

**Study Visit on effective accommodation services
for migrants experiencing homelessness
22 – 23 October 2024
Caritas Florence, Italy**

On the 22nd and 23rd of October, FEANTSA members came together in Florence, hosted by the Italian members at fio.PSD and Caritas Florence, to discuss and exchange experiences on the intersection of migration policies and homelessness. The objectives of the visit were to discuss solutions for effective accommodation options for migrants, including asylum seekers and refugees experiencing homelessness, and identify the points where migration, asylum, and homelessness interact while mapping accommodation (and other) services provided by FEANTSA membership to people in exile.

Aims of the visit:

- ✓ Introduction to the Caritas Florence services.
- ✓ Facilitate exchange and mutual learning between FEANTSA members working in the migration area.
- ✓ Discuss with relevant stakeholders to form the basis of a FEANTSA position what effective solutions are there for accommodation for migrants (including asylum seekers and refugees) and the role of homelessness services in this area.
- ✓ Development of a community of practice and coordination on relevant issues concerning access to shelter/accommodation/housing for migrants experiencing homelessness, including with initiatives from the EU level.

The main areas of interest were the intersection between migration policies and homelessness, low threshold services for migrants' accommodation, reception of asylum seekers, support with housing for people with international protection status, access to shelter for undocumented migrants, and housing first for migrants.

Participants

Caritas Florence team: Marzio Mori, Alina Tamas, Eleonora Tamacoldi, Irene Caverni; Lucia Fiorillo, Osservatorio fio.PSD; Alessandro Pezzoni, Caritas Ambrosiana and FEANTSA AC member for Italy; Giulio Ciucci, Psyplus ETS, Rome; Mattia Esposito, Europe Consulting, Rome; Anna-Leena Myllylä, Sininauhasaatio (Blue Ribbon Foundation), Finland; Ineke Baas, Valente, the Netherlands; Adèle CROISE, Federation de la solidarite, France; Rick Henderson, Homeless Link, UK; Kalin Trifonov, Caritas Vienna, Austria; Simona Barbu, FEANTSA secretariat.

Programme and main takeaways of the visit

Tuesday, 22nd October. Official welcome

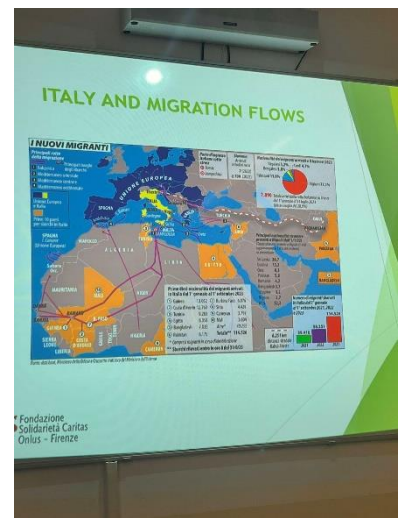
The study visit officially started on the evening of the 22nd of October when FEANTSA members were welcomed at the Le Torri Cucina e Condivisione restaurant, a community kitchen run by Caritas Florence. Over a typical Florentine dinner regularly prepared in the restaurant, participants learnt about the history of the Le Torri Cucina and a short overview of the organisation's activities was offered by its managing director, Marzio Mori.



Wednesday, 23rd of October. Services visits and presentations

The 23rd of October began with presentations from each country representative about the intersection between migration and homelessness and the work of the organisations present at the study visit. Hosts Fondazione Solidarietà Caritas Firenze gave the first presentation, briefly explaining the national context regarding migration and asylum and the services that they implement.

It was explained that in Italy the discourse around migration carried out by the current right-wing government is often framed as an emergency, overlooking structural issues within the management of migration. Among the points discussed here was Italy's recent deal with Albania which sparked a lot of controversy, a type of 'policy' that the rest of Europe is unfortunately looking at for inspiration. This five-year, renewable agreement, funded with €670 million, established two Italian reception centres in Albania. Reception centres in Albania are an attempt to externalise asylum application examination. Concerns about the living conditions in these centres have been raised, especially given their resemblance with detention centres since people are not allowed to exit these centres. Regarding the asylum system in Italy, it was explained that this consists of CAS (Extraordinary Reception Centres) and SAI (Reception and Integration System). CAS has been functioning since 2015 when it was set up as a response to the *emergency disembarks*. This service is aimed at the reception of asylum seekers during the time necessary for their asylum application examination, offering legal aid and basic support, and managed at the national level by the Italian minister of interior, and at the local prefecture-level by the authorities. The SAI has been made available since 2002 and is managed by the Italian minister of interior who partnered with civil society at the local level. The SAI system aims to create an integrated approach to refugee integration. Since 2023, the legislation changed, and SAI became available exclusively to vulnerable asylum seekers – previously available for both asylum seekers and refugees. Due to the rising housing shortage, many refugees risk experiencing homelessness once their period in the SAI system is finished.



Those denied asylum lose access to these centres, leading many into homelessness, particularly evident in Palermo, where re-entry into support services is challenging, prolonging destitution. However, it was highlighted that in Rome it is common for many individuals who want to apply for international protection to spend several nights sleeping rough even before being allowed to submit their application. Italy's national integration framework requires relocation based on available housing rather than local integration needs, severing migrants' social ties and leaving many unsupported, especially as the 80,000 CAS placements and under 40,000 SAI spots fall short of demand. This fragmented system effectively creates cycles of homelessness and destitution for many migrants, without viable pathways to stability.

In Finland, the largest "Housing First" provider, The Blue Ribbon Foundation, addresses migration needs through a team of four focused on varying migrant profiles. These include quota refugees, whose intake dropped from 1,500 to 500 per year, asylum seekers (with 22,656 applying for Temporary Protection Directive and 6,540 for international protection in 2023), and others who gain residence through family, work, or study but do not qualify for integration support. Employed migrants face challenges accessing subsidised language classes, as they must pay for them independently. A recent law change now bars undocumented migrants from applying for residence permits unless seeking asylum. Although the constitution mandates basic rights for all, municipalities and well-being counties individually decide on how they implement the provision of emergency shelter and subsistence provisions for undocumented individuals. Processing times for residence permits can extend up to five years, during which applicants may reside in reception centres. Finland previously had a dispersal system, but it was abandoned when many migrants opted to stay in Helsinki despite limited support.

In the Netherlands, the 2023 elections brought a shift with the Freedom Party and its allies, who are aligned with right-wing leaders like Orban and Le Pen, framing migration as an "asylum crisis" that demands urgent

legislation and bypassing standard democratic processes. Amid discussions of establishing reception centres abroad, such as in Uganda, the true crisis within the Netherlands lies in its severe affordable housing shortage. High housing costs, limited rental options, and stigmatising rhetoric about renting create significant barriers. Overcrowded reception centres leave recognised asylum seekers stranded due to a lack of housing, contributing to the nation's homelessness issue, which officially affects 30,000 people but is likely much higher according to ETHOS estimates. The Netherlands' Action Plan on Preventing and Ending Homelessness (2022–2030), signed by multiple ministries, suffers from a lack of inter-ministerial collaboration, with limited government action. The plan's first year emphasises inclusion for groups like LGBT and EU citizens but excludes undocumented migrants, a restriction imposed by right-wing parties. Despite local governments spending at least €4 million annually on basic services for undocumented migrants, budget cuts and limited resources challenge these efforts. Meanwhile, authorities often avoid taking responsibility for mobile EU citizens - 600,000 to 800,000 mobile EU citizens work in low-wage, unprotected jobs and face heightened homelessness risks due to freelancing contracts without social protections. Municipalities resist using an "equal treatment" checklist for shelter eligibility due to seat shortages, further complicating access for vulnerable populations.

In France, the intersection of migration policies and homelessness reveals significant challenges for asylum seekers and refugees, as two separate systems—emergency accommodation and national asylum reception—operate under different authorities, complicating advocacy efforts. Recently, with input from the housing and migration ministries, the government introduced a policy offering social centres to refugees experiencing homelessness if they agree to relocate outside Paris. Regional asylum reception plans aim to distribute asylum seekers more equitably, yet the journey remains arduous: only half of asylum seekers can access support, and emergency accommodation is difficult to secure, even for vulnerable groups. The complex political landscape and recent budget cuts have further limited support, with 8,000 shelter spots eliminated, pushing many into camps or squats. An important issue concerning double standards and racism is raised; expanded aid continues to be made available for Ukrainians, while non-European migrants face strained resources, bureaucratic barriers, and systemic inequalities, fuelling a climate where immigration often becomes politically sensationalised.



In the UK, a recent left-leaning government has pledged to reform immigration policy, rejecting proposals like the Rwanda scheme, though a new approach has yet to be unveiled. A “hostile environment” persists for migrants, intentionally making entry and stay difficult, with immigration and housing departments operating in isolation, worsening migrant homelessness. Hotels for asylum seekers are costly and managed by the Home Office, while collaboration between departments is minimal, leaving NGOs to handle gaps without sufficient funding. In 2023, a 350% rise in refugees' homelessness was recorded after a change in policies drastically reducing the transition period for people who were granted protection. One-third of England's rough sleepers—and up to 85% in parts of London—are migrants, revealing how current policies exacerbate homelessness. Policies like the “right to rent” further limit housing, with 95% of landlords unwilling to rent to migrants. The increase in asylum arrivals, labelled as an “invasion” by politicians, strains an already overwhelmed system, reinforcing a cycle of exclusion and vulnerability for migrants.



Austria's migration system, established two decades ago, requires incoming migrants to be screened in an "exemption centre" for *Dublin cases*, though numbers remain low. Family reunification has become more restrictive, limiting recognised family connections. Once a migrant's asylum decision is made, assistance depends on their status: accepted asylum seekers have four months to secure independent housing, while those with subsidiary protection can access social benefits and seek support if they lose accommodation. Although asylum centres provide a fallback, mental health issues or similar records can lead to refusals, complicating shelter access for some migrants. Homelessness assistance is eligibility-based, offering Housing First or emergency shelter, with some services available via referrals or a mobile app.

Casa della solidarietà San Paolino, Florence

In the afternoon, the group continued with a visit to the Casa della solidarietà San Paolino in the centre of Florence. Here, the service team operates a three-tiered reception structure for women (including mothers with children), men, and the elderly (increasingly over 50). The Municipality of Florence, together with its social services, manages admissions, and each arrival undergoes an evaluation with a social worker to develop a personalised support plan. While most residents are Italian, demographics vary: the elderly floor is predominantly Italian, the men's floor is mixed (Italian and migrants), single women are mostly Italian, and mothers with children are primarily migrants. Casa della solidarietà San Paolino works on supporting regularisation for undocumented residents by providing legal assistance. For single men or other cases, applying for asylum is typical. Some refugees also arrive after challenges in the SAI system, where the service offers limited integration support to prevent social exclusion risks, highlighting the centre's role as a transitional phase in residents' lives.



For more information on the study visit you can contact: Simona Barbu, FEANTSA Policy Officer, at simona.barbu@feantsa.org