

# Where is my home?

Homelessness and Access to Housing among  
Asylum-seekers, Refugees and Persons with  
International Protection in **POLAND**

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This report is an update of the 2010 study Refugee Homelessness in Poland - Results of a Pilot Study.

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# 1. Background and Objectives of the Study

In 2010, the Institute for Public Affairs, commissioned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), conducted a pilot, exploratory study of refugee homelessness in Poland. The results of that research were both profound and alarming.<sup>1</sup> It was estimated that the proportion of roofless and houseless amongst beneficiaries of international protection varied between 20% and 30%, with approximately 10% experiencing extreme homelessness, namely, rooflessness, and that all beneficiaries of international protection in Poland are at risk of housing exclusion. However, as mentioned, the 2010 study was a first attempt to systematically describe Polish refugees' housing situation, and although it had an impact on policy decision makers, media, and social workers, further studies were much needed. The aim of this research is, among other things, to update the existing information regarding homeless beneficiaries of international or national protection and to better understand the situation of homeless refugees by:

- 1 Collecting the most recent data concerning the housing situation and welfare of beneficiaries of international protection and mapping the phenomenon of refugee homelessness in Poland;
- 2 Gathering information on changes and trends observed in the past two years regarding the housing situation and the causes and consequences of remaining homeless;
- 3 Collecting the opinions of Key Persons on a set of recommendations and policy objectives designed by a working group established by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy;
- 4 Gaining insight into coping strategies of migrants experiencing various forms of homelessness, including describing the role of in-group (within community) and out-group (NGO and local administration) assistance.

## 1.1. Legal Issues

The right to adequate housing is a fundamental human right. It is universal, recognised at the international level and in over a hundred national constitutions throughout the world.<sup>2</sup> According to Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,<sup>3</sup> signed and ratified by Poland, "the States Parties to the present Covenant recognise the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions". In the same Article, the States Parties declare that they will "(...) take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right, recognising to this effect the essential importance of international co-operation based on free consent".

While the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) accepts the fact that "adequacy is determined in part by social, economic, cultural, climatic, ecological and other factors, it is nevertheless possible to identify certain aspects of the right that must be taken into account for this purpose in any particular context".<sup>4</sup> They include the following: a) Legal security of tenure; b) Availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure; c) Affordability; d) Habitability; e) Accessibility; f) Location; and g) Cultural adequacy.<sup>5</sup> In the Polish Constitution, however, Art. 75, Sec. 1 establishes only that "Public authorities shall pursue policies conducive to satisfying the housing needs

<sup>1</sup> K. Wysińska, N. Ryabinska, 2010, Refugee homelessness in Poland – Results of a Pilot Study. Warsaw: ISP and UNHCR, available online at <http://goo.gl/CeVLq> and <http://goo.gl/cpVhf> (accessed at 25 February)

<sup>2</sup> C. Golay, M. Ozden, The Right to Housing, Part of a series of the Human Rights Programme of the Europe-Third World Centre (CETIM).

<sup>3</sup> The full text of the Covenant (a multilateral treaty adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 16 December 1966, and in force from 3 January 1976) is available here: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cescr.htm>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Housing/Pages/HousingIndex.aspx> (accessed at 25 February)

<sup>5</sup> Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, The right to adequate housing (Art.11 (1)) : 12/13/1991. CESCR General comment 4. (General Comments) <http://goo.gl/ZASO1> (accessed at 25 February)

of citizens, in particular combating homelessness, promoting the development of low-income housing and supporting activities aimed at acquisition of a home by each citizen". As such, it is a constitutional norm that applies to the public authorities exclusively and cannot serve as the basis for individual claims. Only asylum-seekers and victims of human trafficking are guaranteed shelter by virtue of international law. Housing discrimination is forbidden, however. In accordance with the European Union law ("the Framework Employment Directive" 2000/78/EC<sup>6</sup> and "the Race Directive" 2000/43/WE<sup>7</sup>), the Polish Act on Equal Treatment<sup>8</sup> forbids discrimination based on, among other things, sex, race, ethnic origin, nationality or religion with regard to publicly offered services, including housing. Nevertheless, as Wencel (2011) notes, "if discriminatory treatment occurs, the limited possibilities to prove unjustified unequal treatment are problematic while claiming one's rights".<sup>9</sup>

In Poland, all proceedings concerning recognition of refugee status are conducted according to rules and regulations of the Act on granting protection to aliens within the territory of the Republic of Poland (hereinafter "Act on granting protection to aliens) of 13 June 2003 (Journal of Laws of 2009, No. 189, item 1472). Decisions regarding refugee status are rendered by the Head of the Office for Foreigners (OF) and are subject to the right to appeal before the Refugee Board. Information regarding appeal procedures and regulations is always attached to the decision received by an asylum-seeker.

Pursuant to the aforementioned Act of 13 June 2003 and the Act of 18 March 2008 amending the Act on granting protection to aliens,<sup>10</sup> a foreigner who has been denied asylum may be granted subsidiary protection or a permit for tolerated stay. Refugee status holders and those who have been granted subsidiary protection are entitled to participate in an Individual Integration Programme (IPI) as specified in the Act on Social Assistance of 2004 (Journal of Laws of 2008, No. 115, item 728, as amended) and the Ordinance of the Minister of Labour and Social Policy on providing assistance to refugees (Journal of Laws of 2009, No. 45, item 366). Foreigners who obtained a permit for tolerated stay are not entitled to such assistance.<sup>12</sup> The types of assistance to which persons with different forms of protection are entitled are presented in Table 1.

As described by Klaus et al. (2011), the Act on Social Assistance cited above provides for the possibility of suspending or discontinuing integration assistance.<sup>13</sup> The following warrant, amongst other things, the withdrawal or termination of integration support:

- A beneficiary, through their own fault, persistently does not fulfil obligations set forth in the programme. For example, he/she does not attend, without justification, Polish language courses, makes use of assistance in a way that is not consistent with the purpose for which it was granted, or else gives false information about their life situation;
- Criminal proceedings are launched against the beneficiary;
- A beneficiary who has previously had their assistance suspended and then reinstated, again behaves in a way that violates principles of the agreement entered into under the IPI;
- A beneficiary who is deprived of refugee status or subsidiary protection is withdrawn;
- A beneficiary has been convicted of an intentional crime.

<sup>6</sup> Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation; full text available here: <http://goo.gl/TrSp1>

<sup>7</sup> Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin; full text available here: <http://goo.gl/z6U1z>.

<sup>8</sup> Act on the Implementation of Certain Provisions of the European Union in the Field of Equal Treatment, Journal of Laws of 2010, No. 254, item 1700.

<sup>9</sup> K. Wencel, 2011, Discrimination in access to housing on the ground of foreign origin in Poland. Law and practice, ARE 5/2011, SIP: Warszawa, in Polish.

<sup>10</sup> Journal of Laws of 2008, No. 70, item 416. Up until 2008, only persons having a recognised refugee status had the right to assistance under the IPI. In 2008, however, the Act on Social Assistance was amended expanding the list of entities entitled to receive integration.

<sup>11</sup> Journal of Laws of 2008, No. 171, item 1056, No. 216, item 1367, No. 220, item 1431, No. 223, item U58 and Journal of Laws of 2009, No. 6, item 33.

<sup>12</sup> More information on legal regulations applying to asylum-seekers and refugees in Poland is available on the following websites: <http://www.unhcr-budapest.org/poland> and <http://www.udsc.gov.pl> and also in K. Wencel, K. Templin, *Rights of forced migrants in proceedings of institutions of social assistance*, in: W. Klaus, J. Frelak (ed.), *Evaluation of the functioning of institutions of social assistance in Warsaw in regard to correct upholding of forced immigrants' rights*, Instytut Spraw Publicznych i Stowarzyszenie Interwencji Prawnej, Warszawa 2009, in Polish.

<sup>13</sup> W. Klaus, K. Makaruk, K. Wencel, with J. Frelak, 2011, Refusal to grant integration assistance – law and practice, Warsaw: ISP, SIP and UNHCR.

**Table 1:** Social Assistance Rights of Refugees, Subsidiary Protection and Tolerated Stay Permit Holders

| Type of Social Assistance                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Refugee and Subsidiary Protection Status Holders                                                                                                                                           | Persons with Tolerated Stay Permit                                                                                                                                                                              |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Integration assistance aimed at supporting the process of integration in Poland under the IPI                                                                                                                                  | YES                                                                                                                                                                                        | NO                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Integration programme offered by the local authority centre for social integration                                                                                                                                             | YES<br>(If participating in the IPI)                                                                                                                                                       | NO                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Financial and non-financial forms of social assistance and benefits                                                                                                                                                            | UNLIMITED ACCESS<br>(After the completion of the IPI, on the same basis as nationals)                                                                                                      | LIMITED ACCESS<br>(Entitled to non-financial support including sheltered housing, food and clothing, and financial assistance in the form of supplementary welfare allowance; not eligible for family benefits) |
| Healthcare services                                                                                                                                                                                                            | ELIGIBLE<br>(For statutory health insurance and, consequently, free of charge access to all health services listed in the Ministry of Health's regulations on the same basis as nationals) | ELIGIBLE<br>(For statutory health insurance and, consequently, free of charge access to all health services listed in the Ministry of Health's regulations on the same basis as nationals)                      |
| Regardless of the status held, all persons with international protection have unlimited access to the labour market (no need to obtain work permit) and can freely engage in economic activity on the same basis as nationals. |                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

Klaus et al. (2011) noted that the practice of withholding integration benefits from the whole family when one member of the family has committed a crime is particularly harmful to migrants.

Beneficiaries of international protection may also be denied integration assistance under the IPI.<sup>14</sup> Refusal to grant assistance occurs in the case of non-compliance with the deadline for submitting an application for assistance, which is 60 days from the moment of receiving the positive decision about refugee or subsidiary protection status recognition. Applicants are also denied assistance if they were convicted for an intentional crime. According to the research cited, in many cases the convictions are for incidents linked with illegal crossings of the Polish border.

Considering the purpose of the IPI, which is to provide assistance to refugees during the initial stages of their settlement in Poland, and the type of social assistance offered to those beneficiaries of international protection who were denied or withheld integration support, it should be stated that denying or withdrawing assistance under the IPI constrains refugees' chances of securing housing and pushes them into homelessness and housing exclusion.

The financial and non-financial benefits to which beneficiaries of international protection are entitled do not suffice for them to secure housing on the free market. Refugees cannot be expected to integrate and advance on the labour market without assistance and data from other countries show that they slowly assimilate economically and their income does not match the income of the local population. Moreover, their unemployment and economic inactivity rates are usually higher than among nationals.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> P.S. Kerr, W.R. Kerr, (2008), "Economic Impacts of Immigration: A Survey", *Harvard Business School Working Paper* 09-013, Boston, MA; P. Lundborg, "Assimilation in Sweden: Wages, Employment and Work Income", *SULCIS Working Paper* 2007:5, Stockholm.

## 1.2. Basic Statistics

Statistics showing the number of proceedings conducted in response to asylum applications in the time period when both studies were conducted are presented in Table 2. Table 3 includes information on the number of positive refugee status recognitions rendered by the Head of the OF by the nationality of the applicants. Table 4 contains data regarding the number of refugees and persons with subsidiary protection or a tolerated stay permit holding a valid residence card as of the end of December 2011.

**Table 2:** Proceedings Conducted by the OF in Response to Asylum Applications (the most numerous nationalities) in 2009-2011

| Countries of Origin             | 2009   | 2010  | 2011  | Total  |
|---------------------------------|--------|-------|-------|--------|
| Total (all applications)        | 10,587 | 6,534 | 6,887 | 24,008 |
| Top five nationalities:         |        |       |       |        |
| RUSSIA                          | 5,726  | 4,795 | 4,305 | 18,281 |
| GEORGIA                         | 4,214  | 1,082 | 1,735 | 5,367  |
| ARMENIA                         | 147    | 107   | 216   | 304    |
| BELARUS                         | 37     | 46    | 81    | 179    |
| UKRAINE                         | 36     | 45    | 67    | 141    |
| Top five nationalities (total): | 10,160 | 6,075 | 6,404 | 22,639 |

**Table 3:** The Number of Positive Refugee Status Recognitions in 2009-2011

| Countries of Origin | 2011 | Countries of Origin | 2009-2011 |
|---------------------|------|---------------------|-----------|
| RUSSIA              | 82   | RUSSIA              | 226       |
| BELARUS             | 19   | BELARUS             | 58        |
| IRAQ                | 16   | IRAQ                | 22        |
| ERITREA             | 12   | ERITREA             | 12        |
| SOMALIA             | 5    | AFGHANISTAN         | 8         |
| OTHERS              | 19   | OTHERS              | 40        |
| TOTAL               | 153  | TOTAL               | 366       |

**Table 4:** Refugees and Persons with Subsidiary Protection or a Tolerated Stay Permit Holding a Valid Residence Card as of the End of December 2011

| Nationality                                                        | Subsidiary Protection | Tolerated Stay Permit | Refugee Status |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| TOTAL (all statuses)                                               | 3012                  | 738                   | 1170           |
| Top five nationalities (refugee and subsidiary protection status): |                       |                       |                |
| ARMENIA                                                            | 18                    | 107                   | 4              |
| BELARUS                                                            | 13                    | 15                    | 119            |
| IRAQ                                                               | 37                    | 2                     | 45             |
| RUSSIA                                                             | 2788                  | 105                   | 828            |
| SRI LANKA                                                          | 30                    | 4                     | 12             |
| Top five nationalities (total)                                     | 2886                  | 233                   | 1008           |

## 2. Refugee Homelessness in Poland – Definitions and Estimates

### Definitions and Estimates

Adopting a particular definition of homelessness determines the research design, hypothesis and results, as it affects who is classified as a homeless person and, consequently, the number of persons categorized as experiencing housing exclusion. This, in turn, has an impact on social policy, “since the scope of provisions and assistance are directly linked to the scale of homelessness that is identified”.<sup>16</sup> A widely used definition describes a homeless person as one lacking permanent shelter where one can sleep or “sleeping rough”.<sup>17</sup> Applying this definition, however, highlights only visible (absolute/extreme) homelessness, the scale of which is much smaller than that of other (relative/hidden) types of housing exclusion. In contemporary research, homelessness is therefore treated rather as a continuum between having a secure and adequate house and having no shelter.<sup>18</sup> For this reason, in this research, a **homeless refugee** is understood as any person who has been granted international or national protection who is not able to secure shelter that fulfils minimal conditions, allowing it to be deemed habitable living space. A habitable living space, as defined by the CESCR, the body that monitors the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, is one that provides the occupants with adequate space, physical security, shelter from weather and protection from threats to health such as structural hazards and disease.

This Report employs the European Federation of Organisations Working with people who are Homeless (FEANTSA) classification and the ETHOS typology, according to which there are two main types of homelessness: **rooflessness** (living in public spaces or night shelters) and **houselessness** (living in shelters, crisis intervention centres or centres for asylum-seekers). According to the ETHOS typology, all persons staying in centres for asylum-seekers are experiencing homelessness. Moreover, from a legal point of view, a refugee is any person who fulfils the criteria of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees adopted on 28 July 1951 (1951 Geneva Convention): obtaining a positive decision about

receiving protection is only a confirmation of this status. However, taking into account that they are entitled to special support only when refugee status has been determined, including integration welfare benefits, for the purposes of this study, homeless persons are those who are residing in centres after status determination and receiving a positive decision granting protection. The expression ‘excluded from housing and at serious risk (or under threat) of homelessness’ is understood here to refer to those persons who are at direct risk of finding themselves in a **situation of rooflessness or houselessness**, and also to persons living in **substandard** conditions, such as living in insecure or inadequate housing, with insufficient sanitation or heating, and/or living in dwellings that are overcrowded or socially isolated.

The European Observatory on Homelessness researchers further propose that there are three domains which constitute a home and from which homeless people are excluded to different degrees. Having a home is defined as: “Having an adequate dwelling or space over which a person and his/her family can exercise exclusive possession (physical domain); being able to maintain privacy and enjoy relations (social domain) and having a legal title to occupation (legal domain)”.<sup>19</sup> The term “insecure” refers to the

<sup>16</sup> D. Hiebert, S. D’Addario, K. Sherrell. 2005. The Profile of Absolute and Relative Homelessness Among Immigrants, Refugees, and Refugee Claimants in the Greater Vancouver Regional District, MOSAIC, Vancouver.

<sup>17</sup> V. Busch-Geertsema. 2010. *Defining and Measuring Homelessness*, in: E. O’Sullivan, V. Busch-Geertsema, D. Quilgars and N. Pleace (Eds.) *Homelessness Research in Europe: Festschrift for Bill Edgar and Joe Doherty* (Brussels: FEANTSA).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*. See also: V. Busch-Geertsema. 2010. *Defining and Measuring Homelessness*, *op. cit.*

<sup>19</sup> W. Edgar, J. Doherty, and H. Meert. 2004. *Third Review of Statistics on Homelessness in Europe. Developing an Operational Definition of Homelessness*. Brussels: FEANTSA.

exclusion in the legal domain, which includes no legal title to a space for exclusive possession or no security of tenure. The term “inadequate” applies to the physical domain, such as situations in which the dwelling is unfit for habitation. Finally, the terms “overcrowded” and “socially isolated” refer to the exclusion in the social domain and mean that the dwelling does not provide private and safe personal space for social relations.

The identification of the study population is a daunting exercise because the homeless persons, regardless of the type of housing exclusion experienced, constitute a hidden, hard-to-reach population. This means that (a) there is no sampling frame that lists the individual members of the homeless population, because such frames are poorly defined or difficult/impossible to construct, and (b) members of this group often refrain from interacting with the majority of social institutions for social or legal reasons, for example, stigma, discrimination, culture or illegal activities, such as undocumented work or illegal trading of goods.<sup>20</sup> This is why estimates usually focus on the number of refugees experiencing absolute homelessness, that is, those sleeping rough or in shelters. The number of refugees living in insecure, inadequate or substandard conditions therefore remains unknown.

It is important to emphasize, however, that because the right to housing is a fundamental human right, no data is necessary to claim that it is unacceptable that beneficiaries of international protection, as well as nationals, in a European Union Member State should have to experience homelessness and housing exclusion. To accept that special integration policies for refugees are needed, additional data is not needed, although it is already known from this and previous research that there is a significant number of homeless refugees in Poland. Estimates are only needed “to implement policies and monitor their efficacy”<sup>21</sup> and for that reason an attempt to estimate the scope and characteristics of refugee homelessness has been attempted. In other words, the fact that it is virtually impossible to establish the exact number of homeless persons, including homeless refugees, using the empirical research methods currently available should not prohibit authorities from undertaking actions necessary to prevent homelessness and housing exclusion, since it has been demonstrated that refugees experience both. Estimates as accurate as possible are necessary to decide how much investment is needed and to evaluate the effectiveness of policies already implemented. The estimates provided in this report can

serve as a reference point for planning such policies, which does not mean, however, that the State is relieved of the obligation to invest resources in data collection systems.

The 2010 pilot study on refugee housing identified the lack of precise information concerning refugees’ living conditions and also the exact number of refugees staying in selected Voivodeships (provinces) as a challenge for precise estimates and extrapolations. Consequently, to address this gap, the report used Key Person estimates to determine the scale of refugee homelessness in Poland as well as data provided by shelters, governmental institutions and local authorities. However, as Key Person estimates are essentially based on asking persons with some knowledge of and acquaintance with homeless refugees to provide their estimates of the size and composition of this group<sup>22</sup> - and not on official counts - such estimates are by default imperfect and of limited validity. They are “probably better than no information at all but how much better no one knows”.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> S. Semaan. 2010. Time-Space Sampling and Respondent-Driven Sampling with Hard-To-Reach Populations, *Methodological Innovations Online* 5(2) 60-75.

<sup>21</sup> V. Busch-Geertsema. 2010. *Defining and Measuring Homelessness*, in: E. O’Sullivan, V. Busch-Geertsema, D. Quilgars and N. Pleace (Eds.) *Homelessness Research in Europe: Festschrift for Bill Edgar and Joe Doherty* (Brussels: FEANTSA).

<sup>22</sup> A Key Person is someone who is knowledgeable about local groups of refugees, their housing situation, where they live, spend time and receive services in their community. Key Persons include representatives of local government, social service providers, law enforcement, municipal agencies, educational institutions, faith-based organisations, local business, civic groups, neighborhood associations, nonprofit agencies, and currently and formerly homeless refugees.

<sup>23</sup> P. H. Rossi. 1987. *Estimating the number of homeless in Chicago*. Social and Demographic Research Institute, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

In order to increase the consistency between the definitions employed and the estimates of the interviewees, in both the 2010 and 2012 studies, each respondent was presented with the ETHOS typology before answering the questions. Moreover, in order to achieve the research goals specified earlier, the following steps were undertaken in 2012:

- a) The representatives of centres for asylum-seekers, County Family Support Centres, Social Assistance Centres, municipal housing offices, shelters, night shelters, crisis intervention centres and other institutions providing help or shelter for homeless people in Warsaw, Białystok, Łomża, Biała Podlaska, Łuków, Lublin, Łódź, Brwinów, Dębak, Grotniki, Linin, Zalesie, Grudziądz, Bydgoszcz and Toruń, where refugees live, were contacted, presented with a description of the problem, including the homelessness definitions, and asked for data concerning the housing and welfare situation of recognised forced migrants. Thus, an institutional survey was conducted, and a full list of institutions located and contacted is available upon request;
- b) The Institute's researchers conducted six in-depth interviews with the representatives of Family Support Centres, social workers, and non-governmental organisations that specialize in providing assistance to refugees, one interview with a Polish employer who participates in a paid apprenticeships for refugees programme, and eight interviews with beneficiaries of international protection living in Poland;
- c) Sites and houses where refugees live have been visited to assess their habitability. During those visits, informal and formal interviews were conducted.

### 3. Scale of Homelessness

#### Scale of Homelessness

In 2012, Key Persons estimated that extreme homelessness (rooflessness) among beneficiaries of international protection ranges between 5% and 10%; houselessness and housing exclusion range between 30% and 40%, with only 20% of refugees having secure and adequate housing. According to these estimates - that up to 40% of refugees experiences one of the forms of housing exclusion, and taking into account the number of refugees with valid residence permits (4,920 at the end of 2011), the number of beneficiaries of international protection experiencing homelessness and housing exclusion in Poland in 2012 amounts then to approximately 2,000 persons. Similar to the findings of 2010, the research team attempted to account for the high mobility of refugees and therefore used the number of refugees who possess a valid residence card (Table 4) rather than the overall number of positive decisions to grant refugee status or other forms of protection. Since a residence permit must be periodically renewed, the Report assumes that statistics on residence permits reflect the number of refugees residing in Poland accurately. However, the data must be interpreted cautiously as there are refugees who are not residing in Poland but travel to Poland only for the purpose of renewing their residence card.

These estimates are consistent with the ones provided two years earlier. Whether this implies a high level of validity and reliability of the measurement of the homelessness phenomenon remains questionable, however, as more than half of the Key Persons interviewed were the same people as two years ago. In other words, the observed consistency might be due to the respondents' stability of perceptions, rather than the precision of the homelessness measurement method. When conducting measurement in social sciences, two properties are of special importance. The first one is called reliability and refers to "the extent the measuring procedure yields the same results on repeated trials".<sup>24</sup> Validity refers to "the extent to which the measuring procedure measures what it is intended to measure".<sup>25</sup> Assessing the reliability and validity in the case of this research is difficult, considering that the interviewees' memory during the first interview quite likely affected the responses given in the second interview. Hence the stability of estimates may be a result of the respondent's consistent experiences and opinions rather than of the properties of the measurement procedure.

The institutional survey was conducted for the year 2011. The survey yielded mixed results. On one hand, it did provide some hard data, which show that (a) there is a certain degree of geographical dispersion of homeless refugees; (b) all types of homelessness and housing exclusion were observed in the specified timeframe:

- 64 persons that were not entitled to benefits provided by the OF lived in centres for asylum-seekers between September and December 2011, according to data from the OF;
- 30 individual persons and two families were reported by shelters or social assistance centres' representatives as experiencing houselessness and a further 39 persons and 44 families were reported as facing housing exclusion or being at risk of homelessness in Warsaw;
- 32 persons (including 22 children) were reported as homeless or at risk of homelessness in Brwinów;
- 13 persons (including nine children) were reported as staying for one month in a homeless shelter in Toruń;
- Six families in Łuków were reported as experiencing housing exclusion;
- Two persons were reported as roofless and one as houseless in Lublin.

<sup>24</sup> E. G. Carmines and R. A. Zeller. 1979. *Reliability and Validity Assessment*. A Sage University Paper, Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

On the other hand, this data cannot be used for any extrapolations or statistical generalizations for two main reasons. First, not all contacted institutions providing assistance to refugees responded to the request for data. It cannot be established at this time whether their lack of response was random or systematic.<sup>26</sup> Second, from comments included in the forms provided by the surveyed institutions, it transpires that classifying a given person or a family into one of the homelessness categories was not uniform (the same across institutions) despite being sprovided instructions. Third, from the same comments, it transpires that institutions systematically underestimate the number of refugees experiencing homelessness and housing exclusion due to the common misinterpretation that 'homeless' equals 'roofless' (sleeping rough): *"We do not have homeless refugees in our district. They share flats with other refugees or stay with someone here or there"* [a representative of a surveyed institution].

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<sup>26</sup> There are two types of measurement errors that affect the results of any measurement procedure: random and systematic (nonrandom). Nonrandom error has a systematic biasing effect and is related to the validity of the measurement procedure. Random error does not bias the results, but affects their reliability (accuracy and stability). In the situation described above, it is not known whether the non-responding institutions were of any particular kind (systematic bias) or not. If, for example, only the institutions receiving State support provided the answers, it is not a random non-response and ultimately means that the measurement results are skewed in a systematic way (biased).

## 4. Has the Situation Changed?

### The Scale of the Housing Exclusion Threat and Analysis of Current Trends

When explaining refugee and migrant homelessness in the 2010 study, it was shown that newcomers face so-called micro-level barriers, that is, barriers that are experienced by individuals or families (households), and these are divided into primary and secondary barriers.<sup>27</sup> Primary barriers refer to individual characteristics of migrants, such as skin colour, ethnicity, gender, religion, or culture, and secondary barriers are linked to their language skills and knowledge of the host country institutions. Primary barriers are therefore connected with discrimination and prejudice and cannot be overcome by a refugee, whereas the secondary barriers can be reduced over time. Further obstacles include structural factors (macro-level barriers), such as high rental prices, lack of adequate social housing, long public housing waiting lists, limited social assistance, legislation that generally favours landlords, and lack of involvement on the part of state and local governments. However, the main impediment emphasized in the 2010 study relates to their economic status. Underemployment and lack of adequate income were mainly responsible for the housing exclusion faced by the beneficiaries of international protection.

In order to collect up-to-date information about the factors relevant to the welfare situation of refugees, six in-depth interviews were conducted with persons directly involved in aiding refugees (*Key Persons*). Respondents in the qualitative part of the research were representatives of district social/family assistance centres, delegates of foundations or NGOs providing direct assistance to refugees and homeless people from areas with the highest concentration of refugees. Four out of six interviewees participated in the pilot study as well. Moreover, eight in-depth individual interviews were carried out with refugees who were either directly affected by homelessness or housing exclusions or providing assistance to fellow refugees in difficult housing or welfare situations. Seven persons were from Chechnya and one from an African country. Five were experiencing homelessness, one was experiencing housing exclusion, and two were refugees serving as mentors to other refugees.<sup>28</sup>

#### 4.1. Main Findings<sup>29</sup>

##### 4.1.1. Typical housing history – general findings from the study

A typical housing history of a refugee from the moment of arrival in Poland in 2012 is similar to what was reported in 2010. For the duration of the status determination procedure, a person who is applying for international protection lives in a centre for asylum-seekers<sup>30</sup> or independently outside the centre. If the person chooses to live outside the centre, then he/she receives financial support and has the right to medical care, language courses offered in the centres, voluntary return assistance and a school starter kit for children.<sup>31</sup> While awaiting a decision on their claim, asylum-seekers cannot take up any work for the first six months and this is, in the opinion of Key Persons, one of the factors that hinders their path to self-sufficiency and creates dependency on social security benefits.<sup>32</sup> In 2011, according to the OF data sent to the Institute of Public Affairs, the average number of asylum-

<sup>27</sup> S. D'Addario, 2005, *Sleeping on the Margins: The Role of Social Capital in the Housing Patterns of Refugee Claimants in the Greater Vancouver Regional District*, MA Thesis, The University of British Columbia, Canada.

<sup>28</sup> A list of interviewees is provided in the Appendix, in Table 9.

<sup>29</sup> The findings presented in this section are based on the opinions and perceptions of the interviewees as presented in June 2012. The authors' commentaries are presented in the final section of this chapter.

<sup>30</sup> Living in a centre by definition means remaining in a state of homelessness – see section II.

<sup>31</sup> The Ordinance of the Minister of Interior dated 10 November 2011 on the amount of assistance for foreigners applying for refugee status (Journal of Laws of 2011, No. 261, Item 1564).

<sup>32</sup> Another factor contributing to the dependency on social benefits, which will be discussed in greater detail later in the text, is the form of assistance provided for participants of the IPI.

seekers and beneficiaries of international protection living inside the centres equalled 1,501 persons and 1,393 individuals were outside of the centres. At the end of 2011, these numbers were 2,709 and 1,162, respectively.<sup>33</sup> Given that the amount of financial support for persons living outside the centres is insufficient for independent renting, they are often forced to live in overcrowded and insecure conditions. Many end up sleeping in overcrowded apartments, sharing beds, and lack privacy and personal security. However, Key Person respondents agreed that persons residing outside of the centre during the status determination procedure integrate more successfully: *“We see a difference between persons who were living in the centre and persons who were living outside. The latter gains certain abilities, is more at ease in moving around town, dealing with issues, engaging in the neighbourhood and other social relationships”* [R4].

After receiving a positive decision, persons with refugee status or subsidiary protection may stay in a centre for another two months. During this time, they apply to participate in the IPI and in the case of entering into a contract with a County (or City) Family Support Centre (PCPR, MOPR) that manages and provides the assistance, they receive financial aid for the one-year duration of the programme.<sup>34</sup> The amount of this support and the IPI regulations enable their access to free market housing. Key persons note, however, that even at this stage, refugees have a problem with accommodation rental and require assistance. They are often not aware of how to search for housing or what to pay attention to when signing a tenancy agreement. Additionally, the vast majority do not speak Polish, hampering their communication with landlords who are usually reluctant to rent flats to refugees.<sup>35</sup>

The greatest risk of homelessness appears when the integration programme ends. Lacking stable employment, refugees are unable to keep a flat rented while receiving financial support available for IPI beneficiaries.<sup>36</sup> The rent is usually too high to be affordable for persons with now low, and often intermittent, income. Key Persons state that despite a notable improvement in programme management and implementation, the IPI still does not fulfil its function. In the space of the one-year programme, refugees are not able to learn Polish or acquire professional and socio-cultural competencies that are necessary to undertake work and achieve self-sufficiency in Polish society. To alleviate this, Key Persons propose extending the programme to two or three years. They emphasize, however, that after the first year of the integration

program, the support should rather involve mentoring and working on becoming self-reliant (including language skills) than simply provision of financial aid. Another reason for progressively reducing the importance of the financial component of the programme by, for example, introducing more language and job-related training, according to both Key Persons and refugees, is to discourage the observed tendency of refugees to cash the *“IPI money”* and move to Western Europe, from where they are often returned to Poland, if found to be working and living without the necessary permits. One of the respondents added, however, that refugees usually leave right before winter, which might indicate a relationship between the housing conditions and the decision to leave Poland.

<sup>33</sup> Source: <http://goo.gl/hAxQv> (accessed at 25 February)

<sup>34</sup> Persons who have received a permit for tolerated stay are not entitled to participate in the IPI; however, they can apply for social security (welfare benefits). Key Persons interviewed disagreed, however, on whether the risk of homelessness among migrants with a tolerated stay permit was higher than among refugees. According to some of them, reduced access to social benefits (including IPI) motivates them to integrate economically, which in turn leads to greater stability of income and housing.

<sup>35</sup> Although in certain places the situation has significantly improved – this will be discussed in greater detail later.

<sup>36</sup> Even when receiving the IPI financial support, refugees with large families are unable to afford larger housing units as the rental rates in cities with high refugee concentration are high, e.g. Warsaw.

When refugees face a difficult housing situation, *“...they usually contact non-governmental organisations, social assistance centres, or seek help within the diaspora or organise themselves”* [R2]. Those who have asked for help from social assistance centres or NGOs are offered help in finding temporary shelter in centres for the homeless, and, in the case of women with children, in crisis intervention centres<sup>37</sup> and single mother’s homes. Respondents emphasized that shelters are much more likely to accept tenants that are “co-funded” than those who are not. In other words, if a tenant is able to pay for their stay in a shelter or is recommended by an organisation that can sponsor their stay, shelters are much more likely to find available space than in the case of a person who has no resources, whether personal or institutional. The situation is further aggravated by the fact that very few organisations that help refugees have funds for reimbursing shelters. According to one of the respondents: *“...it might be a form of discrimination, of avoiding directly expressing the fact that they prefer a Pole. In many places I have heard, we have no support from the municipality, we maintain ourselves, so you need to pay”* [R1].

<sup>37</sup> Crisis Intervention Centres, in principle, accept only victims of domestic violence. The mere fact of finding oneself in a situation of homelessness or at risk of homelessness is not a sufficient circumstance for obtaining refuge in a Crisis Intervention Centre. A woman can stay in a given centre for three months, and in exceptional cases, six months. Hence the frequent migration of women between centres and also cases where female refugees “coached each other, so to speak. What to do to get into this or that centre. I won’t go into the details here, because some of the methods are pretty drastic: how to injure yourself or give some sort of signal to the authorities that, for example, you are experiencing violence”.. [E2, 2010].

On the other hand, as noted by representatives of the Family Support Centres in Warsaw and Lublin, far fewer people actually experience homelessness upon completion of the IPI. They give three reasons for that:

- 1 The number of IPI beneficiaries has declined in the past two years (for example, see Tables 6-8 in the Appendix), therefore the integration issues have become more manageable: *“We have about 50% fewer IPI beneficiaries than two years ago. In 2010, the high number was a result of the amendments to the law made in 2008, when a new group of persons eligible to integration assistance was introduced, namely persons with subsidiary protection status. At present, the number has dropped back to the value from before 2008 and is about 100-120 families. Two years ago it was 400-500 families. (...) When the number is lower, it is easier for us to help”* [R4].
- 2 The recent refugees are single – there are almost no large families among them; the predominant group of beneficiaries of international protection includes young, single men (this fact was also noted by a respondent in Białystok) and it is easier to secure a room or space in a shared flat or house for them; two or three-person households have replaced the large families that prevailed before 2010: *“We have only two families with more than four children”* [R12];
- 3 There are services (co-financed by the European Refugees Fund and the State budget) that aim at securing temporary, safe housing for refugees and subsidiary protection beneficiaries completing the IPI or trying to escape homelessness, namely, the bridge housing services. The bridge housing projects, run in Poland by three institutions: Warsaw Family Support Centre, Lublin City Family Support Centre and Caritas Polska, are the next step up from an emergency shelter. This service allows beneficiaries of international protection to stay in a shared facility or apartment for 12-18 months (in the case of Caritas, up to 36 months). The refugees are expected to provide a small payment depending on their income and are expected to participate in case management services to assist them with their goal of living in their own home or apartment.

Details regarding the number of bridge housing service users and the location of houses are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5:** Bridge Housing Services

| Institution                       | Location  | Number of Flats |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|-----------------|
| Warsaw City Family Support Centre | Warsaw    | 1               |
| CARITAS Polska                    | Warsaw    | 2               |
|                                   | Łuków     | 1               |
|                                   | Lublin    | 7               |
|                                   | Białystok | 6               |
| Lublin City Family Support Centre | Lublin    | 3               |

Source: WCPR, CARITAS POLSKA, MOPR Lublin

Moreover, as noted by the NGO's representatives:

- 4 As a result of consistent lobbying and awareness raising initiatives by NGOs, the local authorities' procedures and approach towards providing assistance to homeless beneficiaries of international protection have improved. As stated by a respondent, "[t]he city [of Warsaw] not only still offers a pool of housing designated for refugees allocated on the basis of a competitive application procedure, but also allocates social housing if extraordinary circumstances occur. (...) Undoubtedly, the city has also addressed the absolute homelessness issue. If there is a homeless refugee living in a shelter, he/she may apply for city housing and he/she will receive it. The city's activities and decisions are going in the right direction, but the problem with employment that mainly determines the housing situation remains" [R2]. In Lublin, on 31 May 2012, a resolution was passed that granted persons with subsidiary protection a right to apply for council (city) housing.

According to the local government representatives, the housing situation of recent refugees and subsidiary protection beneficiaries has improved. This, however, has not been the outcome of any systemic solutions but of changes in volume and demographic characteristics of beneficiaries of international protection in Poland.

#### 4.1.2. Single persons, young persons, single mothers

In 2010, interviewees emphasized that all refugees experience housing exclusion and are at risk of homelessness at some point. However, Key Persons maintained that large families and single mothers are particularly vulnerable due to a lack of suitable housing to accommodate their needs. At the other end, single men had the greatest chance of avoiding homelessness because it was easier for them, Key Persons claim, to find work, even if it was irregular. This work, in conjunction with welfare benefits, provides sufficient resources to rent at least a separate or shared room. These findings echoed those recognised as such in other countries.<sup>38</sup>

In 2012, respondents stressed that single women and young, single men are also categories of refugees exposed to homelessness. Young adults are often undereducated and speak only their native tongue. In the case of Chechens, the most numerous refugee group, this is, in their own opinion, due to the collapse of the education system in Chechnya during the war.<sup>39</sup> These factors, in turn, hinder their attempts to achieve economic self-sufficiency and make them dependent on social and community assistance. It was also mentioned that homeowners are scared of renting rooms and flats to single men. In the case of single women, gender discrimination and the "motherhood penalty" phenomenon plays a role; therefore, they are often advised by persons assisting them to inform the landlord that "[their] husband is currently working in Warsaw". The "motherhood penalty" refers to the finding that being a mother specifically, not just being female or being a parent, leads to lower income.<sup>40</sup> As a person's income and housing situation are related, it is assumed here that the motherhood penalty affects the housing situation of refugee mothers as well as their workplace situation. The motherhood status affects refugee-women housing access directly, through low or no income, and indirectly, through the perceptions and stereotypes held by landlords. The size of the motherhood pay gap in Poland has not been systematically studied yet, but the gender pay gap has been demonstrated to be over 10%.

<sup>38</sup> D. Hiebert, S. D'Addario, K. Sherrell, 2005, *The Profile of Absolute and Relative...*, op.cit.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. K. Wysocka. 2011. "Refugee integration experience in Poland: refugees' plans, aspirations, and needs". In: *Weak links: Challenges to the international protection system in Poland*, J. Frelak, W. Klaus, (eds.), ISP Foundation: Warsaw (in Polish).

<sup>40</sup> S. J. Correll, S. Benard, and I. Paik. 2007. Getting a job: Is there a Motherhood Penalty, *American Journal of Sociology* 112: 1297-1338.

### 4.1.3. Macro- and micro- level factors in falling into and remaining in homelessness.

For all newcomers to Poland, finding and keeping an appropriate flat is the first step in the integration process. However, interviewees have emphasized that in the case of beneficiaries of international protection, finding suitable accommodation is very difficult due to three factors: ❶ the limited number of social and council flats, including accommodation that is appropriate for families, ❷ underemployment of refugees, and ❸ private landlords discriminating against them in the rental market. Regarding the first factor, most respondents pointed out that lack of social housing is an institutional cause and a barrier to escaping from homelessness not just for refugees, but also for the homeless in general. Institutional problems stem from the following characteristics of the housing system in Poland:

- the inadequate structure of housing, that is,
  - the low number of social and council flats within each district;
  - the low number housing provided by the Social Housing Association;
  - the low number of subsidized rent housing;
  - a disproportionately high number of privately owned flats;
  - the large amount of substandard housing;
- limited engagement of district authorities in actions supporting the increase of social housing units;
- ineffective management of the district housing resources;
- social housing not included in the district spatial planning and no social housing action plans/strategies;<sup>41</sup>
- imprecise legal regulations and lack of clearly defined body responsible for housing at the local level, including no sanctions in case district authorities do not fulfil their housing obligations towards local community members.<sup>42</sup>

However, the respondents stressed that the refugees' access to housing is further obstructed by direct and indirect discrimination by the local and district authorities managing the council and social housing. Specifically, many require that applicants for such housing

provide evidence of having lived in the district/county for a defined period. They may also ask applicants to attach a lease agreement from the place of current residence and then continue to reject their application based on the fact they do not meet the definition of a homeless person [R3].<sup>43</sup>

Underemployment of refugees in the context of homelessness is understood as the inability to earn sufficient income to rent and maintain an appropriate flat. It is dependent on a series of variables. First, refugees have difficulty in finding and keeping work due to poor knowledge of Polish. Second, very often they lack the qualifications and abilities required on the Polish labour market, and are thus 'condemned' to low paid work as unskilled workers. Third, even if they possess the education or skills that are sought on the market, their diplomas and certificates are not recognised in Poland or are valued lower by employers. Fourth, Polish employers do not want to employ refugees and are unaware of the law concerning employment of persons with refugee status. They often discriminate against the refugees. Some also report negative experiences from employing foreigners. Furthermore, in the case of large families, taking up work by both parents is often impossible, and the earnings of one person rarely suffice to pay the rent and support a family. In the case of single mothers with children of nursery school age, taking up any type of work is difficult because placing a child in a State-funded nursery is virtually impossible as the family support system in Poland is as deficient as the housing one. It has also been indicated in the interviews that housing and employment problems constitute a vicious circle in yet another form: *There was a case where a Chechen took a course and passed a driving test. But without an official address they didn't want to issue him the license. Finally, for a fee of PLN 200-300, they issued him a temporary address. It needs not to be mentioned that without the license, this Chechen person could not take up the promised job.* [R10]

<sup>41</sup> In Poland, it is the district unit that is responsible for meeting the housing needs of the local community. As mandated by law, the district authorities use the district's housing resource or other resources to meet these needs.

<sup>42</sup> Cf., P. Olech, 2011, "Preventing homelessness, integration of homeless persons and the housing issues in Poland. An overview of housing problems in the context of homelessness". in: *The problem of homelessness in Poland*, M. Dębski (ed.), PFWB, Gdansk.

<sup>43</sup> A similar case has been described by K. Wencel, 2011, *op. cit.*

Another obstacle to renting accommodation by refugees is prejudice and discrimination on the part of property owners. Landlords, as the rest of the society, have a particular aversion towards refugees from Chechnya. Chechens are still associated with terrorism<sup>44</sup> and also with being unreliable tenants. Almost all respondents, both the Key Persons and refugees mentioned the Chechen stereotype: *“The term Chechen is treated as a synonym for terrorist - AK-47, weapon, beard, cruelty, and wildness; an incredibly harmful stereotype created by the media long ago and almost impossible to overcome”* [R3, R12]. Public opinion surveys support the claim that Poles dislike Chechens. According to Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS), the only groups Poles like less than Chechens are Jews, Russians, Turks, Romanians, Arabs and Roma.<sup>45</sup> The prevalence of ethnic and racial prejudices affects refugees from Africa as well. Some landlords *“say Chechens – ok, but Africans – no...”* [R3]. It has also been stated that Polish landlords, when aware that someone is a refugee in an IPI programme and receiving financial support, ask for higher rents and/or, when the programme is over, force tenants to leave deeming them unreliable [R5, R9, R10, R11, R13, R14].

Conducting a media campaign addressing the anti-foreigner sentiment and integration activities directed at the local communities changes such negative attitudes as the example of Lublin shows. The Lublin City Family Support Centre ran a number of sponsored articles in local newspapers describing refugee stories and appealing to local people for more empathy, as well as organised a series of events in which occupants of the bridge houses participated. The results were described as follows: *“[b]efore, there was no chance for even one person reacting favourably. After, 20 phone calls and I had four housing offers for a family of seven”!* [R5]

<sup>44</sup> Such prejudice was expressed during protests against establishing a refugee camp in Jastrzębia Góra. Cf., M. Pajura, M. Lużyński, 2009, Preventing discrimination and xenophobia towards refugees and marginalized migrants in Poland, Centrum Pomocy Prawnej im. H. Nieć, Kraków (in Polish) and in the interviews.

<sup>45</sup> CBOS. 2007, 2010, 2012. “Attitudes of Poles towards different nationalities. Survey results”. *CBOS Research Reports*: Warsaw.

#### 4.1.4. Cultural maladjustment has an influence on homelessness.

Key Persons noted that persons brought up in different cultures often adopt behaviours and strategies of coping that are interpreted as indicating negligent attitudes or lack of motivation to make Poland a new home. Both refugees and social workers indicated that in many cases refugees are not aware of the basic principles of the market economy, such as paying for electricity and water used, getting to work on time or informing an employer about a planned absence. Accustomed to different work and accommodation arrangements, they do not conform to the rules and expectations established in Poland, which at best causes minor difficulties in understanding the scope of responsibility of contractual parties, and at worst leads to stereotyping and conflicts. It happens that refugees reject work offers, miss workdays and in the end lose the job [R2, R5, R7]. This, in turn, makes them more and more reliant on social assistance. Furthermore, the syndrome of learned helplessness and dependence on social assistance is often exacerbated, according to Key Persons, by prolonged residence in asylum-seeker centres. In addition, some have unrealistic expectations towards the social welfare system of the receiving country that leads to misunderstandings about their rights and privileges as refugees. The existence of refugee networks – despite being the only social capital of a refugee in many cases – intensifies the low level of personal control and responsibility for one’s own fate.

#### 4.1.5. Addictions and homelessness

In the previous study, accounts about drug or alcohol addictions among refugees were rare. Currently, almost all Key Persons and refugees interviewed have pointed to addictions as an increasing problem and they related it to homelessness: *“Addictions are a problem. If there is an addicted person, the entire family suffers because the money is spent on pills or alcohol”* [R9]. Addicted refugees often refuse help from Polish institutions and are getting rejected by their own communities. This might lead to dramatic outcomes as expert respondents reported a couple of deaths and refugees reported a total ostracism by the community of the addicted person. The main problem related to substance abuse identified by respondents is that it affects the housing situation of an entire family.

In earlier studies cited in the report it has also been pointed out that there is a relationship between the living conditions in the reception centres and abuse of various addictive substances. There are various possible explanations for the reported issue. The most applicable in the opinion of UNHCR experts<sup>46</sup> is the Acculturative Stress Model which rests on the idea that adjusting to a new country is a stressful life experience. The stress of adjusting contributes to the development of substance use problems. Refugees, who have to cope not only with the burden of cultural and social adjustment to the host country norms but also with multiple other stressful and traumatic events, are especially at risk of stress-related addictions.<sup>47</sup> According to UNHCR experts, the psychosocial support - funded by the State and provided to refugees staying in the reception centres and those participating in the IPI - is insufficient. This suggests that the issue of refugees' increased needs for various types of counseling has so far not been acknowledged adequately by the authorities and ought to be addressed. The issues related to substance abuse and addictions among the beneficiaries of international protection in Poland need further analysis, however. It is nonetheless linked with homelessness and under specified circumstances can be a cause or an outcome of it: *"I asked him: 'why do you drink?' He says: 'try to fall asleep on a bench sober, when you are scared somebody will attack you. It helps me sleep'"*[R15]; *"(...) a man ended up in the street. He was addicted to pills and alcohol. We were trying to send him to a centre, where he could get help. They didn't accept him, as he was drunk. He was staying at various flats, but people didn't want him anymore. Large families sharing one, two rooms, there was no room for a drunken man. He ended up in the street again"* [R9].

<sup>46</sup> Conversations with integration staff at UNHCR office in Poland and UNHCR Regional Representation for Central Europe.

<sup>47</sup> H. Sowe, 2005, Are Refugees at Increased Risk of Substance Misuse?, D.A.M.E.C.: NSW, Australia.

#### 4.1.6. Living conditions are poor. Particularly for those returned to Poland from other EU countries

With regard to living conditions, not much has changed since 2010. Refugees, persons providing assistance to them and researchers visiting refugee dwellings have described conditions in which refugees live as substandard. Flats are overcrowded; four or five people often share the same small room and additional persons sleep in kitchens and halls. In some flats, there is only a shared toilet available in the corridor, and many families make use of it. Some buildings in which refugees live have no bath or shower. Some have no electricity, no running water and no heating system either.

It was indicated that social housing offered by the city often constitutes an example of inadequate housing, in which living conditions are substandard: damp with fungus, and without central heating (only expensive electric heating) [R2].

According to respondents, both Key Persons and refugees, persons returned from other EU countries face the worst housing situation. As put by respondents, *"[t]hey end up in the street"* [R3, R9, R13]. When they come for help to one of the non-profit organisations that provide assistance to refugees they are directed to night shelters [R1, R3]. *"We have good relationships with some of them and we pay. And we talk to them (...) and we say we'll pay for a maximum three days. They usually have no money themselves. But what will happen later? (...) Relatives? Close ones? Call them. You must have a plan. You cannot stay in the street. Alarm others. You have three days to call, think and act. (...) We will help you look for a flat if you decide you want to stay"*. A visit paid to an ad-hoc shelter for returned persons in Łomża confirmed that the conditions in which returned persons live meet the definition of homelessness. The shelter was organised in a space previously serving as a dorm-like staff accommodation. Families were sharing a room; the kitchen and bathroom belonged to the common area. There were limited cooking appliances. The dwelling was deemed substandard, overcrowded and socially isolated.

# Conclusions and Recommendations

The recommendations below exclusively concern issues related to the phenomenon of refugee homelessness. Thus, they do not relate to the general problem of homelessness, although these recommendations should become part of the general exit strategy for the homeless in Poland. The general anti-homelessness strategy should involve institutional and legal changes regarding the housing system as described at the beginning of Part Three. Especially, as stressed by Key Persons, legal and financial mechanisms promoting the change in the housing structure should be implemented. These mechanisms should be focused on increasing access to social housing, housing for rent, subsidized housing and microcredits. Furthermore, it needs to be stressed that implementing **special** solutions for refugees should be done very carefully in order to not jeopardize social cohesion and increase anti-refugee sentiments. In other words, the decision makers need to balance the goal of introducing affirmative measures for refugees and maintaining acceptance for such measures in the Polish society.

## 1. The number of people who live outside centres for asylum-seekers during the status recognition procedure should be systematically increased.

Taking into account the experience of other countries, such as Sweden and Norway, as well as the direct observations of persons waiting for a decision outside centres in Poland, it can be concluded that refugees without a “centre past” integrate faster and better. NGO and family assistance centre staff maintains that this is due to the absence of a network of relationships with refugees living in the centre. In other words, they do not have a well established refugee identity and a preference for being amongst “their own”. They frequently rent flats or rooms amongst Poles, which boosts their language learning process and, consequently, facilitates their finding work and becoming self-sufficient.

## 2. Asylum-seekers awaiting status recognition outside the centre should have their financial support increased for the time they are not allowed to work and should be assisted in finding a flat.

Persons awaiting refugee status recognition usually do not have sufficient cultural competencies to independently “navigate” the Polish housing market. That is why they need institutional help in looking for their first place. In Norway, the Directorate of Integration and Diversity, and in Sweden, the Migration Board,<sup>48</sup> contact local municipal or district authorities for this purpose, which then provide support for the potential refugee in this process. Preparing detailed solutions, which would be applicable in Poland, requires stakeholder consultations. Specifically, such discussions should take place between the OF, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, local governments, NGOs, refugees, landlords, private owners, housing agencies and estate agencies. Including realtors in the consultations would also allow for the establishment of a realistic minimum amount necessary to rent accommodation fulfilling defined standards in the housing market. Asylum-seekers deciding to await the status recognition procedure outside the centre could be advised by social workers employed by the centre to settle in regions and towns of the country that have low unemployment rates and reasonably low rental rates.

In the aforementioned countries, Sweden and Norway, a refugee deciding to wait for status recognition outside a centre may choose to live with a family or independently look for a flat in their preferred location. In that situation, they only receive financial aid and can ask for assistance from the host State in finding secure accommodation. Then the refugee is directed to places that have declared not only housing support, but also support in the process of cultural and economic integration of the refugee. An obstacle to implementing such a solution in Poland may be a low

<sup>48</sup> Source: <http://goo.gl/KddQc> (accessed at 25 February)

– self-declared – capability of the counties to receive and support refugees. As of the end of September 2009 (according to data provided by Ministry of Labour and Social Policy) only four counties declared that they were able to accept and assist beneficiaries of international protection. Under the Polish Migration Strategy, it has been proposed that reception centres should be spread out and small centres should be established in urban areas across Poland. If these recommendations were implemented, integration points in the districts where these centres were located could be established, and the necessary cultural and economic integration assistance could be provided to asylum-seekers. These integration points should be run by OF in cooperation with family centres, social assistance centres and NGOs.

Limiting the number of persons waiting for a decision in centres would allow the reallocation of resources designated for supporting them to a pool earmarked for assistance to persons deciding to live outside centres. Increased financial assistance for those living outside the centres is essential – especially during the period when they cannot take up legal paid work – in order to ensure decent housing conditions for themselves and minimize/eliminate the risk of housing exclusion from the outset of their stay in Poland.

### 3. A professional activation programme should be assured for persons awaiting a decision

A professional activation programme should be developed for both asylum-seekers staying in the centre and for those residing outside it. The programme should encompass (apart from professional courses), workshops on interpersonal skills in a cultural context. These could include, for example, exercises on how to negotiate the accommodation rental from landlords and interviews with employers, as well as training in basic financial management and sessions with a professional career advisor. This will ensure that while waiting for a decision, an asylum-seeker is involved in activities that can foster their integration chances and increase the likelihood to take on work while in the procedure. Furthermore, persons who obtain a positive decision will be better prepared to cope in the new cultural and labour market environment. Such programmes could be managed and run by refugee mentors employed by each asylum-seeker centre which would reduce the cost incurred by the implementation of such programme.

### 4. Procedures of verification (recognition) of certificates and diplomas should be simplified as much as possible

In order to facilitate the refugees' access to the Polish labour market and prevent the process of refugees deskilling, the process of both vocational and professional education recognition should be made as simple as possible. This could be achieved by extending the application of European Qualifications Framework to training and education obtained outside the EU.

### 5. The duration of the IPI should be extended and its content should be changed

Key Persons and refugees agreed that in the current form the IPIs are ineffective in ensuring economic and social integration, and preventing occurrences of homelessness among beneficiaries of international protection. Apart from the reasons mentioned in Part Three, it has also been noted that the design of the IPI contract sometimes hampers refugees' economic integration. For example, the obligations to attend Polish lessons and have regular meetings with a social worker that are scheduled during working hours often make it impossible to undertake full-time work. Just prolonging the duration of the IPI without changing its formula, however, will only deepen the problem of dependence on social assistance. The programmes should be flexible enough to allow beneficiaries to work while also fulfilling other conditions. That is why a team of Key Persons should be assembled, composed of representatives of service providers and refugees themselves, who will develop variants of integration programmes, taking into account the specific nature and needs of various refugee groups.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Demands for changes in the formula and duration of the IPI have been formulated by Key Persons and persons dealing with the problem of refugee integration for years. See *Next Stop Poland, Analysis of integration programmes for refugees*, op. cit.; *Evaluation of the functioning of the institution of social support in Warsaw in terms of correct upholding of forced migrants' rights*, op. cit.

## 6. The pool of sheltered, secured and bridge housing designated for refugees, especially large families, should be increased

When asked to give examples of successful solutions to the problem of refugee homelessness, Key Persons described the cooperation between the Lublin City Social Assistance Centre and Caritas Polska, which are jointly running a programme of bridge housing for beneficiaries of international protection, as described earlier. The functioning principles of bridge houses (co-financed by the European Refugee Fund) are similar to those of sheltered flats: residence is temporary and is concurrent with individual developmental work under the direction of a social worker. Ensuring accommodation is a key factor in facilitating the integration of refugees. However, Key Persons note that allocation of a flat must be concomitant with intensive social assistance, including psychological, professional and cultural counseling. This is needed in order to support the refugee in achieving self-sufficiency after a certain period. Allocation of a flat alone does not solve cultural, economic and motivational deficits among refugees, and thus does not reduce the risk of homelessness in the future. The homeless refugees should therefore be involved in the process of diagnosing, planning and executing his/her individual bridge house programme, and feel responsible for its success.

## 7. Special care should be provided for children, adolescents and young adults.

Respondents taking part in the study emphasized the negative consequences of homelessness for children of refugees. They should thus receive special care and protection. Key Persons claim that the integration and possible successes of children at school constitute a strong motivating factor for parents. Good practice linked with childcare has been developed in Białystok, where the Eleos Foundation runs a children's integration club. Apart from help with homework (due to the language barrier, parents cannot provide this help themselves), the following are offered in the children's club: social therapy, intercultural activities, art and sports classes. Furthermore, children can also receive a hot meal. According to interviewees, these activities are highly effective: children of refugees who attend this club cope better in school, are in a better

psychological state and more easily establish relationships and friendships with Polish children.

There is also a need to support refugee youth of secondary school age – while children of pre-school and early school age quickly learn the language and establish relationships with peers, adolescents have certain difficulties. Furthermore, teenagers often have difficulties with building relationships with adults, especially adults of a different culture. Therefore, drawing on studies of homeless refugees in Canada,<sup>50</sup> Polish teenagers or youth of a similar ethnic background who have integrated successfully can and should be used for work with young refugees.

Monitoring the implementation and functioning of the institution of a multicultural assistant in State schools should also be carried out. Amendments to the School Education Act, which entered into force on 1 January 2010, stipulate that every person who should attend school but does not speak Polish at all or insufficiently to benefit from education has the right to additional, free-of-charge Polish lessons ensured by the school. They are further entitled to assistance from a person who speaks the language of the country of origin of the student and who is employed on the principle of educational support for the teacher. Such a person is usually called a cultural assistant. From observations and experiences of NGOs,<sup>51</sup> it can be concluded that “the presence of a multicultural assistant means that numerous problems with which the school coped up till now with great difficulty or sometimes not at all, have become significantly easier to solve”.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>50</sup> *Living on the Ragged Edges. Immigrants, Refugees and Homelessness in Toronto*. Forum Summary. Metro Hall, Toronto 2003.

<sup>51</sup> See the Association for Legal Intervention (SIP), which under the “Multicultural School” project has confirmed the effectiveness of such a solution.

<sup>52</sup> Aleksandra Chrzanowska, *The cultural assistant, an innovative model of work in schools accepting children of foreigners*, SIP, Warszawa 2009.

## 8. Women and single mothers should be provided with particular support

In the experience of Key Persons and refugees, women originating from Muslim countries and single mothers are in a particularly difficult situation and highly at risk of homelessness. Changes in the IPI formula should thus take into account the special needs and social conditions of this group of refugees. Additionally, they should receive preferential treatment when being allocated sheltered and/or council housing similar to the treatment of Polish women who are in an identical situation and are given priority. Particular support for women, including economic and housing assistance, should be granted to them due to their limited economic and social integration opportunities as child caregivers.

## 9. Special training and supervision programmes for social workers should be offered

Both working with refugees as well as working with the homeless require special skills and are emotionally draining. Working with homeless refugees requires a unique set of competences. Therefore, it is necessary that social workers have constant access to up-to-date knowledge and psychological counseling necessary for them to provide assistance to others and avoid occupational burnout. It has been mentioned repeatedly in the interviews that social workers are often left to their own devices and are expected to supervise themselves.

## 10. A system for data collection and monitoring of the housing situation of beneficiaries of international protection should be designed

As mentioned throughout the Report, collecting data and conducting analysis regarding the housing situation of beneficiaries of international protection and tolerated stay permit holders is challenging but necessary for designing adequate integration policies. Such a data collection system should allow for estimates of the scale of various forms of homelessness, as well as the extent of housing exclusion, and should include a number of variables necessary for finding adequate policy solutions (e.g. demographic variables, employment and housing paths before and after status recognition, etc.). These data should serve as the basis for the cost-benefit analysis of possible forms of financing programmes that help refugees exit from homelessness. As Key Persons disagree on the optimal choices in this matter, there is a need for an in-depth economic analysis, based on which it would be possible to adopt the most effective model of granting and using aid funds.

**Table 6:** Housing Situation of Persons who Completed the IPI in Warsaw in 2011 as Contracted

| No.                                       | Housing Situation                                                                              | Number of Persons in 2011 |
|-------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Refugees</b>                           |                                                                                                |                           |
| 1.                                        | Council Housing                                                                                | 0                         |
| 2.                                        | Flat rented on the free market independently                                                   | 10                        |
| 3.                                        | Flat rented on the free market with other family members who were not participating in the IPI | 2                         |
| 4.                                        | Flat rented on the free market with other non-family migrants                                  | 6                         |
| <b>Persons with subsidiary protection</b> |                                                                                                |                           |
| 5.                                        | Council Housing                                                                                | 0                         |
| 6.                                        | Flat rented on the free market independently                                                   | 4                         |
| 7.                                        | Flat rented on the free market with other family members who were not participating in the IPI | 4                         |
| 8.                                        | Flat rented on the free market with other non-family migrants                                  | 7                         |

Source: WCPR

**Table 7:** Housing Situation of Persons Participating in the IPI in 2009

| No.                                       | Housing Situation                                                              | Number of Persons (percentage) |
|-------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Refugees</b>                           |                                                                                |                                |
| 1.                                        | Council Housing                                                                | 2 (0.03)                       |
| 2.                                        | Flat rented on the free market.                                                | 45 (0.75)                      |
| 3.                                        | Reception centre for asylum-seekers (renting a room)                           | 5 (0.08)                       |
| 4.                                        | Other (Single Mother's Home)                                                   | 8 (0.13)                       |
| <b>Persons with subsidiary protection</b> |                                                                                |                                |
| 5.                                        | Council Housing                                                                | 0 (0)                          |
| 6.                                        | Flat rented on the free market                                                 | 373 (0.63)                     |
| 7.                                        | Reception centre for asylum-seekers (renting a room)                           | 172 (0.29)                     |
| 8.                                        | Other (refugee shelter, night shelter, dormitory, NGO office, trailer/caravan) | 44 (0.07)                      |

Source: WCPR

**Table 8:** Housing Situation of Persons who Completed the IPI in Lublin in 2011 as Contracted<sup>53</sup>

| No.                                       | Housing Situation                                                                              | Number of Persons (percentage) |
|-------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Persons with subsidiary protection</b> |                                                                                                |                                |
| 1.                                        | Council Housing                                                                                | 0                              |
| 2.                                        | Flat rented on the free market independently                                                   | 0                              |
| 3.                                        | Flat rented on the free market with other family members who were not participating in the IPI | 0                              |
| 4.                                        | Flat rented on the free market with other non-family migrants                                  | 0                              |
| 5.                                        | Reception centre for asylum-seekers (renting a room)                                           | 0                              |
| 6.                                        | Other (refugee shelter, night shelter, dormitory, NGO office, trailer/caravan)                 | 1 family of four persons.      |

Source: MOPR Lublin

**Table 9:** A list of participants in the qualitative part of the study

| No. | Housing Situation                                | Location  | Gender |
|-----|--------------------------------------------------|-----------|--------|
| R1  | Key Person                                       | Warszawa  | F      |
| R2  | Key Person                                       | Warszawa  | F      |
| R3  | Refugee mentor                                   | Warszawa  | F      |
| R4  | Key Person                                       | Warszawa  | F      |
| R5  | Key Person                                       | Lublin    | F      |
| R6  | Homeless beneficiary of international protection | Lublin    | M      |
| R7  | Employer                                         | Lublin    | M      |
| R8  | Homeless beneficiary of international protection | Warszawa  | F      |
| R9  | Refugee mentor                                   | Łomża     | F      |
| R10 | Homeless beneficiary of international protection | Łomża     | M      |
| R11 | Homeless beneficiary of international protection | Białystok | F      |
| R12 | Key Person                                       | Białystok | F      |
| R13 | Homeless beneficiary of international protection | Łomża     | M      |
| R14 | Homeless beneficiary of international protection | Łomża     | M      |
| R15 | Key Person                                       | Warszawa  | M      |

<sup>53</sup> As stated by the City Family Support Centre: Migrants who completed the IPI in 2011 left the territory of Poland, despite having their housing upon completion of IPI secured.