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DEALING WITH AN EMERGENCY: FINDING BEDS FOR REFUGEES

Project name:
Emergency assistance in order to increase the Swedish reception capacity

Purpose:
Supporting Sweden's capacity to manage the influx of refugees

AT A GLANCE

Geographical coverage:
Sweden

Project coordinator:
Migrationsverket – Swedish Migration Agency

Budget:
€ 34 999 990

EU contribution:
90% co-funded by the European Union

Type of funding:
Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) / Emergency Assistance (EMAS)

Start date:
December 2015

End date:
March 2016

Overview

First, it was a few hundred. But in the following weeks, thousands more asylum seekers would follow.

In September and October 2015, more than 80 000 refugees applied for asylum in Sweden. In November, several tens of thousands followed. In 2015, Sweden took in 162 877 refugees – nearly 15% of all migrants that reached Europe that year. To put this in perspective, Sweden accounts for 2% of the total population of the European Union.

The most urgent challenge was to find beds where refugees could stay for a short period of time. Then, and equally critical, more suitable longer-term space for the refugees needed to be found, in order to give the Swedish Migration Agency the time it required to process all the asylum applications.

At the height of the crisis, more or less every spare bed in Sweden was needed. The Swedish Migration Agency rented spare rooms, flats and houses, booked bed and breakfast accommodation and reserved entire hotels; it took over gyms and sports halls where, in some cases, refugees slept on mattresses on the floor.

All this put an enormous strain on the agency. "At first we simply tried to cope. We had to find beds for these people, and started to procure accommodation with different private actors that could offer possible solutions. This led to a rapid increase in costs," said John Gunnarsson from the Swedish Migration Agency.



Results

The European Commission (EC) supported the Swedish Migration Agency to help it deal with the unforeseen and extraordinary influx of refugees and the associated high costs, and provided EUR 35 million in emergency assistance. With this money the agency paid for 1 686 728 days of accommodation for 55 123 refugees, between 1 December 2015 and 15 March 2016.

In this way the funds helped to increase Sweden's capacity to manage the situation. Thanks to the EC's contribution, Sweden's reception capacity increased, and asylum seekers had a place to stay. It meant that refugees did not have to sleep on the floor in reception halls or other public facilities, or in tents or in the open air.

Lessons learned

Sweden protects people who come to the country fleeing from war and persecution; their humane asylum procedure with short processing times is the basis of the country's asylum policies.

In 2015, at the onset of the European migrant crisis, Sweden already had a shortage of accommodation for refugees. Since then, the situation has become even more dire as the influx of refugees has had knock-on effects. Already backed up, the asylum procedures have become many months longer and it has also increased Sweden's housing shortage.

"There is no way a country can be totally prepared for such emergencies when 20 000 refugees show up each week. One thing has changed, however. The shared experience between different authorities – civil society, volunteers and private companies, etc. – means that we know how to work together. Today we have more knowledge, experience, routines and are therefore better prepared for such an emergency," said John Gunnarsson.

MUCH-NEEDED SUPPORT

The EUR 35 million was both welcome and much-needed, the Swedish Migration Agency wrote in a short report to the European Commission. 'Sweden is grateful to have received such a large share of the funds available for emergency situations. The money from the Commission helped to cover a smaller part of the extraordinary costs incurred by Sweden for asylum accommodation during the period 1 December 2015 to 15 March 2016.'

MORE INFORMATION

Project reference: HOME/2015/AMIF/AG/EMAS/0025

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