verified and validated by the focal point in each country.

The reporting of developments does not mean an endorsement of practices or opinions on the part of the EUAA. Due to the rapidly-changing situation, information may have been revised or updated.

Additional resources

- [Modular Approach to Reception: Container site designs](#)
- [Who is Who in Temporary Protection](#)
- [Practical recommendations on the provision of emergency placement in private accommodation for persons displaced from Ukraine](#)
- [Overview of the organisation of reception systems in EU+ countries, Situational Update No 8](#)
- EUAA Situational Updates presenting emergency measures to address the protection needs of displaced persons from Ukraine (Nos [9](#), [10](#), [12](#), [13](#), [14](#), [15](#))
- [Analysis of Measures to Provide Protection to Displaced Persons from Ukraine](#)