

EMN IRELAND MIGRATION MEMO #1: How do EMN Member States ensure systems for housing International Protection Applicants are ‘flexible’?

This EMN Ireland Migration Memo summarises findings from the [EMN Inform on Organising flexible housing in the context of international protection \(2023\)](#) which compiled responses from EMN Member and Observer Countries covering the period 2017-2021. This Migration Memo is prepared by Emily Cunniffe, Keire Murphy and Dervla Potter. For more information on EMN publications visit www.emn.ie or email emn.ireland@esri.ie.

[EMN Ireland](#) is the Irish National Contact Point of the [European Migration Network](#) and is located in the [Economic and Social Research Institute \(ESRI\)](#).

THE ISSUE

The inflow of International Protection Applicants (IPAs) (also known as [asylum seekers](#)) can vary significantly and be subject to rapid, substantial changes. Ireland has seen a fluctuating pattern of applications since the early 2000s, and in 2022, saw the [highest number of applications on record](#). This fluctuation, in addition to other factors, can lead to pressure on Ireland’s ability to provide housing for applicants and, at times, Ireland has not been able to provide accommodation to some applicants arriving to the State, including [currently](#). To meet these changing demands for accommodation, countries need to be able to both quickly upscale capacity to provide accommodation and to downscale in times when there is less demand.

This Migration Memo aims to present information that can support policy makers in understanding how other EMN Member Countries organise their reception systems in a flexible manner, whilst anticipating fluctuation in the future.

CHALLENGES AND PREDICTING CAPACITY NEEDED

Most EMN Member and Observer Countries reported challenges in housing IPAs¹ due to volatile fluctuations in migration flows, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the availability of adequate housing when beneficiaries of international protection need to move from reception facilities to private accommodation. Some countries faced difficulty opening new reception centres due to issues such as securing funding, lack of available land and opposition to new facilities from local communities.

In determining how much housing is required, most countries use **periodic forecasting and analysis**, conducted between four times a year and every three years. Various data are used, from information about the housing market to asylum processing times and country of origin information. Most plans have a **margin or buffer capacity to anticipate fluctuations**. For example, Norway prepares three scenarios: low, middle and high, with the middle scenario used for planning and budgets.

FLEXIBILITY MEASURES

One of the most common flexibility measures used is the **creation of additional accommodation as buffer capacity**. Many countries also reported the importance of **budgetary flexibility** to ensure accommodation can be secured quickly, as well as the **regional distribution of applicants** and **working with local municipalities and multi-level stakeholder cooperation**. Some countries such as Germany and Portugal reported that a combination of the measures shared in Figure 1 below were successful or important in meeting the additional demand for housing for international protection applicants.

Spotlight on: Upscaling and downscaling in The Netherlands

In the Netherlands, the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) strives for a 91% occupancy rate, which can, when funds allow, be multiplied with a reserve capacity. COA has an **action plan for the up-and downscaling of housing capacity** which includes measures to **expand existing accommodation centres, re-open recently closed centres, open new centres, use (pre-existing) reserve/buffer capacity, create temporary housing locations, and open emergency locations**. Nonetheless, like Ireland, the Netherlands also has a housing crisis and faces challenges in housing applicants.

¹ AT, BE, BG, CY, ES, FR, HR, IE, LT, LU, LV, PL, PT, NL, NO.

CHALLENGES AND GOOD PRACTICES IN OUTFLOW OF BENEFICIARIES OF INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

A common challenge to housing applicants was the pace of outflow of beneficiaries of international protection from reception systems. Such outflow challenges were mainly due to high demand for affordable accommodation in the private rental market. Some countries allow applicants to remain in reception centres after they receive status and time limits may apply. The responsibility for housing beneficiaries can also vary, with Sweden and Belgium placing responsibility on local municipalities.

Good practices reported included **close cooperation and coordination with other stakeholders** such as local authorities or NGOs. **Transitional housing** is reported as a good practice by countries such as France and Belgium. In Belgium, beneficiaries have a two-month transition period in 'Local Reception Initiatives' which can promote their inclusion. However, with high application influx and low outflow to regular housing, the initiative is under pressure to offer accommodation for a two month stay. In Spain, **specialised teams support beneficiaries to find appropriate housing**.

FIGURE 1: FLEXIBILITY MEASURES IN PLACE IN EMN MEMBER AND OBSERVER COUNTRIES (2017-2021)



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Most countries use **periodic forecasting** for a given period, with various data, including processing times, applications, and housing market information.
- One of the most common flexibility measures used is ensuring the **availability of buffer accommodation centres**, followed by **budget flexibility**.
- The **outflow of beneficiaries of international protection is an issue** across EMN countries. While transitional programmes are used in some countries, external factors such as housing crises affect their effectiveness.
- **Close coordination** among stakeholders is seen as important, both for housing applicants and for supporting beneficiaries to access accommodation.

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