

Belgium: Government Reception Plan with Main Focus on Restrictions and Return as Asylum Seekers and Activists Take Matters into Their Own Hands

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As the reception crisis continues, the government has launched a plan with a main focus on restrictions. Meanwhile, asylum seekers and activists have taken matters into their own hands occupying a building set to house the National Crisis Center.

The ongoing [reception crisis](#) in the Belgian capital of Brussels [continues to leave asylum seekers without shelter and sleeping rough](#). According to Belgium's asylum agency, Fedasil the number of "homeless" asylum seekers reached between 2,000 and 3,000 by early March. As of [late January 2023](#), the federal government had [been convicted](#) by the Labour Court more than 6,000 times for failing to provide accommodation to asylum seekers [and fined](#) "well over 280 million Euros". Given the refusal to pay, a bailiff has visited Fedasil, the cabinet of Migration State Secretary Nicole De Moor and the cabinet of Prime Minister Alexander De Croo (Open VLD) to confiscate goods.

De Croo and de Moor presented a [new migration deal](#) on 8 March. The announced plan includes the aim of establishing some 700 accommodation places using shipping containers [reportedly](#) supplied by the European Asylum Agency (EUA) and a ban on placing children in detention centres. However, the main elements [are restrictive](#),



including a 30-day limit to leave reception places for rejected asylum seekers, legally anchoring the proactive return policy, imposed measures to ensure cooperation on return, acceleration of deportations and Dublin transfers. “Those who have used up all appeals must return to their country of origin. That is why we will focus more on outflows and deportations. The proactive return policy is enshrined in law. We will not continue to create reception places. Those entitled to reception will get it, but no collective regularisation will happen. On the contrary,” said De Croo. Further, the plan includes severe restrictions on family reunifications. **According** to Euractiv: “It notably includes a procedure for determining who the effective carer of the child is. Family reunification with Belgian children will be possible for the parent who effectively takes care of the child daily, as before being the child’s parent was sufficient. The ban on family reunification — which provides for a two-year waiting period for third-country nationals who are here through family reunification — will be extended to foreigners who seek the right of residence as partners of a Belgian or EU citizen”. ECRE member, Flemish Refugee Action **sees little impact** on the reception crisis with promised places not immediately available and urges a clear framework and increased dialogue with local authorities instead of a “yo-yo policy” of phasing out local shelter initiatives that now turns out to be very needed. The organisation further notes (translation): “Instead of taking responsibility, the federal government is blaming some groups in the shelter for the shelter crisis. For example, those who apply for family reunification or cannot return to their country of origin for medical reasons”.

Meanwhile, as the reception crisis continues, asylum seekers and activists have been forced to take matters into their own hands. A group of 60 asylum seekers, sheltering in a building on Avenue du Port after being **evicted from a tented camp** in front of the Petit Château reception centre, were **again evicted** on 10 March. The eviction that was originally announced for 13 March left many asylum seekers **without alternatives** and surprised activists who tried to contact regional authorities – apparently unaware of developments – as **according** to Yan Verhoeven, a volunteer of the movement, Stop the reception crisis, workers were “already blocking the entrance to the building”.

Reportedly, workers were instructed to make the building uninhabitable by a federal body on request from the Brussels capital police. Editor-in-chief of **Are We Europe**, Anneleen Ophoff **reported on** 13 March (translated): “Koning Albert IIIaan, about nine hours ago. A hundred civil activists and about fifty asylum seekers force their way into an empty government building and barricade the doors. On the street side, dozens of activists are sitting on the ground”. **According** to Ophoff, taking over the building set to house the National Crisis Center is symbolic as “the lack of shelter for asylum seekers is the crisis of today”. Réseau ADES, published **video material** of police **blocking** the building, **unsuccessfully** seeking to prevent food and blankets distributed by activists and supporters to the occupants from entering. On the evening of 13 March, the organisation **stated** (translated): “At 6 p.m., we wait. We are waiting for the authorities to decide who will manage the situation and who will free up places for asylum seekers. In the meantime, the police siege continues. Our occupation too”. The Building’s Agency is **reportedly** taking legal action against the occupants and Nicole de Moor has warned



that “Anyone who squats a building will not be given priority at Fedasil”. On 15 March, Réseau ADES communicated that the region of Brussels capital proposed temporary accommodation to the occupants of the building, a solution rejected by asylum seekers who fear being left once again in the streets. “When we were expelled from the Palais squat, we were promised that we would be rehoused. But yesterday we found ourselves on the street again”, an asylum seeker named Duclo said. The occupants renewed their call for an emergency reception for all asylum seekers left in the streets through a compulsory distribution plan in the municipalities or the activation of the national crisis phase. Meanwhile, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in Belgium has long criticised the Belgian authorities for not providing asylum accommodation.

For further information:

- ECRE, Belgium: Reception Crisis Continues and Convictions of Authorities Mount, NGOs Unimpressed with Evacuation of Unsafe Squat Leaving Many in the Street, February 2023
- ECRE, Belgium: Failure to Deal with Persistent Reception Crisis is “Attack on Rule of Law” Human Rights Institutions Say, Situation in the Building of Palais des Droits is “Worse than that in Libya’s Camps” Underline NGOs As Authorities Find No Solution, January 2023

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