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# Summary

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## **For as long as it takes**

Emergency shelters and types of temporary accommodation available to municipal authorities  
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The report presents and discusses findings from a study of the use and quality of emergency shelters and other forms of temporary accommodation available to municipal authorities.

The data on which the report relies were collected through one survey of 107 municipalities and another of 145 temporary accommodation providers. In addition to the surveys, the municipalities answered a vignette survey which was sent together with the questionnaire.

## **Availability of temporary accommodation**

The phrase *temporary accommodation* consists of two terms neither of which is clearly defined in legislation and guidelines. Temporary housing must meet certain standards, however, such as being available to tenants day and night, facilities for cooking and basic personal hygiene such as access to WC, baths and clean clothes.

The temporary accommodation facilities we have investigated for this mapping study can be divided into three groups.

- Emergency shelters
- Overnight shelters
- Other forms of temporary housing

There is no clear definition in the legislation specifying what temporary accommodation means in terms of duration. The duty to assist people with a temporary place to stay is enshrined in the Social Services Act, but the act does not specify what it means by *temporary*. This particular field – providing temporary accommodation for homeless clients – relies more on discretion than many other areas, something the report also confirms and provides arguments for.

### **Use of temporary housing**

We divide the municipalities into three groups: major cities with populations of >40,000; medium-sized municipalities with populations of 39,999–10,000; and small municipalities with populations of up to 9,999. In some of the analyses we also isolate the four largest cities, Oslo, Bergen, Trondheim and Stavanger. With the exception of Trondheim, we have sub-municipality-level data for these cities. With the exception of the group of small municipalities, all groups requisitioned temporary accommodation during 2010. 72 per cent of all municipalities requisitioned temporary housing in their own municipalities, while 40 per cent requisitioned the same in other municipalities. There is a correlation between municipal size and referrals to temporary accommodation in own municipality. All of the major cities/sub-municipalities requisitioned temporary accommodation in their own municipality, while 39 per cent of the municipalities in the group of small municipalities requisitioned temporary housing in their own municipality. 35 per cent of the municipalities in the major city group requisitioned temporary accommodation in other municipalities. The medium-sized municipalities were most likely to requisition temporary housing in other municipalities (64 per cent).

More than half of the municipalities report requisitioning both municipal and private temporary accommodation. 7 per cent report requisitioning only municipal temporary accommodation, while one in five report requisitioning only private accommodation. It is mainly the smallest municipalities which only requisition private accommodation. Municipalities with >40,000 pop. are most likely to requisition both municipal and private housing.

“Hotel/boarding house” is the type of temporary shelter most municipalities requisitioned in 2010 (61 per cent). This is followed by “other emergency shelters (hostels and the like)”, a category used by most municipalities (49 per cent). Slightly fewer than half of the municipalities requisitioned “place on a camping site”. 40 per cent referred homeless persons to crisis centres in 2010. The largest municipalities are the ones that use overnight shelters most. It is also the largest municipalities which use “other emergency shelters (hostels and the like)” most. The most used alternatives among the smallest municipalities are “hotel/boarding house” and “place on camping site”.

64 per cent of municipalities report that residents have single rooms / family rooms. 38 per cent report that residents have daytime access and 60 per cent of the municipalities say that residents are given accommodation for more than a day at a time. The most important reason for requisitioning emergency shelter is that the other places are full. More than half of the municipalities give this as the most important reason. 41 per cent of the municipalities which use emergency shelters use them for specific groups, mainly persons with substance dependency problems. Emergency shelters are used for persons in the age-group 25–55.

The municipalities in the survey use highly divergent methods of recording the number of stays in temporary accommodation. 39 per cent of the municipalities say they recorded fewer than ten stays in temporary housing in 2010. 21 per cent of the municipalities recorded between 11 and 50 stays. 11 per cent of the municipalities recorded between 51 and 150 stays, while a small percentage recorded more than 150 stays in temporary housing.

More than 60 per cent of the providers report having had fewer than 50 persons with acute needs “residing” in 2010. 11 per cent report having had between 51 and 150 persons, and a small percentage report more than 150 persons with acute needs residing in temporary accommodation in their municipalities in 2010.

### **Groups that use of temporary housing**

The groups most municipalities report providing temporary accommodation for are persons with substance dependency and persons with a dual diagnosis. In 71 per cent of the municipalities persons with substance dependency were put up in temporary

accommodation, and in persons with a dual diagnosis in 58 per cent of the municipalities in 2010. About half of the municipalities report that persons with known or visible mental health problems stayed in temporary accommodation. Half of the municipalities report that young people aged 18–24 stayed in temporary accommodation, while 41 per cent report having had families with children staying in temporary housing in 2010. 39 per cent report having had persons in acute economic distress staying in temporary accommodation.

Stays by persons under 24 do not represent the majority of total stays in any of the municipalities. The majority of residents in more than half of the municipalities are in the age-group 25–44. Divided among types of providers, the data show that the under-34s make up the majority of distressed lodgers in the “hotel/boarding house” category. This applies to about a third of the “overnight shelter/emergency shelter”, “camping” and “family/crisis centre” categories. Nearly half of the “overnight shelter/emergency shelter” providers tell us that most of their lodgers belong to the age-group 35–44.

24 per cent of providers report having had families with children residing in temporary accommodation in 2010. Six temporary housing facilities (7 per cent of the providers) say they had children/adolescents lodging without carers during 2010. The providers who put up children/adolescents under 18 in temporary accommodation are the same as had families with children in temporary accommodation. The majority reporting having provided lodgings for these two groups are “hotel/apartment”, “temporary boarding room”, and “temporary rented dwellings”. In general, providers who had families with children/adolescents under 18 staying in temporary accommodation score better on all counts on the standard of the temporary facilities, than all providers put together. Families with children and young people under 24 usually stay less than three months in temporary housing.

### **Length of stay in temporary accommodation**

Stays in temporary accommodation are supposed to be “temporary”, but there are no clear definitions of how temporary should be understood. The survey shows that some groups stay longer in temporary accommodation than others. This is particularly the case for people with substance dependency and

people with dual diagnoses. 29 per cent of the municipalities report the prevailing length of stay for people with substance dependency is in excess of three months. 27 per cent of the municipalities also give more than three months as the commonest length of stay for persons with dual diagnoses. Altogether, 31 per cent of the municipalities report having had non-Norwegian nationals in temporary housing during the course of 2010. 11 per cent report more than three months as the commonest length of stay for this group. For families with children and young people under 24, a small proportion of the municipalities report more than three months as the prevailing duration of stay in temporary accommodation. The longest stay in temporary housing is not appreciably different from usual duration in the responses from the municipalities.

For one in three providers the prevailing length of stay in temporary housing is less than three months. 61 per cent of providers report more than three months as the longest stays. All “family/crisis centres” and all “temporary accommodation pursuant to legislation applicable to institutional care” note more than three months as the longest length of stay. This applies to 77 per cent of “overnight shelter/emergency shelter” category, half of the “camping” category and 39 per cent of “hotel/apartment” category. It is mainly providers targeting specific groups that report over three months as the longest stays.

### **Commonest reasons people need temporary housing**

67 per cent of the municipalities report eviction as the main reason for people needing temporary accommodation. Nearly all of the municipalities in the three largest groups of municipalities cite this as the prevailing reason. Following eviction, the next commonest reason for needing temporary housing according to the majority of the municipalities is because people are staying with friends and acquaintances. The proportion of municipalities giving this as the commonest reason declines with declining municipal size. 22 per cent of the municipalities cite “sleeping rough” as the commonest reason for needing temporary accommodation. 14 per cent of the municipalities cite release from prison as the commonest reason, while family conflicts provide the commonest reason for 19 per cent of the municipalities. Discharge from an institution is given by 17 per cent of the municipalities as the most important reason,

and mainly by the largest municipalities. Domestic violence and breakdown of relationships are the categories least likely to be mentioned by the municipalities as the commonest cause of people requiring temporary shelter. 13 per cent of the municipalities give “other reasons” than those specified in the questionnaire.

### **Standard of temporary accommodation**

Only 7 per cent of the municipalities have entered into quality assurance agreements with all of their accommodation providers. 34 per cent say they have no quality assurance agreements with any of their providers. 25 per cent of the municipalities have quality assurance agreements with most providers, and 11 per cent with fewer than half of their providers. In the major city group, 83 per cent of the cities/sub-municipalities reportedly have quality assurance agreements with all/most providers. In the group with the smallest municipalities, none of the municipalities have quality assurance agreements with all/most of their providers.

Among the providers, there are as many, about 40 per cent, who say they have a quality assurance agreement with one or more municipalities which do not in fact have one. The providers in the categories “overnight shelter/emergency shelter”, “family/crisis centres” and “temporary accommodation pursuant to legislation applicable to institutional care” are most likely to report having a quality assurance agreement with one or more municipalities. A larger proportion of public providers have quality assurance agreements than private providers. More than half, 57 per cent, of providers report having been visited by the requisitioning authority during 2010.

90 per cent of providers have house rules which residents are obliged to follow. The great majority of providers cite discharge/expulsion as an available sanction for serious violations of the house rules. 72 per cent of the providers say they can ask residents to leave/discharge them without notice. 29 per cent of providers report that residents can be away from the facility for a certain time without restrictions. 46 per cent say that residents can be away from the facility under certain conditions. These conditions tend to deal with duration of absence and its arrangement in advance. 41 per cent of providers say residents are allowed to have visitors under certain conditions. The providers mainly report three conditions here. Visitors must be sober, stay no longer than

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the stipulated time, and the visit should be arranged with the provider beforehand.

### **How the work on temporary housing provision is organised**

The responsibility for allocating temporary housing lies primarily with the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Organisation (NAV) in every municipality. One in four municipalities say other agencies are automatically brought in whenever temporary housing is allocated. About the same number of municipalities say that other agencies are *not* automatically brought in. In 37 per cent of the municipalities, other agencies are brought in in some circumstances. There are significant differences among the groups of municipalities on this point. Most of the municipalities report notifying the housing office or corresponding body. Some municipalities also notify health and care services, including substance abuse and psychiatric services.

Nearly four in five temporary housing facilities report notifying the municipality immediately when they ask a resident to leave the same day.

More than half, 59 per cent, of the municipalities always allocate temporary housing on the basis of an administrative decision. 16 per cent allocate temporary housing usually after making an administrative decision, though 6 per cent of the municipalities never allocate temporary accommodation on the basis of an administrative decision.

41 per cent of the survey municipalities believe there has been a rise in the use of temporary accommodation over the past three years. There is variation among the groups of municipalities. 75 per cent of the municipalities in group 1 and 15 per cent in the group with the smallest municipalities believe such a rise has taken place. A third of all municipalities believe the use of temporary accommodation is the same, while 13 per cent believe it has declined. That a decline in the use of temporary housing over the past three years has taken place is something the largest municipalities are more likely than the others to believe.

### **Municipal practices**

The municipalities were given five vignettes to fill in. The vignettes consist of short cases involving different types of client. The

municipalities were asked to say how they would have gone about solving the problem. 62 municipalities completed the vignette survey.

*Vignette A:* Female, 35, with daughter. The woman is thrown out of her male partner's home. Facing imminent homelessness she gets in touch with the municipal authorities. The woman's only income is a government training allowance. Binge drinker.

This is a situation most NAV offices say they would take seriously and attempt to alleviate. More than half of the municipalities would have requisitioned a crisis centre place for this woman. There are significant differences between the groups of municipalities, and it is the largest municipalities which are most likely to offer a place at a crisis centre. 37 per cent of the municipalities would have offered the woman a room at a hotel/boarding house. 18 per cent say they would have tried to get hold of a municipal or privately owned dwelling. 20 per cent of the NAV offices said they ask for assistance from other services such as the child welfare agency.

*Vignette B:* Male, 22, end of his first criminal conviction. Has no qualifications/skills and no job. Used to live with parents, but has no wish to move back with them again. Uses cannabis and amphetamine occasionally.

The clearest option selected by the municipalities for this person is temporary housing, place in a hostel, and various types of emergency shelter. A place at an emergency shelter is what the largest municipalities are most likely to offer. Most of the small municipalities would allocate a place in a cabin on a camping ground. Some would have told the client to make arrangements with family or friends/acquaintances as a provisional solution. A very small minority would have provided some sort of aftercare, mainly in connection with the client's substance abuse problem.

*Vignette C:* Female refugee with five children. The woman lived in a resettlement municipality for three years. Moved to a new municipality and lives in a rented two-room flat. The landlord gives them two weeks' notice. She has no tenancy contract. Main income is social assistance.

39 per cent of the municipalities say they would have worked to let the women stay on as a tenant in her present accommodation. On this point, many NAV offices demonstrate detailed understanding of the Tenancy Act. The majority would nevertheless have accepted the eviction. More than one in five NAV offices would have offered places at a hotel/boarding house, a return to the resettlement municipality and/or municipal or private housing. Very few municipalities mention that the women is living together with five children in a two-room flat.

*Vignette D:* Male, 46, severe substance abuse problems. Lives on social assistance. Lives in municipal accommodation but has been served with a two-week eviction order.

Over half of the municipalities say they would have attempted to halt the eviction. One in three NAV offices would allocate a temporary place at an emergency shelter. There is a correlation between offers of an emergency shelter and municipal size. It is mostly the larger municipalities which offer this form of housing provision. One in three municipalities would assess longer-term options for the man. Many of these options would require collaboration of other actors.

*Vignette E:* Male, 35, severe mental health problems and serious substance abuse. Sleeps rough in sheds and the like. Has not contacted the social services. Very poor mental and physical health.

Getting the man admitted to hospital or other form of institution is what most municipalities offer. Nearly as many would offer the person a temporary place at an emergency shelter. This is clearly the more prevalent option for the large municipalities. Some municipalities would offer a form of sheltered housing. Some municipalities deny having any responsibility for this person since he has not registered housing needs with the social services.

### **Findings and reflections**

The chapter gives a brief summary of the most important findings from the study and places them in a somewhat wider perspective.

Four areas in particular would appear to call for further discussion:

- The variety of available options – a heterogeneous field

- The groups that make use of temporary accommodation – provisions for the individual groups
- Understanding and content of the term “temporary”
- Quality of accommodation provided discussed in light of the interventions’ purpose