



FRANCE / IMMIGRATION - 03/22/2017

The horrible living conditions in Paris' shelters for unaccompanied minors

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While waiting for their asylum claims to be processed, unaccompanied minors in the French capital are often housed in deplorable conditions, in filthy, dingy shelters rank with bed bugs. Our Observer is working to document these terrible living conditions. She denounces what she sees as the authorities' failure to "protect" these vulnerable teenagers and children.

In France, regional governments (called [départements](#)) are responsible for dealing with migrants and refugees under the age of 18, who are subject to special processing. The city of Paris (which has the same authority as a department) has partnered with the Red Cross to establish a special procedure to determine if the young people in question are actually under the age of 18. The young people who pass this screening must then wait for their file to be processed by the Department of Children's Social Welfare and Health, which then makes a decision on their care.

Most unaccompanied minors must wait between five days and four weeks for their file to be processed. During this waiting period, they are housed in special shelters and cared for by charitable organisations appointed by the city.

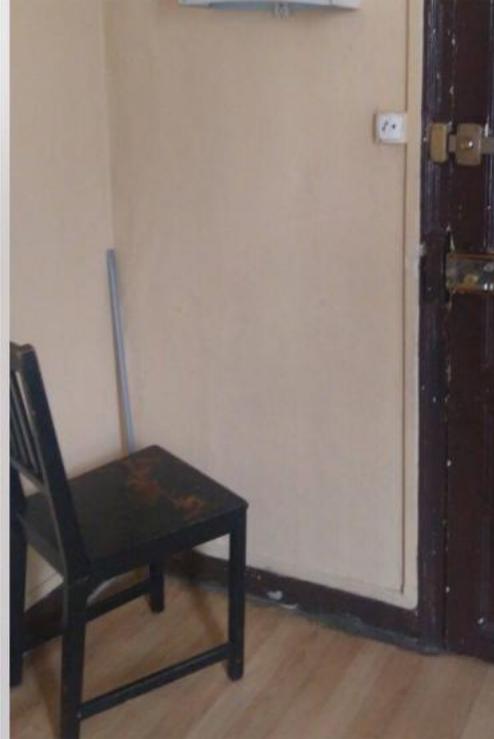
Our Observer Agathe Nadimi is a teacher in Paris who campaigns for the rights of unaccompanied minors. For the past few weeks, she has been working on an investigation into the conditions at the city shelters housing these young migrants. She has amassed a large collection of photos documenting the poor living conditions. Many of the photos she has taken herself, while others have been given to her by the migrants she works with.

“You recognize a kid who is living in a shelter by the bug bites on his arms”



Agathe Nadimi
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In the past few weeks, I have visited four different shelters, and have taken and gathered photos from more than a dozen establishments. In some of these shelters, the electrical installations are dated and there are loose wires hanging around, creating a real safety hazard for the young people living there. Often, the windows don't close properly, or not at all. Even worse, many of the doors don't have working locks. In other cases, the young residents just aren't given keys. Many of them end up using whatever they can – from iron bars to chairs – to bar the doors at night.



The young people in this shelter used iron bars and a chair to bar a door without a lock.



Tangled electrical wires

These shelters are often filthy. In several different establishments, the mattresses are infested with bedbugs and the young people are often covered with bites. You can often recognise a kid who is housed in a shelter from the

bites on his arm.



Bed bug bites

Some of the teenagers have told me that the shelters are infested with lice, while others have seen mice. In terms of hygiene, these living conditions are nothing short of catastrophic. Sometimes, there is only one shower and one toilet for dozens of young people. And, very often, these stop working. And in many shelters, the children are not given any sheets so they have to sleep on the bare mattresses.



A mouse in a shelter in Paris' 3rd arrondissement.





Often, sheets aren't provided.

These are young people who need to rest and to be in a calm, safe space. They've undergone a harrowing journey from their home countries and they are utterly alone. We can't let them live this way.

The France 24 Observers team met with a young person staying in the shelter in Saint Ambroise in Paris' 11th arrondissement.

"When I first came to the shelter, it was filthy," he said. "There was dust everywhere. I had to clean everything. Still, I often can't sleep at night. I wake up when the bed bugs bite me. I can see them climbing on my body."

**"We haven't received the slightest indication that there are problems,"
said France Terre d'Asile**

The shelters mentioned by our Observer were selected by the organisation [France Terre d'Asile](#), which also cares for the young people living there. This organisation is currently responsible for 366 young people living in 21 different establishments scattered across the French capital.

When contacted by the France 24 Observers team on March 1, 2017, the director general of France Terre d'Asile, Pierre Henry, stated, "We haven't received the slightest indication that there are any problems" in the establishments where the association works.

According to Henry, each shelter is "carefully monitored" and, "every evening,

an educator makes a visit to the shelters to provide information to the young people living there and to check out the state of the shelter”.

However, several young people told the France 24 Observers team that they had made complaints about their living conditions to the educators sent by France Terre d’Asile.

“They gave us a repellent meant to kill the bedbugs but it didn’t work,” one said.

“They don’t care what we say,” said another.

When the France 24 Observers team visited these shelters, our journalists asked the France Terre d’Asile educators on site if they were aware of the problems mentioned by the residents. The educators refused to answer the questions.

Pierre Henry did concede that many unaccompanied minors have arrived in Paris since November 2016 and the urgent need to find shelter for these young people has meant that some of these shelters have been chosen quickly. But our Observer said that the poor conditions in the shelters was already a problem in summer 2016.

France Terre d’Asile also mentioned budget limitations set by the Paris town hall, which provides a budget of only 18 euros a night for housing an unaccompanied minor.

An audit in the spring

In 2015, the city of Paris published a [brochure](#) on welcoming young migrants. It specifically mentioned that hotels were not adapted to housing minors, particularly “without additional support for this at-risk group”.

The France 24 Observers team contacted authorities working with city of Paris, who stated: “If we discover that norms are not respected in these shelters, we will immediately end our collaboration with them.”

City authorities also mentioned that staff were working on “numerous measures to limit the use of shelters, including the opening [set for March] of a

collective run by a specialised organisation”. Authorities also said that there were plans in the works for carrying out a comprehensive evaluation of shelters housing unaccompanied minors “in the spring”.

During the February edition of our show, The Observers Direct, we highlighted the difficult situation for unaccompanied minors in France, many of whom end up on the streets after being refused housing by the city of Paris and the Red Cross.