

Ukraine crisis: financial support is urgently needed to ensure affordable and accessible housing in EU regions and cities hosting refugees



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The immediate and long-term challenges of housing the 7.3 million Ukrainian refugees registered in the EU's cities and regions was the subject of debate on 29 September at a meeting of the CoR's Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy and EU Budget (COTER). The long-term challenges were particularly emphasised by Jan Fluxa, the deputy minister for regional development of the Czech Republic, which currently holds the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union. Many of the refugees will stay "for longer, if not forever" and there is a need to ease their move from "immediate but short-term" housing solutions – which, Deputy Minister Fluxa said, had created a "very unpredictable situation" – to "standard housing".

Issues touched on included the EU's ongoing reliance on households to host Ukrainian refugees, fears that the soaring prices of energy will make it more difficult to maintain this level of voluntary support over the winter, difficulties finding apartments on the market, the importance of subsidising the renovation of unused housing stocks in order to find homes for refugees, and whether to ringfence social housing in order to ensure that pre-existing housing needs are unaffected.

Rafał Trzaskowski (PL/EPP), Mayor of Warsaw, stressed that the population in Warsaw has increased by 12% due to the refugee crisis caused by the war in Ukraine. Most refugees are living in the homes or second homes of Polish citizens, who will struggle to provide adequate housing for Ukrainians in winter due to increasing energy prices. " Financial support is urgently needed in order to provide refugees, and especially the ones with special needs, with suitable

and safe housing. There has been no strategy on housing for refugees in the EU and most burdens have been shifted to local and regional authorities. The access to funds should hence directly be channelled to regions and cities ."

Melanie Kühnemann-Grunow (DE/PES), Member of the Berlin House of Representatives, highlighted that the availability of rental flats and houses in Berlin was already very scarce and difficult before the European refugee crisis and this has worsened with the large number of Ukrainian refugees arriving in the capital. She made clear that Berlin wants to ensure safe housing and thus a secure basis for all Ukrainian refugees, especially women and children, but with only 600 vacant flats, the situation urgently needs to be improved through financial support.

Andres Jaadla (EE/Renew), Member of Rakvere City Council, underlined: " In our small region we only have 15,000 inhabitants. With the ongoing refugee crisis, housing prices are rising rapidly. Providing all Ukrainians with safe and sustainable housing on the long term will help them to overcome the approaching winter and to focus on finding jobs and schools for their children. "

The Czech government has made housing an important item on the agenda of its Council presidency and has asked for input from local and regional administrations ahead of a 8-9 November meeting focused on housing that it has organised. Along with Poland and Germany, the Czech Republic has taken in the largest number of Ukrainian refugees. Deputy Minister Fluxa said that one in 15 current residents in Prague is a refugee from the conflict in Ukraine.

COTER members also adopted a draft opinion calling for enhanced cohesion policy support for territories with geographic and demographic handicaps, including rural areas, island, cross-border and mountain regions. New EU strategies, such as the Long-term vision for the EU's rural areas , must set out clearly defined proposals for these areas to ensure balanced development and a fair recovery across all European regions.

Marie-Antoinette Maupertuis (FR/EA), President of the Assembly of Corsica and rapporteur on this opinion, said: "The application of the European treaties, which should ensure territorial cohesion also for remote territories as well as the ones suffering permanent handicaps, is not satisfactory. Very often, the needs of these regions are taken

into account at the final stage of the policy-making process, rather than at the outset. Moreover, many EU funds with a territorial dimension are mostly programmed in isolation. What we need is a truly integrated approach to all these interventions and "geographic" targeted measures with specific budget allocation."

During the meeting, the COTER commission elected Emil Boc (RO/EPP) as its new chair. Mr Boc is Mayor of Cluj-Napoca Municipality of Cluj County in Romania and has been a member of the CoR since 2019. He was Prime Minister of Romania in 2008-12. He will chair the COTER commission's work during the next two and a half years. More information here .

Commenting on his election, he said: " As COTER chair, one of my biggest priorities is to make sure that we will have an efficient sustainable and qualitative implementation of the current cohesion programmes and a strong cohesion policy in the future. I want to ensure that our work as COTER and institution has a real impact in our territories, and that no region is left behind, no matter the size, demographic or geographic challenges. "

Members also held a general exploratory debate on the opinion on " Just and Sustainable Transition in the context of the coal and energy intensive regions " , by rapporteur-general Sari Rautio (FI/EPP), and COTER members had an exchange of views on the opinion on " Communication on putting people first, securing sustainable and inclusive growth, unlocking the potential of the EU's outermost regions " , by rapporteur Pedro Chaves De Faria e Castro (PT/EPP).

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