

URGENT ACTION

ASYLUM SEEKERS DENIED SHELTER

In Belgium, at least 2,600 people seeking asylum are destitute due to the Belgian government's failure to provide them with shelter and other essential goods and services. Many have no other choice than to sleep on the streets or in makeshift tents. With winter approaching, and temperatures plummeting, the federal government should immediately activate a 'dispersal plan' to provide adequate shelter to people seeking protection and comply with Belgium's international human rights obligations.

TAKE ACTION:

- Write a letter in your own words or using the sample below as a guide to one or both government officials listed. You can also email, fax, call or Tweet them.
- [Click here](#) to let us know the actions you took on **Urgent Action 113.23**. It's important to report because we share the total number with the officials we are trying to persuade and the people we are trying to help.

Prime Minister Alexander De Croo

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Belgian Embassy in the United States

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Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing to express my concern about the Belgian government's failure to provide shelter and other essential goods and services to people seeking asylum in Belgium, in violation of its international human rights obligations. As a result of this failure, at least 2,600 people are destitute. With winter here, and temperatures plummeting, I am increasingly concerned for the health, safety, and welfare of these people who are denied shelter.

The Belgian government has failed to provide a sufficient number of places for asylum seekers for more than two years, which has resulted in a reception crisis. Over this time, the government has been ordered more than 8,000 times by courts, including the European Court of Human Rights, to provide adequate shelter to asylum seekers. Yet the Belgian government refuses to comply with these rulings.

I urge you to take all necessary measures to end this reception crisis and the ongoing human rights violations of people seeking asylum in Belgium. This can be done by activating a dispersal plan, as introduced in Belgian law in 2015, which would result in additional reception capacity being provided across municipalities. If the dispersal plan is activated, it is essential that the federal government provides the necessary support to those local authorities that create additional reception places.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Belgian government has repeatedly failed to provide adequate accommodation to asylum seekers and refused to increase reception places to meet the needed capacity. In so doing, authorities created a self-inflicted crisis that has left thousands of asylum seekers without shelter.

On October 19, 2021, 50 people were denied shelter whilst applying for asylum at Brussels' asylum registration center. As a result, they started camping outside of the center. Since then, thousands more were abandoned on the streets after they applied for asylum. The authorities have carried out forced evictions against asylum seekers camping on the street or in squats, with no alternative accommodation provided. In at least one case, the police destroyed makeshift tents made from cardboard and other materials, set up near the registration center, leaving people entirely without shelter. Several informal settlements have emerged in Brussels, notably one located in Rue des Palais, which served as a shelter for approximately 1,000 people. Belgian media and NGOs reported that the living conditions within this settlement were dire, with limited access to food provision, clean water, and sanitation as well as the presence of infectious diseases such as scabies and diphtheria. This settlement was cleared out by the police in February 2023. More squats and informal settlements developed in the following months, and the authorities proceeded to clear them out, sometimes providing no alternative accommodation for all or some of the asylum seekers.

Currently, the suffering of destitute asylum seekers is only alleviated thanks to the invaluable work of Belgian NGOs, activists, and other organizations. However, the capacity of civil society organizations is limited. Although the government has increased Belgium's reception capacity, the measures taken have been too slow and insufficient to solve a self-inflicted reception crisis. Already in 2021, civil society organizations warned that action was needed to increase reception capacity, to avoid people being denied shelter. Despite such warnings, the government failed to take appropriate measures. Thousands of court decisions have recognized that Belgian institutions violated their obligations to adequately assist asylum seekers. By failing to comply with the rulings, the government has shown a shocking contempt for not just the rights of asylum seekers, but also the rule of law.

When Belgium was confronted with a larger than anticipated number of individuals seeking international protection in 2015, a so called 'dispersal plan' was put in place by Royal Decree 2016000341 of May 17, 2016. Belgium's legislation now explicitly stipulates that "[t]o ensure a balanced distribution of reception places among municipalities", the government can determine the criteria for the mandatory distribution of reception places. Civil society organizations have advocated for the activation of the dispersal plan since 2022. The activation of the dispersal plan would result in additional reception capacity being provided across municipalities, ending the current reception crisis.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: French, Dutch, English, or your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: March 28, 2024

NAME AND PRONOUN: Asylum seekers denied reception (they/them)