Overarching trends and recommendations in asylum and refugee accommodation governance

Key findings and recommendations

Overview

This policy brief will provide an overview of cross-cutting trends in asylum and refugee accommodation governance across the localities of Malmö and Eslöv (Sweden), Cosenza and Catanzaro (Italy), Nicosia (Cyprus) and Glasgow (Scotland). Specifically, this brief will discuss national short and long-term accommodation frameworks. Next this brief will delve into the local implementation of these programmes and review the different roles played by local authorities and third/private sector actors. This brief will close with a summary of key policy and data gaps underpinning some of these programmes. Lastly, it should be noted that while more context-specific recommendations are laid out in each country's full report, select recommendations corresponding to each thematic section are embedded throughout the brief.

GLIMER is informed by a combination of rigorous policy analysis, qualitative research with multi-party stakeholders and secondary analysis. This policy brief is reliant on policy documents, statistics and evaluations together with interviews with stakeholders from national, regional and local authorities and the third sector in all four countries. In Sweden, GLIMER members worked across the region of Skåne and the municipalities of Malmö and Eslöv, two municipalities in a close geographic distance and part of the Öresund region that connects Sweden to Denmark and continental Europe. In Italy, researchers worked in different locations covering the territory of Calabria, focusing on two main cities (Cosenza, Catanzaro) and on places with a high density of non-Italian residents (Lamezia Terme). In Cyprus, work consisted of ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth semi-structured interviews with stakeholders from devolved and local government, as well as the third sector. Lastly, in

Scotland consortium members worked across several locations that included both the site of Dispersal (Glasgow) as well as areas involved in the Vulnerable Person's Resettlement Scheme (VPRS). This policy brief does not represent an exhaustive depiction of each country's findings. To access each country's full report, please visit: http://www.glimer.eu/outputs/.

Service delivery frameworks

Countries tend to have two-tiered systems that operate in parallel to provide for the short and long-term housing needs of displaced migrants.

Short-term accommodation

All countries provide short-term accommodation services for asylum seekers that are intended to provide for the immediate needs of newly arrived migrants. In Italy, refugees are initially housed in 'extraordinary reception centres', also known as CAS, when they arrive. CAS accommodation is provided by a network of Prefectures that work in collaboration with third/private sectors. Arrangements are governed by 'terms of reference' agreements that specify the period of stay which should be limited to the amount of time necessary before they are transferred to more permanent accommodation as CAS is unsuitable for long-term stays. These agreements are used to award public contracts and include the local authority in whose territory the accommodation is located.

A similar system operates in Scotland where the Dispersal Scheme provides the first means of accommodation for displaced migrants who have yet to be awarded refugee status. The Dispersal Scheme, however, differs in that it only operates in Glasgow City, not UK wide and is not operated by the local authority but rather is outsourced to a private contractor called Serco.
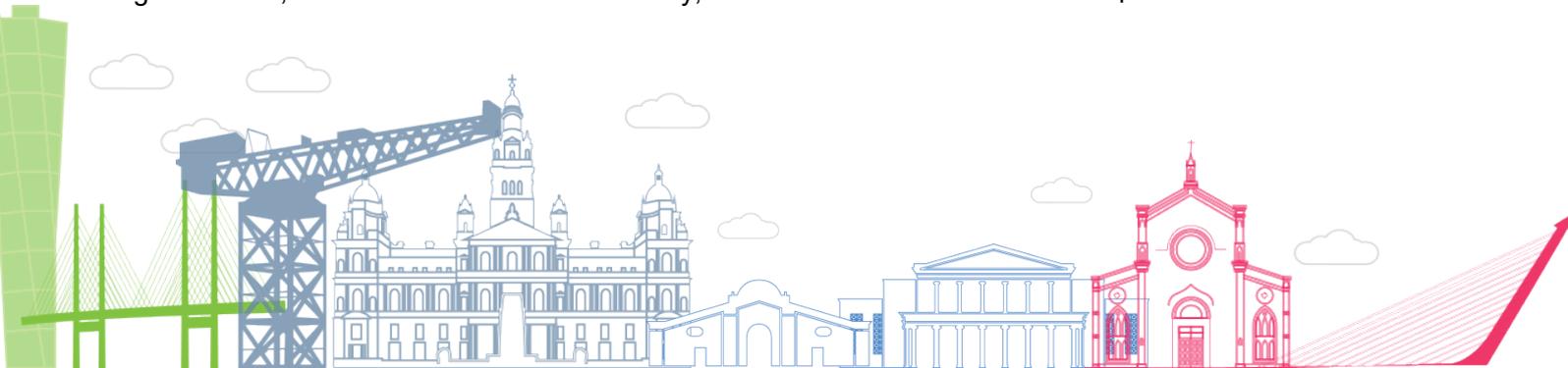
In the event that asylum seekers and refugees do not have recourse to public funds, emergency housing for these migrants falls to the third sector.

In Cyprus, the first option for accommodation for asylum seekers is the Reception Centre in Kofinou (RCK). Since the RCK was initially designed as a temporary place of residence, refugees are not legally allowed to be accommodated in the centre. However, in 2017 the maximum amount of time that an asylum seeker is allowed to stay in the centre was increased from three months to six months.

Lastly, asylum seekers who arrive in Sweden may choose to stay in 'Facility Accommodation' arranged by the Swedish Migration Agency or in 'Own Accommodation' which is arranged by the asylum seeker themselves.

Most short-term accommodation systems are not forward thinking as they were not envisaged to be permanent.

Short-term accommodation systems are typically for asylum seekers which is, in theory, supposed to be a temporary classification while their application is being processed. As a result, accommodation systems responding to the short-term needs of this population are imposed on the basis on immediate need and do not always have the health and care of migrants as the main objective. Furthermore, reception centre capacity is much lower than actual demand and although it is supposed to be temporary, reception centres are housing asylum seekers and refugees much longer than expected. As a result, the quality of living conditions in reception centres becomes questionable as hygiene facilities are insufficient and disability friendly spaces are rare.

While asylum seekers who cannot secure a space in reception centres or local authority schemes are sometimes free to arrange their own accommodation, social welfare service frameworks that are meant to facilitate this process often come with many administrative issues that prevent a smooth transition. For example, landlords in Cyprus are reluctant to rent to asylum seekers and refugees because not only is rental allowance not enough to cover the standard cost of living, but rental dues are also often delayed due to the administrative process that delivers the rental allowance.

Lastly, disjointed accommodation governance within short-term accommodation schemes and between short and long-term accommodation schemes create points of transition which may heighten the vulnerability of asylum seekers and refugees if any coordination between stakeholders breaks down. This is the case in Scotland where the short-term Dispersal Scheme is only in Glasgow and refugees are highly vulnerable to temporary homelessness if there is any lapse in communication. Similarly in Sweden, the accommodation route chosen at the beginning of the asylum process determines migrants' ability to access municipal accommodation in the future. Essentially, if an asylum seeker arranges their own accommodation from the beginning, they will be ineligible for municipal accommodation once they are granted refugee status.

This fragmented governance structure places additional barriers to an already limited pool of options for asylum seekers and refugees and can place families in unfavourable and uncertain situations that may delay economic and social integration.

Long-term accommodation
With the exception of Cyprus, countries typically have a separate long-term housing scheme for refugees. For example, municipalities in Sweden must organise accommodation for refugees within two months of a decision being made. Once asylum seekers receive a positive residence decision, newly designated refugees who stayed in 'Facility Accommodation' are moved to the municipal reception system, while refugees who chose to arrange their own accommodation remain responsible for their accommodation.

In Scotland, local authorities take over once a refugee determination is made if the new refugee has recourse to public funds. This is implemented through the Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) which applies to all 32 local authorities, not just Glasgow City as is the case with the Dispersal Scheme.

Lastly, in Italy long-term accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees is provided through the Protection System for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (SPRAR) which operates through networks across local authorities that have access to the National Fund for Asylum Policies and Services (FNPSA).

Most long-term accommodation systems try to incorporate resettlement with community planning.

With the exception of Cyprus which does not have a long-term accommodation scheme, the transition from short-term accommodation to long-term integration has a degree of community planning to it. For example, SPRAR in Italy is a long-term system based on territorial networks and is known as an integrated management system that goes beyond food distribution and emergency accommodation and uses refugee resettlement to repopulate certain blighted areas. By providing legal and social guidance and assistance to develop plans for inclusion and socio-economic integration, the refugee and asylum seeker reception system plays a capillary function for urban regeneration where diasporic communities have repopulated small and medium-sized urban spaces.

Similarly in Scotland, the VPRS allows for increased autonomy of local government which results in a balance between providing shelter for refugees and community planning needs. Here, VPRS is seen as having regenerative potential by allowing local authorities to tap into existing housing stock, both social and private, in areas experiencing depopulation. It has been found that this provides a better housing experience for not only displaced migrants, but local stakeholders as well.

Recommendations:

- The needs of asylum seekers and refugees should be considered within mainstream housing policy through integrated accommodation solutions developed by local governments.
- Transition between short and long-term accommodation schemes must be carefully managed to prevent lapse in coverage and inevitable homelessness.
- Social welfare services should be more flexible and offer immediate on- the-ground support to newly arrived asylum seekers.
- The sustainability and suitability of using short-term accommodation for long-term housing needs should be evaluated.

Local implementation

While ultimate responsibility to provide accommodation services falls on local authorities and municipalities, third and private sectors also play a critical role in accommodation service delivery frameworks often filling acute gaps, but not always with the best outcome.

In Italy, both CAS and SPRAR are activated locally between local authorities and private social enterprises. A synergy has been created between public authorities and the private sector which is comprised of organisations, associations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) where these actors are able to help local governments so long as they have established themselves as trusted players through their work on reception projects.

However, collaboration between public and private actors can have varying outcomes. In Scotland for example, local authorities have considerable knowledge and expertise in mobilising resources and services that come with providing housing for people in need. Nevertheless, the transfer of responsibility from the local authority a private contractor in the Dispersal Scheme represents a loss of policy control which has implications for urban planning and community development. This complex governance structure adversely affects asylum seeker accommodation provision, pressurises and disenfranchises service providers at the local level and creates hierarchies of engagement and representation that inhibits successful multilevel governance. As a result, third-sector organisations in Glasgow have limited dialogue with government even though they provide crucial frontline support for those who fall between statutory gaps.

In Sweden, while civil society stakeholders are not strong partners in providing accommodation for displaced migrants, municipalities play a more active role in organising accommodation for both refugees and asylum seekers. Local municipalities arrange contracts between public and private housing companies that sublet housing units and recently arrived migrants through 'social contracts'. These sublets are considered 'Facility Accommodation', can vary in terms of length of time and permanency and can be private or shared. Even with this

active participation by municipalities, it can be difficult to find housing suitable for families with children as housing units may include apartments, temporary module housing, redesigned former day care centres and homes for the elderly and hospital buildings. Underpinning accommodation arrangements for displaced migrants is the reality that Sweden suffers from an extensive shortage of affordable housing which has led to growing housing inequalities – a structural reality that can differ across localities.

Lastly, in the absence of a workable long-term accommodation framework in Cyprus, NGOs collaborate with local authorities to fill in the gaps where the state essentially 'buys' services from the third sector to carry out certain activities. These integration projects are highly dependent on European and national funding and are usually short-term an unsustainable. As a result, the lack of decentralised action to provide long-term accommodation on the part of government pushes displaced migrants to the private housing market where housing is unaffordable and social welfare services have antiquated and extensive documentation requirements that can be barriers to securing housing.

Recommendations:

- Central governments should support local authorities and collaboration between local administrators and private/third sector organisations should be encouraged with close oversight provided by local authorities.
- Responsibility should be evenly distributed, to the extent possible, across all local authorities for both short and long-term accommodation schemes.
- Stakeholders collaborating at the local level should ensure there is a safety-net in place to absorb people who lose accommodation eligibility following denied applications.

Missing data and policy infrastructure

Before the issues identified in this brief can be addressed, it is important to ensure that key overarching policy guidance is in place – something that was not consistent across jurisdictions.

Data collection and policy frameworks

In Cyprus, the vast majority of applicants are unable to secure shelter at the RCK, the only one of its kind on the island and are therefore dispersed throughout the island. However, there is little-to-no data on where displaced migrants live, under what conditions, or whether they depend on social welfare benefits or are employed. This is in addition to the fact that there is no legal framework to design integration policies that provide solutions for recent arrivals to successfully settle into new communities.

Similarly, in Sweden Settlement law does not contain regulations or guidance on what accommodation municipalities are to provide, such as standards or cost, both of which can vary between and even within municipalities. Lastly in Scotland, Glasgow City Council lost policy control over the Dispersal Scheme in the transfer of power to a private contractor which means the City has minimal scope to plan.

Recommendation:

- State and local officials should ensure their policy frameworks include provisions on acceptable living standards/conditions, renting costs and geographic considerations of accommodation for refugees and asylum seekers to ensure there is equal opportunity in housing at the local level in both how it is implemented and regulated.

Ultimately, accommodation is not being upheld as a universal right for many asylum seekers and refugees. The various cross-cutting trends identified in this brief often create unequal treatment for different categories of displaced people which can create a contentious dynamic between asylum seekers and resettled refugees. Most importantly, these short-comings often lead to homelessness, both temporary and chronic, an issue that was identified across all countries. Homelessness can affect asylum seekers and refugees in both short and long-term accommodation arrangements, and the recommendations laid out in this brief aim to mitigate that outcome and foster successful long-term social integration and economic independence.