

CEB – OECD High-Level Seminar

“The refugee crisis: challenges and responses for social investment”

Paris, 17 May 2016

Key takeaways

Social investment is crucial to respond to the needs of asylum seekers and refugees who have already arrived, but also necessary to be better prepared for future inflows. Social housing, education (including vocational training), health and employment support are all intertwined and must be addressed through a holistic approach, which also requires better communication and co-ordination among all actors involved. Participants highlighted the importance of strengthening the co-operation and financial burden sharing between different government levels and to support municipal actors, who often have the main responsibility to provide housing and broader social integration services. Furthermore, in order to be effective, social investment programmes need to include social partners, employers and civil society initiatives, garner political support and be tailored to each specific context.

Participants underlined the difficulties of providing accommodation and social housing, which in many countries was already scarce before the crisis. Moreover, social housing programmes should avoid placing asylum seekers and refugees in areas where shares of foreign-born are already high, as residential segregation can impede integration and influence public opinion negatively. For their part, skills recognition should be processed as swiftly as possible and vocational training programmes be conceived accordingly to facilitate access to the labour market, which is an overriding priority.

The question of how to ensure the support of mainstream society members featured prominently in the discussion. Social tensions can be reduced by creating more opportunities for interaction in daily life (e.g. at work, school or through associations). Clearly communicating to public opinions that there is no “competition” between refugees, disfavoured native-born and all other low-income families in access to social services, especially social housing, can help. Indeed, the refugee crisis may be an occasion to revive social investment for the benefit of all vulnerable population groups.