UMBRELLA REFUGEE COMMITTEE



Refugee-led Mobile Patrols

Report Q3 - 2026

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1. About the URC's Refugee-led Mobile Patrols

The Umbrella Refugee Committee's (URC) refugee-led mobile patrols project is funded in 2026 by UNHCR's Refugee-Led Innovation Fund. With this initiative, the URC connects asylum-seekers, refugees and other migrants experiencing homelessness in Brussels with essential service information, community support, and trusted human connection. Our volunteers combine lived experience of forced displacement, knowledge of complex asylum procedures, language skills, and community-to-community outreach to support those most isolated and excluded.

2. Overview

Over the quarter, our patrols mostly ran around the Hub Humanitaire on Wednesday mornings and Sunday evenings, with two visits to the Bervoets squat. The people we met were a mix of newly arrived asylum seekers, people stuck in long procedures, and a growing number of families with nowhere to sleep. Housing and legal help were the main needs in almost every report.

Indicator	Observation Q3
Dates	01/07/2026 – 30/09/2026
Patrols conducted	20
# of people encountered Q (approx. 15 people per patrol)	300
Individual case forms/surveys completed	120
Main locations	Humanitarian Hub, Parc Maximilien, Tour & Taxis, Squat Bervoets (Forest)
Main referral organisations	Frequent referrals to Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen Legal Helpdesk and Infoline, MSF, Samusocial, Humanitarian Hub, Doucheflux, Refugee Medical Point, services and URC community organisations

Observations

More families on the street. From mid-July, Moldovan families with children began appearing in larger numbers, and by 30 September the groups were big enough that the team found it overwhelming. Nearly all were subsequent applicants (Annex 26 quinquies), which means no access to Fedasil, and Fedasil itself told patrols it was at full capacity. Ukrainian families showed a similar pattern, with two living in cars beside the Hub for a week. Other difficult cases included a father and two girls evicted from a Fedasil centre after a negative CGRA decision, a Nigerien mother with four children sleeping outside, and a mother with three children, two of them with albinism.

Shrinking safety nets. The Samusocial WTC emergency shelter (100+ places) closed on the morning of 30 September. Some people were back on the street after only one to three weeks in

Samusocial. We did manage a few wins, such as emergency shelter for the Nigerien family and NSS Evere agreeing to collect two families MSF had given tents to, but these were exceptions.

Confusion about documents and status. This came up again and again. One man spent seven years in Germany and thought he couldn't apply for asylum here, and another had been in limbo for four years after a Dublin decision, believing his procedure was over. Newly arrived people often didn't know where to register or that they needed to be on the Fedasil dispatching list. Dublin cases rose through September, along with questions about the new rules since the Pact.

Stalled voluntary returns. Sudanese, Eritrean and Ethiopian men trying to return home are stuck in administrative "ping-pong." The Ethiopian man we followed had his phone stolen while sleeping outside. Volunteers noted early signs of depression in two of these young men. Noor is waiting on IOM about his laissez-passer.

Shifts in who we meet. In late August and September, volunteers noted more Maghrebi men (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia), some under the influence of alcohol or drugs, and advised keeping some distance from them. One Ivorian man seeking voluntary return was loud and aggressive without attacking anyone. Returning people were often wary at first but kept coming for the coffee, and beneficiaries now know our Wednesday and Sunday schedule.

Bervoets squat

We visited twice, on 22 July (with MSF) and 12 August.
The first visit was an introduction. The building is in fairly decent shape with running water and electricity, and about 50 residents, mostly young Burundians, West Africans, Ethiopians and Eritreans, plus a few Europeans. Donated food arrives daily. The coordinators, Arture and Ali, were welcoming and gave us practical advice: visit early mornings, after 6pm or on weekends, and take a Wednesday 9:00–10:30 slot to present our organisation. They also suggested football and other social activities to build trust, and said shoes are a much-needed donation.

The second visit was quieter. Few residents were available, and several turned out to be Belgian or EU citizens. People mostly wanted to chat rather than ask questions, and we handled two EU-related questions through the Vluchtelingenwerk infoline. MSF wasn't there, and residents asked for them. We offered trainings on request and left flyers. The coordinator Ally was frustrated by the low turnout and said many residents are in procedures but have lost hope and stopped making an effort, which keeps them in the squat far too long. Dublin cases came up again. Late in September, a patrol also found a squat of about 40 people near Bourse, in the former Sister House building.

Suggested priorities for Q4

1. Plan for the winter, with emergency shelter options for families.
2. Set up a follow-up system for referrals, especially voluntary return cases through IOM.
3. Organise further Dublin and Pact training for volunteers with VwV.
4. Agree a regular rhythm for the squat visits, using the times and activities the residents suggested.

5. Tighten up reporting and attendance.

3. Quantitative & Qualitative Data

Unfortunately, we cannot always collect data/surveys from *all* persons we encounter, speak to, and/or accompany. Hence, the numbers below are far lower than the actual number of people we reach and (try to) assist. The data shown in this report is not the complete dataset for this period. To request the full Excel file / raw data, please contact us using the details provided at the end.

Gender

Gender	Count
Male	95
Female	19
Families/couples	5
Other/unknown	1
Grand Total	**120**

Age

Age (years)	Count	% of 120
19-26	43	36%
27-40	42	35%
40-64	27	23%
65+ **	3	2.5%
15-18 *	2	1.7%
Uncertain	3	2.5%
Children***	/	/
Grand total	**120**	

***Minors:** Only two people were in the 15-18 band, both Sudanese boys met on 1 July. One had arrived the day before, and the other had an Italian Eurodac registration and hadn't applied in Belgium.

****Seniors:** The three 65+ people include the elderly Georgian couple (the woman is in a wheelchair) and a Nigerian man with eye and mobility problems.

*****Children are undercounted:** The form records one age band per entry, so children appear only in free text. That covers an 11-year-old boy (Moldovan family), a 14-year-old boy (Ukrainian mother), and a woman with three sons aged 14, 17 and 7. The children in the patrol notes, such as the Nigerien woman's four children and the three families on 16 September, aren't in the form data at all. The form therefore understates how many children we met.

Nationality

Nationality	Count	Share
Eritrea	18	15%
Sudan	14	12%
Afghanistan	11	9%
Moldova	9	7.5%
Guinea	8	6.7%
Somalia	8	6.7%
Georgia	6	5%
Morocco	6	5%
Ukraine	5	4%
Not recorded/unusable	5	4%
Algeria, Burundi, DR Congo, Ethiopia, Hungary, Iraq, Libya, Niger, Nigeria, Palestine, Spain	2 (per country)	
Djibouti, Gambia, Germany, Kenya, Mauritania, Pakistan, Rwanda, Togo	1 (per country)	
Grant Total	**120**	

Time in Belgium

Time in Belgium	Count (approx.)
Less than 1 month	27
1-6 months	21
6-24 months	14
More than 2 years	20
Unknown/unclear	4
Blank	34
Grand total	**120**

Residence status *

*For Q4, we have made these categories in the data form more specific.

Residence Status	Count
Asylum seeker / ongoing procedure	58
Undocumented / irregular stay / rejected	19
Dublin	17
Recognised refugee / M-status	9
Subsequent applicant (annex 26 quinquies)	4
Unclear / non-legal answers	13
Grant Total	**120**

Main Challenges Faced / Needs

Challenges Faced	Count
Shelter	105
Food	42
Legal/admin support	26
Healthcare / health issues	25
Hygiene	13
Isolation / loneliness	10
Clothing/warmth	10
Psychological support / trauma	10
Safety	10

Homelessness Situation / Where people were sleeping

Housing situation was not recorded in the Q3 forms, but patrol reports describe many people sleeping outside, in parks, in cars or in tents near the Hub, as well as in squats at Bervoets and near Bourse. Families with children were a growing share, and many were subsequent applicants without access to Fedasil. Emergency options were short-term or shrinking, including the closure of the Samusocial WTC shelter on 30 September, and recognised refugees had no dedicated support finding housing.

- **Outside or in parks:** Two Afghan women with documents were sleeping in parks (19 Jul). A Moldovan family with a young boy was sleeping outside (1 Jul). A mother with 3 children said “I am outside with 3 children” (6 Sep). A Nigerien woman with 4 minor children, one a 2-year-old with a cough, had slept in the street since Wednesday (13 Sep). An Ethiopian man had his phone stolen because he sleeps outside (27 Sep).
- **Cars and tents:** Two Ukrainian families lived in two cars parked by the Hub for about a week (23 Sep). MSF gave tents to two families (6 children) behind the Hub, and NSS Evere promised to collect them. By 30 September there were tents around the Hub, and a couple of dead rats.

- **Squats:** Bervoets (Forest) has about 50 residents with running water, electricity and daily donated food. It isn't only asylum seekers: several residents are Belgian or EU citizens. A squat of about 40 people was found near Bourse in the former Sister House building. The Bervoets coordinator said many residents are in procedures but have lost hope and stay too long.
- **Large groups of families:** 25+ Moldovan people, mostly children, were on the street on 19 July. A group of 8–10 Afghans, including families and women, was also on the street that day. On 30 September the Moldovan groups were so large the team found it overwhelming.
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Why they can't get a place

- **Fedasil refuses or is full:** Subsequent applicants (Annex 26 quinquies) are denied access. Fedasil told patrols it was at full capacity. A father and his two girls (14 and 11) were evicted from a Fedasil centre after a negative CGRA decision (16 Sep). A couple had used the vulnerability exception twice and then been asked to leave.
- **Shelter gets shorter or closes:** Samusocial often gives one night, and one man was told one night at Samusocial, then one at Fedasil. A Guinean woman said the NSS booking system never has places when she tries. The Samusocial WTC emergency shelter (100+ places) closed on 30 September. Four people were back on the street after only 1–3 weeks in Samusocial (16 Sep). A Ugandan woman refused Samusocial because of the check-in/check-out system.
- **Couples and families:** An elderly Georgian couple (the woman in a wheelchair) couldn't use Samusocial because men and women are housed separately.
- **Recognised refugees:** Two people with refugee status couldn't find housing, including an Afghan woman (1 Jul). A Sudanese man with a deposit and legal residence but no work contract couldn't rent (9 Sep). Ella confirmed there are no organisations that help recognised refugees find housing.
- **Administrative traps:** No address risks stopping CPAS funding (1 Jul). Having no phone or internet blocks bookings, and the Hub being closed on Wednesday mornings meant three families on 16 September could only be referred.
- **People not registered anywhere:** An American couldn't get housing without being registered in Belgium. A French man needed free luggage storage, and Ella suggested DoucheFLUX, Chez Nous, L'Îlot and La Fontaine.

Additional Observations

Legal and procedural information was the most common thing we gave. About 20 notes record that a volunteer provided legal-aid or lawyer addresses, or explained where to apply for asylum. Several people were newly arrived and had no idea where to start. One 15–18-year-old had no information about the asylum procedure and was scared, and others were referred to the Vluchtelingenwerk Legal Helpdesk (one in Russian) or the Immigration Office.

Mental health concerns were noted in August and September. At least 8 notes mention confusion, mental instability, psychological exhaustion or memory loss, including a man who could not recall his name or origins. A further handful describe people as "very desperate" or

"very vulnerable", including a man undocumented for 15 years. None were recorded in July. Volunteers could mostly orient people to services, and had no clear mental-health referral route.

Physical health problems often came with the street. About 10 notes mention diabetes, respiratory problems, heart or mobility issues, eye problems, a leg operation with metal implants, or an earache. One woman was eight months pregnant with two children. People were typically pointed to the Refugee Medical Point or the Hub.

Housing notes mostly describe volunteers arranging or chasing a place. These include registering people with Samusocial, one emergency booking for 3 nights, and help with accommodation requests. Volunteers also noted a woman's frustration that the NSS booking system never has places, and difficulty finding a shelter for a disabled woman and her partner together. One man's stolen phone made it hard to contact Samusocial. A man whose volunteer did not speak French had to rely on a colleague to make the booking.

Many cases cross European borders. Several people had status or registrations elsewhere: a Eurodac fingerprint in Italy, M-status from Italy, a Spanish residence permit, 12 years in the Netherlands with refugee status withdrawn, and 7 years as a refugee in Germany. A young man received a Dublin decision for the Netherlands after a mistaken train trip, despite having been registered in Belgium first. One man wanted to go to England. These cases need specialist legal advice and show why the Dublin and Pact training matters

Voluntary return needs follow-up. Two notes record requests for voluntary return, including an Ethiopian man blocked at the embassy stage, where IOM was contacted but no answer had come by the end of the quarter.

Positive feedback. One young Sudanese man said URC treated him more kindly and carefully than other organisations.

4. Contact

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