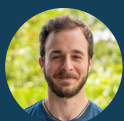


# Hospitality<sup>1</sup> and Migration: Housing First for those Excluded from Housing First



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*This article explores how the Métropole de Lyon in France is reimagining migrant reception policies by adapting the principles of Housing First to populations traditionally excluded from such programmes, in particular undocumented migrants. Faced with state inaction and legal barriers, local authorities and civil society have created alternative housing models, including tiny homes and squats. These solutions emphasise stability, dignity, and community, while the article acknowledges the limitations of temporary fixes and the ongoing need to embed hospitality within public policy frameworks.*

## Background

The first reception of migrants in France is under the jurisdiction of the State. Its strategy, set out in a national multi-annual plan, provides broad guidelines for the reception of asylum seekers and refugees. However, year after year, the quality of this reception has declined, as denounced by the associations working to support exiled individuals.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to further undermining the lives of displaced people, this deterioration has effectively shifted the burden of homelessness caused by a shortage of accommodation, onto local authorities and citizens, each of whom is compelled to act at their own level to help.

It is against this backdrop that reception policies have emerged in France since 2020, taking different forms and operating on various scales, and driven by collective actions of all kinds. The common denominator of these policies is the desire to act on behalf of the most vulnerable people living in the area, beyond the simple legal framework.

There are many motivations behind this commitment. Firstly, the public health crisis is partly overcoming silo approaches, enabling action that places people at the centre (particularly in the case of homelessness), while at the same time giving local authorities the opportunity to get involved outside the regulatory framework alone. Secondly, the highly mediated displacement of populations (e.g., Afghanistan or Ukraine) which is mobilising civil society throughout Europe. And lastly, for some local authorities (including the Métropole de Lyon), the elections in spring 2020 saw the arrival of new leaders with a strong social commitment in several of France's major cities.

This renewal of the executive at the head of the Lyon Metropolitan Council led to two major changes: a commitment to meet its obligations to provide shelter for certain groups (e.g., single women with young children, or unaccompanied minors), and a commitment to do so in line with the principles of Housing First.

## Reception sites: a community engagement in favour of migrant populations

In France, despite their vulnerability, migrants are largely excluded from mainstream housing provision. This

is due to one simple factor: the lack of a residence permit. In France, access to social housing requires a residence permit, which many migrant people do not have. As a result, Housing First programmes are largely inaccessible to this segment of the population. As for private rental housing, it is already a complex and challenging process for residents of the European Union, so there is little prospect of finding a large-scale solution to the housing exclusion of migrants within the private sector.

This is where the Métropole de Lyon intends to take action. Until 2020, the above-mentioned housing obligations were only partially met, and in a poor way. Only a few families were accommodated in hotels, with no regular social support and no long-term viability for this accommodation. The precariousness of this accommodation made it difficult for migrants to recover, rest and take steps that could eventually lead to regularisation and thus access to housing.

The change in the majority will allow the opening of lodgements, which are intended to move away from the traditional French emergency shelters. These solutions are based on the principles of Logement d'Abord (Housing First), offering increased social support, a stabilising length of stay and, above all, a space that we want to be considered as housing. Not just in its form, but in the way it is lived in.

The lodgement offered (tiny houses, small collective structures) allow people to find or rediscover a home. The aim is to finally resume a normal life: to have a key, to be able to invite someone to stay within the framework set by and for the inhabitants of these sites, to have a private kitchen or bathroom, etc. These considerations may seem elementary, but they are not part of the everyday life in accommodation facilities in France.

The end of care is also not a burden for people. The managers of these institutions are committed to ensuring continuity of care, and people leave these institutions for three reasons:

- administrative changes allowing access to social housing;
- to move to a housing solution more suited to the family situation if this has changed (new birth, arrival of a spouse, etc.);
- to leave the site if the person no longer complies with the rules established collectively.

The philosophy behind these projects is clear: to put an end to the permanent state of emergency by providing places where people can rest,

organise themselves, plan ahead, have territorial integration, create links and create or strengthen solidarity networks around them, with the aim of promoting social inclusion and facilitate their long-term cohesion into local life.

Furthermore, the transition from a collective housing system to an individual habitat system is a real plus. This is particularly true for people living in tiny houses and vacant apartments acquired by the Metropolitan Council, as they have a self-contained, independent space with technical characteristics similar to or equal to those of a home.

However, this 'shelter' policy does not solve everything. The lack of regularisation continues to block access to permanent housing. The high number of situations of this kind means that facilities have to be opened to more people, who have to share more private spaces (e.g., kitchens, bathrooms). The transition to other services takes a long time, especially when the Metropole Council's responsibility ends, and the accommodation often remains temporary.

Also, it is not just about housing. It is about recognising that everyone, migrant or not, needs a stable place to rebuild their lives. The attention paid to the quality of housing, the identification of sites that are not always on the outskirts of the city to enable them to become part of a dynamic neighbourhood life, the provision of comprehensive support (e.g., health, schooling, childcare, learning French) are all factors that enable the Métropole to affirm that recovery depends on the right to housing.

***“The philosophy behind these projects is clear: to put an end to the permanent state of emergency by providing places where people can rest, organise themselves, plan ahead...”***

The fact remains that people who do not fall within the Métropole's responsibility are still excluded, even if they live in the area by other means. That is why, in parallel with the development of these sites, the Lyon Métropole has chosen to embark on a more complex path: exploring the precarious housing sites known as squats.

### **Squats and self-managed sites: institutional support**

While the issue of reception and its deployment as a public policy allows local authorities to position themselves alongside citizens, they can go further through the material resources at their disposal. The question

of mobilising their resources mainly concerns the public for whom they are responsible, but this mobilisation is being gradually extended to all rough sleepers at the request of collectives<sup>3</sup> and associations.

However, the pace at which these properties are made available seems very slow to collectives working with people who have no accommodation or housing solution. Occupation then begins without the landlord's permission, and with it the cycle of legal proceedings that weighs on the residents and their supporters.

In order to limit this phenomenon, the idea of formalising these occupations emerged at the start of the term of office of the municipal executive. The work is still in progress and the local authorities are gradually establishing forms of occupation, either by allowing precarious housing to be maintained for a certain period of time, or by making vacant buildings available to associations and entrusting them with the management and financing of the life of these places (e.g., water, insurance). To reduce the risks to these spaces, social and technical interventions are also carried out, while at the same time providing an insight into community organisation in order to combat the tendency to occupy these spaces.

Nevertheless, squatting should not be seen as a final solution, because it remains the result of the failure of several public policies (reception of precarious people, protection of vulnerable people, or even urban planning), to which the only response remains decent housing under the rule of law. As always, there are exceptions, with sites offering very decent living conditions. However, it is the methods of organising, receiving, and supporting the most vulnerable people that should inspire the institutions, and not the physical support (in short, vacant and deteriorated buildings).

The fact remains that this type of organisation brings migrants closer to the principles of Housing First. The denial of a number of their rights does not prevent migrants from imagining, organising and determining how they want to live in these places.

For these squats are first and foremost places where people live. The choice of the term 'inhabitant' by supporters and those involved when talking about the people who live there is not unimportant. Rules and regulations have been established that help to institutionalise these spaces. They include a series of rules that make these sites places of rest close to the home concept (for example: respect for individual spaces, secure locking of the front door to ensure separation between outside and inside, collective maintenance of common spaces to ensure decency, combating over-occupation to make life as peaceful as possible, etc.).

So yes, these places are much more precarious than the reception sites mentioned above. There is less social support, and it is up to the residents themselves to emphasise community dynamics. However, the commitment of local authorities to these issues, which they see as a first step, makes it possible to think more broadly about the ways in which an institution can participate in a dynamic of hospitality, even though hospitality is by its very nature a non-institutional gesture.

*“By recognising that people have the capacity to transform the public arena, to participate in shaping the public policies we reserve for them, we enter into a relationship of exchange that does not exist in policies of control and exclusion.”*

### Hospitality and public policy: translating HF principles into law

In the face of increasing exclusion and the erosion of the right to housing, some local authorities are adopting reception as a principle of public action. This is not an insignificant choice. It shakes up the usual frameworks of social policy, and creates space for hospitality.

Talking about hospitality in an institution means accepting a degree of uncertainty and trial and error, where the norm that the authorities are supposed to guarantee requires stability.

Sociologist Anne Gotman describes hospitality as a 'bricolage' of margins and overflows. It is in these margins, in these incomplete and shifting forms of reception, that tomorrow's rules are invented. By observing (how people live in the interstices), by allowing ourselves to be questioned, by being open to the solutions that people themselves propose. Tomorrow's rules emerge from this trial and error, when the expected effects are observed and people's rights are strengthened, because they are based on listening to the people affected by these rights.

This shift is essential: by recognising that people have the capacity to transform the public arena, to participate in shaping the public policies we reserve for them, we enter into a relationship of exchange that does not exist in policies of control and exclusion. As a result, the public policy of hospitality becomes a permanent search for ways to integrate the gestures of hospitality into the law, allowing for trial and error in order to continuously feed this public policy.

## ENDNOTES - Hospitality and Migration: Housing First for those Excluded from Housing First

- 1 To be intended as reception capacity.
- 2 <https://www.lacimade.org/vers-un-nouveau-schema-national-daccueil-des-demandeurs-dasile2025/>  
<https://www.forumrefugies.org/s-informer/publications/articles-d-actualites/en-france/1516-asile-une-analyse-statistique-confirme-les-limites-du-systeme-d-accueil>
- 3 Groups of citizens organised informally around a cause, in this case helping people in very vulnerable situations.