SAFE HOMES

CASE STUDIES

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

GLOSSARY

Hosting = Private hosting is the act of offering accommodation often in a shared space to someone in need of a place to stay. It is one of the oldest forms of humanitarian response.

Hosting scheme = private accommodation scheme refers to organized programs, whether by authorities, civil society organizations, or groups of individuals, that provide accommodation, either in a shared or vacant space, and other support to both hosts and guests. In recent times digital platforms have been established to help connect guests with hosts. These schemes may or may not foresee monetary contributions or other type of incentives such as tax benefits for hosts as a contribution towards food or utilities, for example. In some countries this is called "pledge accommodation" or "citizen accommodation".

Hosted arrangement refers to the relationship between hosts and guests, established through the mutual and voluntary agreement of hosting or being hosted.

Exit strategies are the activities to support people to transition out of the hosted arrangement.

Guest = Hosted people are the people temporarily accommodated in a hosted arrangement by a host.

Host is the household that accommodates the guests and may provide various levels of additional support. Hosts will often be family members or friends or friends of family/friends. However, they may also be strangers who may have connected through a hosting scheme, social media platforms, or through spontaneous encounters.

Solidarity household is the term used to describe the household when the host and the guest are living together within the same home.

Social workers = case workers are the people employed to care for the solidarity households through social follow ups. Case workers are central to building and maintaining relationships of trust with both hosts and guests.

Host community = local community, this is the community (including hosts) that temporarily hosts and shares private and public resources with displaced people. The host community includes people in vulnerable situations and excluded groups.

Community welcoming initiatives is the term used to describe initiatives and schemes through which people get involved in supporting newcomers in their integration and inclusion in the local community such as community sponsorship.

Preparedness = contingency planning means preparing organisations, such as public authorities and civil society organisations, to be ready to respond effectively in the event of an emergency.

Homelessness affects people experiencing diverse living situations from sleeping rough to having temporary shelter or living in insecure or inadequate housing.

Reception centers = accommodation facilities are the spaces established by public authorities for the collective housing of displaced people.

INTRODUCTION TO CASE STUDIES

The escalation of the international armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine in February 2022 resulted in the displacement of more than seven million individuals. In response to the crisis, there was a notable surge of solidarity across Europe, ranging from the provision of essential material aid to the opening of homes to accommodate those fleeing Ukraine.

Member states of the European Union (EU) implemented a variety of initiatives to address the urgent needs of displaced people, including providing access to sustainable accommodation. Options included shelters, collective centres, hostels, social accommodation, rental subsidies, and other financial schemes where hosting assistance played a unique and special role.

Open Home, Open Heart banner on the iconic Liberty Hall Building in the middle of Dublin, Ireland as part of the Safe Homes project to thank the Irish population for their solidarity

Hosting assistance is a reception tool and a humanitarian response to crises that can be organised by authorities, civil society groups, or individuals to offer accommodation to those in need. The European Commission (EC) took the lead in promoting this housing option. The "Safe Homes Initiative: guidance on the provision of accommodation to those fleeing Ukraine"[1] served as the main tool and reference on how a hosting assistance programme or initiative could be developed, implemented and reinforced. Additionally, to foster a transnational model of best practices, learn the lessons, and aid authorities and civil society in organisation hosting assistance in the future, the EC funded the Safe Homes Programme[2] implemented by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) together with several Red Cross National Societies.

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1 - Available at: https://migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/news/safe-homes-initiative-guidance-provision-accommodation-those-fleeing-ukraine_en

2 - Find more information about the Safe Homes Programme here: https://redcross.eu/projects/safe-homes

The Safe Homes Programme integrated day-to-day operational activities with transnational reflection on effective practices and lessons learned through two interconnected modules:

An operational module to facilitate access to appropriate and secure housing in private accommodation, including activities such as comprehensive mapping of hosting assistance initiatives and stakeholders, establishing effective matching processes and referral mechanisms, and providing guidance and assistance to both hosts and guests.

A stakeholder engagement and lessons learned module which aimed to assist authorities and implementing partners in reflecting on their efforts and developing a robust model of best practices. The ultimate goal was to establish a replicable model of dignified and secured hosted arrangements for all those in need of accommodation that could be applied in the future.

This compilation of case studies, developed within the Safe Home Programme, sheds light on the experiences and insights gained from hosting assistance programmes and initiatives implemented in eight countries – **Belgium, Hungary, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Romania, France, and Slovakia.** Those member states experienced significant arrivals of people displaced from Ukraine and this presented both challenges and opportunities in arranging, adjusting, developing, and implementing hosting assistance programmes and initiatives.

Each case study offers insights into the country's legal, policy, and societal approach to welcoming people displaced from Ukraine. They provide detailed information on hosting assistance initiatives and programmes, their scope, mechanisms, and related practices, including those directly implemented by National Societies. Moreover, they identify key operational approaches, best practices, and lessons learned. The case studies examine the impact of hosting assistance on the overall situation and integration opportunities for guests and conclude with a set of recommendations.

This compilation complements and adds to two other resources prepared by IFRC within the scope of the Safe Homes Programme. The "Safe Homes Key Lessons from Hosting People Displaced from Ukraine in Private Homes"[3] report outlines key lessons learned from hosting assistance programmes and initiatives across the European Union while the "Safe Homes: Practitioners Handbook"[4] presents practical tips and tools intended for EU member states, regional and local authorities, civil society organisations and citizens involved in the design and delivery of hosting assistance. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the diverse range of initiatives, practices, challenges, and activities implemented in the field of hosting assistance, it is highly recommende to read all three documents.

The displacement from Ukraine highlighted the urgent need for practical, effective, and comprehensive emergency housing initiatives. Collaborative efforts between governmental and non-governmental organisations in the countries of focus offered valuable insights for the future. Implementing standardised procedures, investing in data management tools, fostering collaborations among stakeholders, and prioritising community development were crucial for building upon the groundwork laid during this crisis and providing essential support to displaced people.

Successful hosting assistance programmes and initiatives demanded an innovative and adaptive approach that acknowledged the unique needs of displaced people. Moreover, focusing on sustainable housing solutions, supporting hosts, and offering a variety of services were key to fostering integration opportunities and guests' self-sufficiency.

Before delving into the case studies, the following sections provide some additional contextual information. The first chapter focuses on temporary protection mechanisms, particularly on access to suitable accommodation. The next one defines hosting assistance and addresses the sustainability of such programmes and initiatives, their impact on the well-being and integration of guests, as well as the resilience and openness of host communities. The final chapters present the next steps and recommendations, referring to the overall lessons learned and opportunities that can serve for developing and implementing hosting assistance programmes and initiatives in the future.

3 - Safe Homes Key Lessons from Hosting People Displaced from Ukraine in Private Homes
4 - Safe Homes: Practitioners Handbook

Temporary protection and access to suitable accommodation

To respond to displacement from Ukraine,[5] the Council of the European Union decided to invoke a temporary protection mechanism. Such an instrument, according to the Council, was needed to limit the potential "risk" to the member states' asylum systems and their inability "to process the arrivals [of displaced people] without adverse effects on their efficient operation and on the interests of the persons concerned and on those of other persons requesting protection".[6] Each member state had the discretion to grant temporary protection to individuals arriving from Ukraine, regardless of whether they met the criteria for international protection. This allowed offering immediate assistance and services to those displaced people.[7]

Under the Temporary Protection Directive, people granted temporary protection are entitled to a residence permit, access to information, asylum procedure, employment, social welfare, medical care, education, banking services, and accommodation. Moreover, they have to be provided with necessary assistance and services that allowed them to gain self-sufficiency and not be dependent on state or social assistance.

Article 13 of the Directive provides the right to suitable accommodation, which may include "the means to obtain housing". The latter refers to the resources, strategies, or avenues individuals might use to secure a place to live. This includes various methods such as renting or purchasing property, applying for government housing assistance programmes, the improvement of conditions in collective centres, the repair and constructing new homes, seeking accommodation through social networks or online platforms, or utilising temporary housing options like shelters or hostels, repurposing public facilities, cooperation with private sector actors, and supporting the transition into independent rental agreements. Essentially, it encompasses the different ways people access and acquire housing based on their financial, social, and personal circumstances. Access to housing is a fundamental human right ensuring that displaced people live with dignity and lead meaningful lives.[8]

A holistic and comprehensive approach to enabling access to suitable accommodation, which goes beyond the provision of shelter, has to include accompanying assistance and services and take into account the specific needs of various groups, including older people, people with disabilities, or people with vulnerabilities.

The analysis of the situation in various member states presented in the case studies showed differences in approaches to providing suitable accommodation for people displaced from Ukraine. Most initiatives focused on promoting and creating spaces within a collective reception system, while other alternative accommodation arrangements often lacked clarity and a comprehensive approach. In some member states, various incentives, including financial schemes, one-off payments, or tax reductions were provided to those, private citizens and/or legal entities, hosting or renting accommodation to people displaced from Ukraine. Other states promoted hosting assistance initiatives and encouraged ordinary citizens to open their homes to those in need of accommodation and provide shelter free of charge.

The sudden and large-scale arrival of persons displaced from Ukraine strained resources and required rapid mobilisation and coordination among various stakeholders. One core issue was to develop or adjust legal and policy fundamentals for providing temporary protection and related services and assistance. The second element concerned stakeholders' responsibilities related to assistance and services provided on the ground to people displaced from Ukraine.

The scale of displacement required the involvement of various stakeholders. In particular, the local and municipal authorities, non-governmental organisations, and civil society played a vital role in guaranteeing access and providing suitable accommodation to people granted temporary protection. They were responsible for implementing the national-level legislation and policies. Although some member states, had relatively limited room for manoeuvre to adopt specific measures, local authorities managed to develop strategies to coordinate and operationalise required services and assistance.[9]

Local authorities worked closely with other stakeholders, including NGOs, ordinary citizens, and volunteers, to identify available housing options, including the repurposing of public facilities for short- and medium-term accommodation needs. Sometimes they outsourced to non-governmental partner organisations the provision of essential services such as education, healthcare, language interpretation, psychosocial support, and legal aid. Those organisations often operated emergency housing and reception facilities, as well as assisting in identifying other housing options, particularly for the most vulnerable groups.[10]

Furthermore, NGOs worked to prevent and address the risks of exploitation and trafficking in persons. They advocated for the rights of people displaced from Ukraine and raised awareness of their needs. Overall, NGOs played a critical role in ensuring that people granted temporary protection could access suitable accommodation, appropriate and safe housing, and live with dignity.

One of the main challenges was associated with the uncertainty related to this particular displacement situation. International conflicts like the one in Ukraine are often prolonged with no clear resolution. Moreover, the proposed answer, the temporary protection mechanism, was time-bound in nature. This impacted the sustainable access to suitable accommodation and support.

Article 6 of the Directive provides that temporary protection ends when the "maximum duration has been reached" or when the Council decides so, which might be at any time if the situation in the country of origin has changed and a safe and durable return is possible. Moreover, Article 4 states that temporary protection can be initiated for the initial period of one year, and then extended for another year. In March 2022, the Council decided to implement the mechanism for a year and then extended it twice, eventually until the end of March 2025.

Such time-bound limitation brought unpredictability which did not allow to introduce durable and sustainable solutions[11] to the protracted situation of people displaced from Ukraine, including guaranteeing access to suitable accommodation and fostering integration opportunities.

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5 - The Temporary Protection Directive defines such circumstance as a situation "characterised by a mass influx" of displaced individuals unable to return to their home country due to a conflict.

6 - Recital 7, Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/382 of 4 March 2022 establishing the existence of a mass influx of displaced persons from Ukraine within the meaning of Article 5 of Directive 2001/55/EC, and having the effect of introducing temporary protection.

7 - See: European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), Legal Note. The Right to Suitable Accommodation under the Temporary Protection Directive; Meltem Ineli Ciğer, When Temporary Protection Ends: longer-term solutions for refugees from Ukraine; and European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), Providing Temporary Protection to Displaced Persons from Ukraine. A Year in Review

8 - See: ECRE, The Right to Suitable Accommodation Under the Temporary Protection Directive and EC, Temporary Protection, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/common-european-asylum-system/temporary-protection_en

9 - European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), Fleeing Ukraine Implementing temporary protection at local levels, p. 33.

10- Ibid., pp. 18-19 and 33.

11- It is worth mentioning that the Temporary Protection Directive identifies only one durable solution which is a safe and dignified return to a country of origin.

What is hosting assistance

Discussions about the adequate planning of exit strategies to ensure that adequate assistance is provided to the families in Budapest during the Regional Safe Homes Lessons Learned workshop

Hosting assistance programmes and initiatives are often implemented within a partnership of various stakeholders, primarily central and local authorities, non-governmental organisations, and local communities. The approaches towards building and fostering partnerships differed among the member states presented in the case studies (see graphic for more information).

It is worth noting the role of groups of citizens, volunteers, and hosts. They were often active, setting up and operating chats, communicators, and social media to communicate with people displaced from Ukraine, relevant non-governmental organisations and civil society groups, and to coordinate assistance provided. These channels were used to match and arrange accommodations in the homes of ordinary citizens. Furthermore, in some presented countries, community-driven, alternative, spontaneous, and informal initiatives played the main or even exclusive role within the overall hosting assistance system.

Each hosting assistance initiative or programme has to ensure that a hosted arrangement is suitable and safe. Preventing potential protection-related challenges can be achieved by developing a proper approach to vetting offered accommodations, assessing the motivation of hosts and guests, and arranging a matching process. Hosts and guests must have access to appropriate information, support, training, mentoring, and learning opportunities.[13] Finally, conducting monitoring of hosted arrangements and developing risk management and protection mechanisms allows engaged stakeholders to prevent and respond to emerging challenges.

This is why adapting and developing case management systems and tools were crucial for the implementation of hosting assistance initiatives and providing tailored assistance and services to hosts and guests. In some of the member states, developing or adjusting the existing case management systems played a significant part in the overall hosting assistance system.

In essence, hosting assistance represents not only a practical accommodation option, but it is a reflection of societal values and solidarity. Highlighting proactive and inclusive approaches to support those in need and maintaining a hospitable civil society space is vital. Fostering understanding of and engagement in hosting assistance enables spontaneous acts of solidarity and inclusive responses to emergencies, reinforcing societal cohesion.[14]

Finally, through a dignified and independent living experience along with access to comprehensive support and infrastructure for both hosts and guests, hosting assistance fosters integration and adaptation opportunities for newcomers and builds community resilience and openness.[15]

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13 - The experiences of people granted temporary protection with hosting assistance were mixed. While some expressed satisfaction with the programme and praised the welcoming attitudes and support offered by hosts, others faced challenges regarding the adequacy and safety of their accommodation, along with difficulties in accessing essential support and assistance. The Fundamental Rights Agency's survey found that lack of privacy and sharing of common spaces with strangers were among the main problems experienced by those staying in hosted arrangements (FRA, Fleeing Ukraine: Displaced people's experiences in the EU). Other issues concerned the lack of preparation and training provided and limited consideration of special needs and requirements.

14 - See: Safe Homes Key Lessons from Hosting People Displaced from Ukraine in Private Homes

15 - Ibid.

The concept of hosting assistance, as defined by the Red Cross,[12] encapsulates the act of offering accommodation to individuals in need of housing. It stands as one of the oldest forms of humanitarian response to crises such as conflicts, displacements, or natural disasters. A hosting scheme, an organised initiative facilitated by authorities, civil society organisations, or groups of individuals, aims to provide accommodation by local hosts for newly arrived guests.

Hosting assistance may take various forms. Accommodation can be offered in shared or vacant spaces and by persons already known to the guests, or by strangers, private persons, or legal entities. It may also include financial incentives and/or tax benefits to hosts and companies providing housing in hotels or other similar facilities. These schemes may incorporate direct and/or indirect payments for guests. However, the core objective for hosting assistance is to provide housing and support to those in need mostly free of charge.

Hosting assistance should also ensure access to other necessary services such as education, provision of information, health, and employment and be accompanied by a variety of services that create sustainable integration opportunities. To be a successful tool in situations of displacement, hosting assistance cannot be limited to providing mere accommodation.

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12 - For more see: IFRC, Safe Homes: A Practitioners' Handbook.

Sustainability of hosting assistance

Despite facing the same emergency, member states' responses to the displacement from Ukraine were unique, reflecting specific challenges, opportunities and cultural elements. The analysis of hosting assistance initiatives and programmes across the countries presented in the case studies showed a variety of approaches and arrangements.

While hosting assistance can aid in addressing housing needs, relying exclusively on this type of arrangement is not suitable or sustainable. It can be further hindered and limited by delays in matching, decreasing interest from potential hosts, and inadequate support provided to guests and hosts.

One of the main challenges to hosting assistance in the member states presented in the case studies was related to the uncertainty and unpredictability of the temporary protection mechanism. Moreover, tight rental markets,[16] increases in costs of utilities, and already overstretched resources further impacted the access to sustainable accommodation and the experiences related to hosting assistance, and this significantly limited integration prospects and opportunities.

Despite the identified barriers and challenges, hosting assistance programmes and initiatives were a crucial component in supporting the integration and self-sustainability of displaced people. Hosting assistance can support integration opportunities because it creates a more welcoming environment for guests. It offers protection and safeguarding, and a more permanent and stable living situation for them compared to temporary shelters or other forms of shared accommodation. In turn, this stability is a crucial factor in giving back agency and control to displaced people, allowing them to focus on (re)building their lives, improving mental health, and facilitating their access to assistance and services.[17]

Living with host families, displaced persons can connect with the local community, learn about their culture and customs, improve their language skills and establish social networks. This can help to break down barriers and misconceptions between communities and foster better understanding, trust, and positive relationships.[18]

In the member states covered in the case studies, hosting assistance programmes and initiatives aimed to provide immediate shelter and support to people displaced from Ukraine. However, the countries that focused on long-term exit strategies demonstrated the most successful outcomes in terms of adaptability and self-sustainability. Transitioning from hosting assistance to durable and sustainable accommodation solutions demands careful planning and consideration. Hosting assistance plays a significant role in building up to this transition by providing stable but limited-in-time accommodation and support to individuals seeking to integrate into their new communities.

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16 - For example, rents in urban and suburban areas have risen significantly, making it challenging to find affordable housing in metropolitan areas (see: ECRE, Policy Paper. Transitioning Out of the Temporary Protection Directive, p. 9).

17 - FRA, Fleeing Ukraine…, pp. 19, 22-23, 35-36; ECRE, Policy Paper. Transitioning Out of the Temporary Protection Directive; and EC, Solidarity and housing…

18 - Ibid.

Integration is not an overnight process and thus requires long-term investment in housing infrastructure, awareness-raising, capacity-building, introducing public policies and the development of public policies that tackle various elements including incentive schemes. Within the context of displacement from Ukraine, creating and managing long-term integration opportunities, fostering social infrastructure, and building and preparing individual exit strategies from hosted arrangements was not sufficiently and comprehensively considered and developed across the region.

Sustaining hosting assistance programmes and initiatives also require a concerted effort to develop and foster a multi-faceted approach encompassing resource allocation, tailored support mechanisms, adaptation to changing circumstances, and collaborative efforts among stakeholders. A range of resources may be required to sustain their positive impact of hosting assistance programmes and initiatives, especially on integration and self-sufficiency.[19]

These are in particular:

- **Financial resources:** to ensure the programme's financial sustainability, it is foremost necessary to develop a long-term vision of how those resources could be raised to sustain a hosting assistance programme or initiative, ensuring preparedness for future crises and identifying and securing funding from donors, government, or other sources. Financial resources can be used to cover the cost of basic necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter for displaced people, as well as costs associated with programme administration, including staff salaries and operating expenses. In addition, the programme can consider innovative financing models such as public-private partnerships or impact investments.

- **Human resources:** the programme requires skilled and experienced staff to ensure that displaced people receive proper care and support. They can include case managers, social workers, mental health professionals, and other support staff. Training and ongoing support should be provided to staff to ensure that they deliver high-quality services to guests and hosts.

- **Policy and legal resources:** the programme should adhere to existing legislation and regulations and ensure that all necessary permissions and approvals are obtained. Resources may be required to update or develop policies and regulations specific to the programme. It is essential to address legal and regulatory challenges that can prevent it from operating smoothly and sustainably. Effective engagement with government and other key stakeholders is essential to manage risks and overcome challenges.

- **Community support:** it is important to maintain community support for the programme and promote awareness and understanding of hosting assistance among potential hosts and the wider community. Part of this involves ensuring that hosts receive support and recognition for their contributions and assistance.[20] Such programmes and initiatives should promote mutual understanding and respect while also providing support to address any potential conflicts.

- **Hosting assistance provides a flexible interim solution, complementing other accommodation options.** Moreover, its effectiveness relies on thorough pre-planning and clear exit strategies, ensuring it remains temporary and does not prolong reliance on hosts and their support. Recognising hosting assistance within a broader continuum of care and reception can serve as an innovative housing solution addressing homelessness and housing exclusion.

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19 - Hosting assistance initiatives and programmes should be considered an element of a broader process, part of a long-term strategy leading to the integration and adaptation of displaced people.

20 - FRA, Fleeing Ukraine…, ECRE, Policy Paper. Transitioning…; and EC, Solidarity and housing…

Recommendations

Hosting assistance serves as a transitional measure, designed to provide immediate relief for accommodation needs. While it can be expanded to assist a broader range of individuals, it is crucial to acknowledge its temporary nature. Therefore, investing in sustainable housing policies, long-term planning, and preparedness as well as developing exit strategies for individuals relying on hosting assistance is fundamental. Without those elements in place hosting assistance may inadvertently prolong the implementation of temporary solutions, increase housing insecurity, and, foremost, limit the guests' possibilities to transition to independent living.

When developing and implementing a hosting assistance programme, the authorities, supporting and working together with local authorities, municipalities, civil society, and other stakeholders, should consider:

- Implementing and sustaining hosting assistance programmes and initiatives as well as their impact on integration, inclusivity, and societal cohesion requires a commitment from the authorities and their support to non-governmental organisations, civil society, and ordinary citizens.

- Establishing a structured and comprehensive policy framework for addressing the situation and needs of displaced people. Such a policy should include various elements and initiatives, including a hosting assistance programme and short- and long-term integration opportunities for displaced people.

- Introducing standardised procedures across all actors involved in hosting assistance activities, ensuring proper standards related to vetting of pledged accommodations, matching of guests and hosts, and ongoing support for all parties involved.

- Prioritising investment in data and case management systems to ensure efficient registration, matching, and protection monitoring procedures. This also requires consistent review and adaptation of casework models and services to the evolving and changing needs of guests and hosts.

- Standardising the approach to hosting assistance activities nationwide, developing risk assessments and preparedness plans, addressing challenges promptly to avoid parallel systems, and ensuring comprehensive support through existing initiatives.

- Building a sense of community among guests and hosts for successful integration, facilitated through activities that encourage interaction with the local community. Fostering sustainable coexistence also includes providing training, support, and mediation between guests and hosts, promoting broader integration through social events, mentorship initiatives, and language classes.

- Establishing financial subsidies and incentives to encourage independent living and alleviate potential burdens on hosts and ensure access to sustainable accommodation.

Next steps

Discussions about the different considerations of preparedness and challenges when implementing Hosting Assistance in Budapest during the Regional Safe Homes Lessons Learned workshop

By considering these steps, the EU and member states can bolster the positive effort of hosting assistance ensuring integration and long-term well-being of displaced people.[21]

- Continuing to provide EU-wide policy for post-temporary protection options and assistance to the most affected EU member states.

- Ensuring the inclusion of people granted temporary protection and holders of other forms of international protection as eligible groups with a possibility to accumulate periods of residence in different EU member states and reducing the disproportionate five-year requirement of continuous stay in the ongoing revision of the EU Long-Term Residence Directive.

- Maintaining a coordinated and leadership approach to response to displacement from Ukraine beyond emergency assistance.

- Allowing people granted temporary protection to benefit from simplified procedures to transit to other legal statuses such as single permits when available after the termination of temporary protection.

- Continuing to address practical obstacles to providing healthcare services, including setting up procedures for involving interpreters, and ensuring that healthcare rights are accessible.

- Ensuring that displaced persons have access to education, language training, and employment, particularly for women with family and care responsibilities

- Providing clear information on the procedure to be followed and continuing to support connections for displaced people and their hosts, even as hosted arrangements are phased out.

- Creating structured programmes and networks that match displaced people with appropriate initiatives that take their specific needs, such as health and mental health conditions, into account and creating a solid framework to help hosts and build their capacities to ensure the sustainability of hosting assistance programmes and initiatives.

21 - Prepared based on: ECRE, Policy Paper…, p. 3; ECRE, The EU's Response to Displacement from Ukraine. ECRE's Recommendations, updated 10 October 2023; FRA, Fleeing Ukraine…, p. 9; and EC, Solidarity and housing…, p, 20.

PROGRAMME STEPS OVERVIEW HOSTING ASSISTANCE

CROSS CUTTING THROUGHOUT EACH STEP : PROTECTION GENDER & INCLUSION, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & ACCOUNTABILITY

0 PREPAREDNESS (PRE-STEP)

1. Institutional preparedness
2. External engagement and advocacy
3. Host preparedness

1 CONTEXT ASSESSMENT ANALYSIS

1. General context assessment (Incl. stakeholder and hosting assistance organisation mapping, migration related legal framework).
2. Host profiles assessment
3. Accommodation conditions
4. Displaced/guest profiles assessment
5. Host community assessment
6. Perceptions and Xenophobia
7. Safeguarding risk assessment
8. Exit strategy assessment
9. NS capacity assessment
10. Community engagement and accountability assessment
11. Programme risk assessment

2 DESIGN & PLAN

1. Objectives
2. Selection of components for hosting assistance
3. Programme duration & hosting period
4. Targeting and selection criteria
5. Exit strategies
6. Process of host and guest programme engagement
7. Registration & verification processes
8. Support for host households
9. Accommodation checks
10. Safeguarding risk management and support
11. Enrolment
12. Accommodation improvement and adaptation
13. Matching
14. Agreements
15. Initial placement support
16. Information support
17. Financial Support
18. Complimentary, integration, inclusion and exit support
    1. *Integration frameworks*
    2. *Translation support*
    3. *Legal assistance*
    4. *Warm welcomes and orientation support*
    5. *Household items support*
    6. *Mental health and Psycho-social support*
    7. *Language*
    8. *Employment support*
    9. *Onward accommodation support*
    10. *Host community support*
    11. *Host population activities to build empathy*
19. Case management

3 IMPLEMENT & MONITOR

1. Partnerships
2. Information Management
3. Extending or ending
4. Programme Monitoring

4 EVALUATE, REPORT & LEARN

1. Report
2. Programme evaluation
3. Case studies

BELGIUM [1]

PUTTING LOCAL AUTHORITIES AT THE FOREFRONT OF A HOSTING ASSISTANCE MECHANISM

This case study presents how the arrival of people displaced from Ukraine prompted changes in Belgium's approach to hosting assistance, leading to the implementation of new government responses to address their housing.

Number of people displaced from Ukraine granted temporary protection	**79,856** [2]
Number of people displaced from Ukraine in need of housing	**25%** **(approximately)** 60% women, 40%men, 68% total adults, 32% children (accompanied)
Number of pledged accommodations in Belgium	**44,000**
Average duration of hosted arrangement	**8 months** [3]
Location of the hosting assistance initiatives	**Entire country**

1 - This case study mostly focuses on Walloon and Brussels-Capital Regions.

2 - As of 28 February 2024,. Source: Statbel. (2024). Déplacés en provenance d'Ukraine. https://statbel.fgov.be/fr/visuals/deplaces-ukrainiens

3 - Source: The Belgian Red Cross study on hosting assistance initiatives in the country.

BELGIUM 1

FRANCE 2

HUNGARY 3

IRELAND 4

NETHERLANDS 5

LUXEMBOURG 6

ROMANIA 7

SLOVAKIA 8

CROIX-ROUGE
de Belgique

INTRODUCTION

Prior to the escalation of the conflict in Ukraine in February 2022, several hosting assistance initiatives driven by civil society already existed in Belgium but were not formally integrated into the country's official reception model. In fact, providing housing assistance for migrants has been effectively criminalised, with four hosts being charged with human trafficking and belonging to a criminal group in 2018 for providing accommodation to homeless migrants. The hosts had not sought any financial benefit and argued that they acted solely out of humanitarian concern.[4]

The unprecedented scale of housing needs following the arrival of people displaced from Ukraine fundamentally altered the landscape in Belgium, triggering new federal, regional, and local measures to welcome, protect, and integrate people displaced by the conflict.

The engagement of municipalities in a hosting assistance mechanism proved to be significant. Activities managed by local authorities were more adaptable to specific needs but presented challenges in communication and coordination among stakeholders. The lack of established frameworks and unclear procedures, coupled with the urgency of the situation, resulted in disparate hosting assistance approaches across the Flemish, Walloon, and Brussels-Capital Regions.

The hosting assistance mechanism played a pivotal role in providing emergency housing to people displaced from Ukraine, evolving from a temporary support measure to one of the main housing arrangements offered.
An evaluation conducted by the Belgian Red Cross (BRC) underscored the significant role hosts played in supporting guests' adaptation and integration to Belgian society. However, communication challenges, the absence of established procedures, and unclear stakeholder roles impacted both hosts and guests, posing obstacles to long-term, sustainable integration and housing solutions.

4 - See also:https://www.irfam.org/le-delit-de-solidarite-de-lhospitalite-a-la-desobeissance-civile/

© Belgian Red Cross

BACKGROUND

Several organisations in Belgium implemented hosting assistance initiatives before 2022. Singa's "CALM" project, for example, sought to support the integration of single refugees through flat sharing, employing a structured approach with both temporary and longer-term arrangements. The Citizen Platform for Refugee Support, Belrefugees, facilitated informal hosting arrangements through a network of citizens, offering temporary accommodation to migrants. Another initiative, the MENA programme, coordinated by the NGOs Mentor Jeunes and Pleegzorg Vlaanderen, focused on unaccompanied asylum-seeking children with foster families receiving training and comprehensive support to accommodate children. While in the Flemish Region, ORBIT's Temporary Housing Registration permitted citizens to host refugees for up to three years, offering guidelines and administrative support for the hosting process. Each of these initiatives is presented in more detail below.
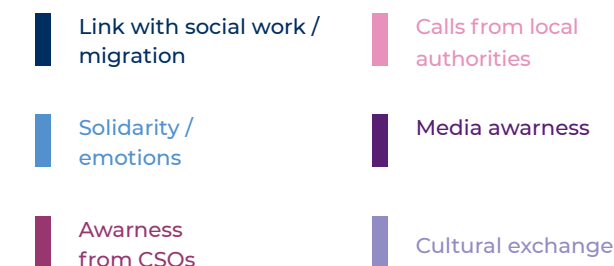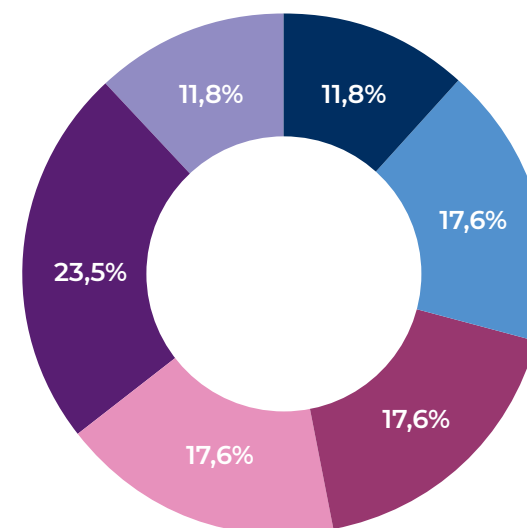
The arrival of people displaced from Ukraine and the activation of temporary protection measures prompted diverse approaches to addressing housing needs, including hosting assistance initiatives. It also resulted in the rapid development and implementation of new mechanisms: the granting of temporary protection played a crucial role in facilitating swift assistance to those displaced from Ukraine.

In March 2022, the "Protection and Reception of Ukrainians Task Force", coordinated by the National Crisis Centre (NCCN), was established by the Belgian State Secretary for Asylum and Migration. This new body identified several core actions that needed to be taken to respond to the increased needs, including expanding the capacity of a dedicated emergency shelter, strengthening local preparedness, developing a centralised matching tool, establishing a registration centre, and facilitating access to information. Under Belgian legislation, it is the responsibility of the municipality where people granted international protection and those under temporary protection are living to guarantee their rights and access to services. Access to appropriate and sustainable accommodation, as well as the labour market, was seen as a key element in enabling the self-sufficiency of people displaced from Ukraine.

After registering at the immigration office's dedicated registration centre, people displaced from Ukraine who were granted temporary protection received a temporary protection certificate (A card) granting them the right to stay in Belgium, as well as access to the labour market, healthcare, social assistance, and education.

For those in need of housing, hosting assistance became the most widely available option. A nationwide campaign #FreeSpot / #PlekVrij / #PlaceDispo, launched on 28 February 2022 by the State Secretary for Asylum and Migration, encouraged Belgian residents to host people displaced from Ukraine. This resulted in nearly 22,000 pledged spots within a week of the campaign's launch. This number reached a total of 44,000 by June 2022. Surveys found that people's motivations for wanting to host people displaced from Ukraine included a sense of moral obligation, a need to respond to appeals from the authorities and at the community level, as well as lobbying in the media, solidarity, emotional response to the war, and a hope of cultural exchange.[5] A "typical host" profile emerged, characterised as an individual over 40 years of age, possessing higher education, and having a sufficient income. The guests were predominantly women with children who had recently arrived in Belgium.[6]

HOSTING MOTIVATIONS TO ACCOMODATE PEOPLE DISPLACED FROM UKRAINE [7]

- ■ Link with social work / migration
- ■ Solidarity / emotions
- ■ Awarness from CSOs
- ■ Calls from local authorities
- ■ Media awarness
- ■ Cultural exchange

This massive citizen-led mobilisation triggered a widespread chain reaction involving federal, regional and local authorities. However, the rapid implementation and coordination of this spontaneous housing model presented numerous risks and challenges. Although hosting assistance quickly emerged as the primary accommodation option available to people displaced from Ukraine in need of housing, a programme capable of encompassing the scale of the need was not in place. The broader policies, centralised coordination, procedures and tools necessary were also lacking.

Taking this into account, the responsibility for providing housing, including hosting assistance mechanisms, stayed with municipalities under the overall coordination of the respective regional governments in Walloon, Flemish, and Brussels-Capital Regions. Federal authorities were tasked with establishing the legislative and policy foundations to address the displacement. Delegating the implementation of programmes to local authorities allowed them to be adapted to the specific contexts, but also brought challenges, as it was the first-time municipalities had directly handled such large numbers of new arrivals. Communication and coordination between the actors involved posed a particular challenge, as did ensuring the protection and safety of displaced people and their hosts.

Hosting assistance was regarded as a temporary support measure but eventually became the main type of accommodation available. This was due to the extended timeframe of the situation, and the absence of alternative housing solutions and available exit strategies.

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5 - Based on the survey done by the Odisee – Social Work Research Centre and on the Belgian Red Cross research. See more at: https://www.odisee. be/onderzoeksprojecten/PlekVrij-opvang-Oekraiense-vluchtelingen and https://www.odisee.be/sites/default/files/public/2023-03/Rapport_PlekVrij_ ENG_def.pdf

6 - Ibid.

7 - Data from focus groups carried out by the BRC in 2023. Sample of hosts = 48.

ABOUT HOSTING ASSISTANCE MECHANISMS

The provision of emergency housing to people displaced from Ukraine required onsite matching between potential guests and hosts at the registration centres run by the Immigration Office (Office des étrangers).

From March to July 2022, the Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum-Seekers (FEDASIL) took on the role of coordinating these matches. FEDASIL identified housing needs among registered persons, determined eligibility for housing arrangements, matched individuals with suitable accommodation offered by local authorities, and organised transportation, primarily via buses, to the designated communes. This helped ensure that the hundreds of people arriving from Ukraine were able to find hosted accommodation, and travel to municipalities where these were available, on the same day of their registration.[8]

The first federal transit reception centre, Ariane[9], was set up to accommodate those arriving during nonworking hours – at night or on weekends.[10] However, in the subsequent months, the unwavering flow of arrivals, the increased difficulties to ensure immediate matching, the long-term stay of some residents, as well as the reception crisis of asylum-seekers created gridlock at the Ariane centre.[11]

Compiled by municipalities, the digital Housing Tool platform collected detailed data for each apartment or spare room pledged by members to the public. The Public Centre for Social Welfare (PCSW)[12] operating in each municipality became central to the implementation of local hosting assistance initiatives. They were generally responsible for providing financial assistance, offering support with administrative matters, facilitating access to the labour market, making referrals to services, and assisting with education-related issues. They were also in charge of identifying temporary accommodation solutions as well as supporting people's search for more sustainable housing.

## Implementation of hosting assistance mechanisms

In the summer of 2022, a bottleneck emerged due to multiple factors including: complications in direct matching from FEDASIL, challenges with individuals unsuitable for hosting assistance, returning families unable to continue their hosted arrangements, new arrivals of people displaced from Ukraine, and gridlock at the Ariane centre. FEDASIL then decided to withdraw from the matching process, informally transferring the matching responsibility directly to local authorities. As a result, hosting assistance was only accessible upon arrival for people with high vulnerability challenges, while most people granted temporary protection had to find a municipality ready and willing to welcome them. Assistance at the local level depended on the availability of spaces in private accommodation. As the Flemish and Brussels-Capital Regions neared their quotas, the vulnerability of new arrivals who were in need of housing increased.

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8 - Belgium to obtain temporary protection. If they lacked accommodation, they could apply to FEDASIL for emergency housing, which at the time might involve hosting assistance. Individuals were required to register with a local authority to access accommodation in a collective centre or search for private housing in the traditional rental market. This registration also opened up additional rights.

9 - This centre is managed by the Belgian Red Cross (Flemish community).

10- It also provided emergency shelter for families or individuals that could not be matched upon arrival for some days. To increase accommodation capacity, support was provided by hotels in Brussels who offered free rooms for short stay.

11- The Ariane Centre was originally established as a transit centre exclusively for persons granted temporary protection. Due to the reception crisis in Belgium since 2021, additional spaces were needed for asylum seekers. Consequently, some areas within this collective centre were allocated to asylum seekers. Presently, Ariane hosts both asylum seekers and persons granted temporary protection.

12- Openbaar Centrum voor Maatschappelijk Welzijn (OCMW) in the Flemish Region or Centre public d'action sociale (CPAS) in the Walloon Region and either OCMW or CPAS in the Brussels-Capital Region.

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RESEARCH CONDUCTED BY THE BELGIAN RED CROSS SHOWED THAT IN BRUSSELS-CAPITAL AND WALLOON REGIONS RELATIVELY FEW HOSTS FORMALISED THEIR HOSTED ARRANGEMENTS. [15]

30%

of hosts have formalised accommodation with displaced persons from Ukraine
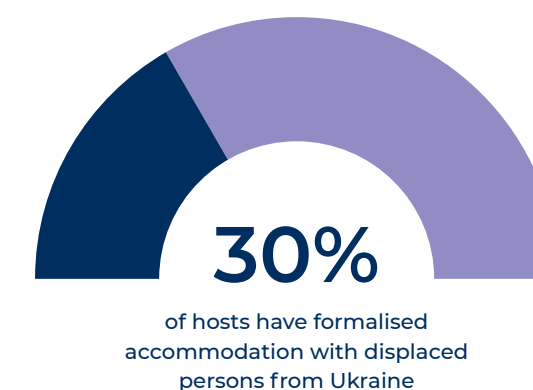
The established regional accommodation ratio was based on population. In the Flemish Region, at the time home to 59,11% of all displaced persons from Ukraine in Belgium[13], vacant apartments and spare rooms made available by locals formed part of a shared repository comprising various types of accommodation, including collective shelters, social housing, and hotel rooms. The Brussels-Capital Region opened hotel rooms, then collective centres to displaced families who were required or willing to leave their initial accommodation in host families. The Walloon Region opened collective centres to accommodate people granted temporary protection who had to leave hosted arrangements, but also residents of the Ariane centre who could not be placed in hosting assistance.

In the Flemish Region, an agreement between the host and guest was signed, stating that the hosting assistance was of a temporary nature, with the guest expected to move to alternative, longer-term housing as soon as possible. Agreements could be valid for less than a month or extended if both parties agreed. In Brussels-Capital and Walloon Regions, most municipalities proposed the agreement template created by the Walloon and Brussels Regions. The purpose of these agreements was to provide a framework for hosted arrangements. In addition to this document, some local authorities proposed a "charter of good manners" to both parties.[14]

Several international and national non-governmental organisations[16] and the Ukrainian diaspora played important roles in offering information and support to people granted temporary protection. The associative network, including the Belgian Red Cross[17], contributed to the organisation of hosting mechanisms, taking the lead on collective centres, information and orientation, protection, and health with the support of the regional authorities. UNHCR played a central role in mobilising and coordinating efforts led by public services in support of people granted temporary protection in the Brussels-Capital Region. Various hotlines were also created in each region to provide support.

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13 - In Walloon and Brussels-Capital Regions a 20% of displaced persons from Ukraine was established, respectively. A distribution ratio of available accommodations was established per region: 60% in Flemish region, 30% in the Walloon Region, and 10% in the Brussels-Capital region.

14 - For the Brussels-Capital Region see: https://www.helpukraine.brussels/sites/default/files/inline-files/2.%20Convention%20type%20d%27occupation%20temporaire%20_avec%20paiement_5-FR_0.pdf and for the Walloon Region see: https://www.wallonie.be/sites/default/files/inline-files/convention%20occupation%20pr%C3%A9caire-v1.pdf

15 - Data from the online survey done by the BRC. Sample of hosts = 139.

16 - For example, in mid-2022, following the decision to decentralize the matching of guests and host and move it to the local level, Belrefugees actively contributed to the process in two municipalities of the Brussels-Capital Region. The organization conducted information sessions for host families and provided personal follow-up throughout the matching process.

17 - The Belgian Red Cross (Flemish community) manages the federal transit reception Centre Ariane, the Belgian Red Cross (Francophone community) carried out health screenings and provided information at the registration centre (Eurostation) and previously provided also information at the information/reception point at the Brussels South international train station

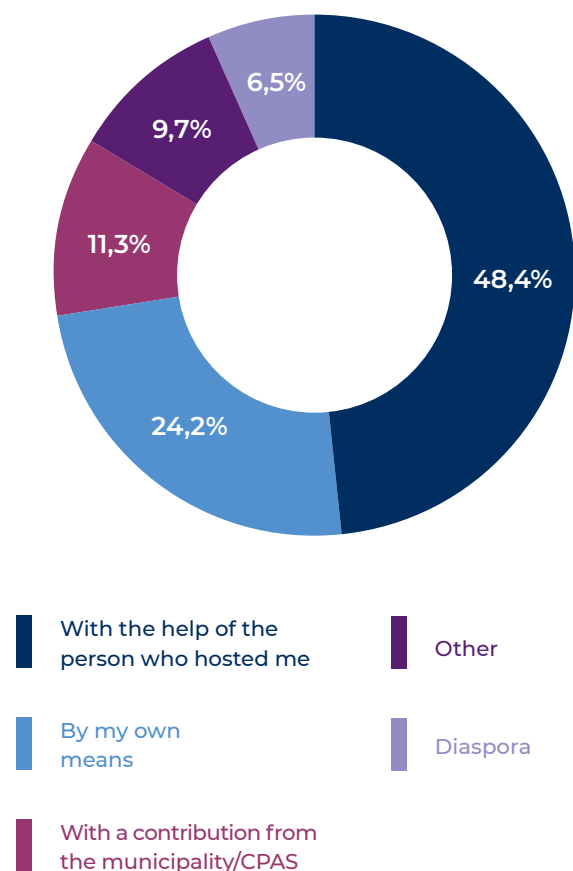## Evaluation of the Belgian hosting assistance mechanisms

Most hosts [18] considered hosting to be a positive experience for themselves and their families, and often provided extensive support beyond accommodation. In many cases, there was a perceived lack of appropriate support from authorities. Hosts found themselves offering administrative support and aid in accessing various services, including healthcare and education, as well as leisure activities. Hosts also played a crucial role as listeners, providing comfort and emotional support to their guests.

The range of support offered by hosts had a significant impact on their guests' adaptation and integration, in many cases ultimately helping them to find sustainable and stable long-term housing solutions. The majority of interviewed guests found permanent accommodation on their own or with the help of their host family. However, challenges in securing permanent housing persist, encompassing issues such as limited information about housing, insufficient availability of housing, financial constraints, discriminatory practices, or instances where host families may have lacked the necessary time, resources, or inclination to assist guests in securing more permanent accommodation.

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17 - Data from the online survey done by the BRC. Sample of hosts = 139. The BRC survey: average score of 7/10 for overall experience.

18 - Data from the online survey conducted by the BRC in 2023. Sample of guests = 99.

HOW DID YOU FIND LONG-TERM ACCOMODATION? [19]

- 48,4%
- 24,2%
- 11,3%
- 9,7%
- 6,5%

■ With the help of the person who hosted me

■ By my own means

■ With a contribution from the municipality/CPAS

■ Other

■ Diaspora

The response from the public is a fine gesture. [...] But too much has been put on the shoulders of the host. They were already making their homes available, so they were losing their privacy, they had to drive the people in, they had to enrol the children in school, they had to deal with the administrative side of things, etc [...]. I don't think the host families realised the extent to which they were going to be called upon at every level, financially or administratively. And above all, not being able to give them an end date for this accommodation. If we'd said 2 or 3 months, we'd have had fewer problems.

— *Local authorities on the role of hosts*

Despite the unprecedented mobilisation, expressions of solidarity, and generosity, along with a strong commitment from federal, regional, and local authorities to welcome displaced people, various consequences emerged with a significant impact on both hosts and guests.

The lack of preparation of hosts prior to receiving guests (linked to the lack of information available from local authorities) had consequences for both sides. Many host families, unfamiliar with the reality of providing hosting assistance, had high expectations but were unprepared to welcome vulnerable or traumatised individuals and families. Additionally, hosts also lacked information regarding how to refer people to additional support services when needed. The lack of established processes also impacted people displaced from Ukraine, who had to navigate complex and unclear administrative procedures, and experienced differences in treatment depending on the municipality and host family.

Difficulties associated with matching meant that the criteria for hosts and the specific needs of displaced people were not fully taken into consideration. According to the BRC survey, guests provided information on their family composition, contact details, a copy of their identity card and, more rarely, the languages spoken. While the schooling of children was a priority for federal authorities, no particular attention was paid to individual's specific needs apart from visible (mainly physical) vulnerabilities. The matching carried out by FEDASIL did not always work in practice and the local authorities sometimes had to redirect guests to hosts. Poor understanding of previously unidentified or non-visible vulnerabilities resulted in protection and security concerns for guests and, in some cases, hosts themselves.

As the support provided by local authorities varied from one municipality to the next, not all hosts and guests were informed about potential resources and support available to facilitate the hosted arrangement (template agreements, etc.). Some municipalities were unable to take on certain profiles such as older people, large families, or single men, mainly due to a lack of interest/willingness from hosts to house these groups. Some municipalities dedicated special housing to older people such as rest homes. Others had also opened collective centres, which in some cases welcomed large families and profiles where hosting could not be found elsewhere (for example Roma families). This complicated local management and integration.

Hosts often had to handle administrative follow-ups for guests. The lack of knowledge about whom to alert in the event of conflict also impacted people's safety. Post-matching monitoring depended significantly on the municipalities and the motivation or capacity of the social worker in charge of managing citizen accommodation in the municipalities or the social services public centre.

The lack of a proper exit or transition strategies for guests to move to longer-term housing put a huge burden on hosts, who had to assist their guests in finding accommodation (a particular burden in cities facing chronic housing shortages, particularly affecting affordable housing) and work. While hosts played a crucial role in helping their guests to find permanent accommodation, certain municipalities helped the search by collaborating with agencies or landlords to offer social, collective, or private housing options. Local authorities and property owners also made efforts, including the reduction of rental prices and offering shorter lease terms.

Hosted arrangements were often extended due to several factors such as: (1) the lack of available alternative accommodation; (2) the low income of guests; (3) the unclear length of stay of people granted temporary protection in Belgium (especially taking into account that typical leases in Belgium last between one and nine years); or (4) discrimination related to people's status as being reliant on social support.

While alternative rehousing solutions, including in hotels or Airbnb, were sometimes proposed and available, they were not optimal, while collective reception centres also did not represent a sustainable option as they also only provided temporary accommodation.

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

1. Poor coordination and preparation impacted the wave of solidarity to support people displaced from Ukraine.

— The nationwide call made by the State Secretary for Asylum and Migration to Belgian residents occurred before the establishment of an efficient matching mechanism.

— Municipalities had limited time to prepare and develop proper needs assessment procedures, including long-term housing solutions especially considering a rapidly decreasing amount of available emergency accommodation.

— There was a lack of recognition and capitalisation of the experience of existing associations specialising in hosting assistance, such as BelRefugees and Singa.

— Due to the emergency situation, and the lack of an established framework, clear procedures, and information, there was little consistency in how the different territories organised hosting assistance.

— The lack of clear, centralised information and an unclear division of roles between (local) stakeholders and public authorities hindered the implementation of a well-organised hosting assistance mechanism. Limited expertise in temporary protection, hosted arrangements, and mass displacement management led to ad-hoc actions at all levels.

— Most hosts[20] had no prior experience with sharing or offering their homes to people from abroad. Those who did, typically hosted exchange students or served as foster families for children in need of emergency care.

— The lack of organisation, the urgency of the situation and the absence of frameworks and planning led to gaps in communication and transparency between hosts and guests (financial, psychosocial, administrative, duration, etc.).

2. Lack of systematic vetting and monitoring in all municipalities by local authorities.

— Verification of the profiles of hosts and the accommodation offered varied widely from one area to another: 35% of the municipalities interviewed did not check hosts' criminal records, and only 51% carried out a home check.

— The type of follow-up varied widely, depending on the area, the individual front-line staff tasked with the job, and the time and resources at their disposal.

— Most local authorities did not carry out any controls. Instead, they monitored the various families with varying degrees of detail, ranging from trust in hosts and guests (spontaneity in case of need), to phone calls, e-mails or home visits.

3. Lack of precision and communication during matching.

— Municipalities were not systematically involved in the initial matching process which was created without their input. Consequently, they were left to handle the decisions made, creating significant challenges for effective local management of the process.[21]

— The federal tool used for registration was strongly criticised for being difficult to use and unreliable (both in terms of the matching itself, and in terms of logistical difficulties – delays etc.). Additional issues included the challenge of aligning the federal initiative with local and citizen initiatives, resulting in a proliferation of tools. Municipalities also faced difficulties in identifying clear, reliable contact people with sustained connections to on-the-ground realities. Lastly, some strongly criticise the lack of humanity and mistreatment resulting from these multiple malfunctions.

— The use of parallel registration systems by municipalitie [22] caused frustration among federal and regional authorities, who aimed for wider adoption of their own systems. Additionally, it led to variations in the identification and addressing of specific needs of hosts and guests across different municipalities.

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4. Variable support, mediation, monitoring and information of hosts and guests by local authorities.

— Host families and guests needed support, which the local authorities were not always able to provide. 65% of hosts interviewed did not know who to contact in the event of a conflict with their guests. 74% of the guests interviewed felt that they had to rely mainly on their host to get answers to their questions.

— People displaced from Ukraine were not obliged to follow the regular integration programme for refugees (consisting of citizenship courses and language courses in French or Flemish). This limited learning about Belgian, society, culture and services.

— Frontline responders (for example CPAS and municipality workers, local emergency coordinators, and others) had different means, roles, mandates and skills, and therefore a different understanding of hosts' and guests' social needs. This had a direct impact on their ability to support people and led to differences in the support/treatment of hosts and guests.

— Local authorities received a mass of information from regional and federal authorities, as well as from the media, which considerably increased the burden on them to support hosts and guests.

5. Lack of structural rehousing solutions and support.

— In Belgium, in principle, local authorities are responsible for providing housing for anyone unable to pay for accommodation. However, they are not responsible for finding permanent housing, only required to "provide shelter to vulnerable people domiciled in the municipality" although some do seek to provide long-term solutions such as the Brussels capital Region or some municipalities.[23] New arrivals' knowledge of the Belgian rental market and related laws and procedures was limited, not least due to the lack of integration programmes.

— People displaced from Ukraine preferred to stay in urban areas, leading to a significant demand for accommodation in the Brussels-Capital Region and major cities in both Flemish and Walloon Regions. The Belgian rental market was already very tight, and social housing underdeveloped in many municipalities.

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20 - According to the BRC research, 82% of hosts interviewed had never been involved in a solidarity initiative for migrants.

21 - In July 2022, inadequate matching process not only hindered access to shelter for arriving displaced people (as they were already registered in the database as being provided with hosting assistance accommodation) but also prompted guests from various regions of Belgium to return to Brussels where they were expected to be provided with a more suitable accommodation.

22 - According to BRC research, 70% of the municipalities surveyed used the Housing Tool matching platform and at the same time 60% of them used a local matching system.

23 - For more information see: https://www.socialsecurity.be/citizen/fr/assistance-sociale-et-cpas/aide-au-logement.

All these challenges and obstacles led to several risk factors. Those listed below were identified in multiple municipalities:

→ Differential treatment of Ukrainians and people of other nationalities coupled with implicit abuse, maltreatment, institutional discrimination.

→ The psychological, financial, and administrative exhaustion and burnout of host families exacerbated by insufficient support from both local and federal government.

→ The loss of motivation and engagement by public authority's staff, social services' public centres' employees due to differential treatment of persons granted temporary protection and others as well as exhaustion of municipal services and social services public centres.

→ The loss of motivation and engagement, as well as the exhaustion of public authorities, municipal and social services, attributed to differential treatment between individuals granted temporary protection and others.

→ The psychological, financial, and administrative exhaustion and burnout of host families exacerbated by insufficient support from both local and federal government.

→ Durable housing solutions were unavailable, leading to an over-reliance on citizen solidarity.

→ Social housing capacity was insufficient due to disregard of the social housing ratio law in Belgian municipalities.

→ The lack of respect for anti-discrimination federal law in the rental market.[24]

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24 - Anti-discrimination legislation, encompassing federal laws, decrees, and orders, establishes "protected" criteria, making discrimination based on these criteria prohibited and punishable. These are: race, skin colour, nationality, disability, age, sexual orientation, origin and social condition, household composition among others. For more information see: https://www.unia.be/fr/criteres-de-discrimination/criteres-de-discrimination

At the very beginning Samy Mahdi launched #PlekVrij and said to people "if you want to offer yourself as a host family for Ukrainian families, contact your municipality". We had to respond to that, and we created a simple online form to register applicants, and we asked the local authorities to collect all the offers and send them to us using that form. The problem with this form was that once we received the data, people couldn't change it, so we quickly asked our IT specialists to create a software where the local authority managers could connect to our system and adapt the host family data.

— *NCCN worker, 03 May 2023*

IMPACT OF THE HOSTING ASSISTANCE INITIATIVES FOR PEOPLE DISPLACED FROM UKRAINE

Despite the multiple challenges and barriers faced, several good practices were identified in various municipalities:

• Municipal leaders quickly and proactively defined roles, and clearly communicated with the target group, explaining existing issues and anticipating upcoming ones.

• Special Points of Contact (SPOCs) were established at the local level for hosts and guests, ensuring accessibility to support if required.

• Municipal leadership supported the matching of guests and hosts, which took the needs and vulnerabilities of hosts and guests into account, centralised the matching information through the local SPOC, and reduced short circuits between federal governments.

• The value of experiences and tools developed in response to previous crises were recognised and provided a foundation for support to people displaced from Ukraine.

• Existing integration programmes, French courses, group discussions and activities between hosts and guests, and with the wider public, were all key elements enabling people to access vital information, as well as supporting broader integration.

• The provision of interpreter and translation services in key social services helped people access support more smoothly.

• Provision of psychosocial support for guests was identified as a significant good practice, ensuring new arrivals had the help they needed and reducing the burden on hosts.

• Formalising arrangements, and providing standard agreements, setting out the terms of the hosting arrangement for each party, provided reassurance, security and a degree of certainty for both hosts and guests.

• The creation of community centres, supported the necessary supervision of individual cases, provided a centralised location where people could access information, as well as enabling people to access and share information in their native languages.

• Support with rehousing by local authorities, but mostly by the voluntary sector and other stakeholders.

• Public authorities' efforts to ease access to the rental market, such as the implementation of sliding leases like "Bail Glissant" in Brussels and rent reductions, were complemented by initiatives from local authorities (such as reduced rents and shorter lease terms) and property owners, helping people access more affordable accommodation at scale. These endeavours aimed to address the specific needs of displaced people.

• Clear frameworks, delineation of roles and responsibilities, and communication and collaboration between authorities, NGOs and other service providers fostered a more coherent and coordinated response.

• Setting a clear end date for hosting agreements and the rights and responsibilities of the respective parties, provided clarity and helped establish realistic expectations for both hosts and guests.

• Collective information sessions provided rapid, uniform dissemination of essential information ensuring all parties received consistent information.

CONTRIBUTIONS FOR FUTURE REFLECTIONS

The Belgian Red Cross, while not directly involved in delivering hosting assistance, conducted an evaluation of Belgium's hosting assistance mechanism. The evaluation adopted a people-cantered and protection-oriented approach, aiming to deepen the understanding of the concept of hosting assistance, and exploring both its potentials and limitations. The overarching goal was to promote a reception system grounded in principles of protection and quality, emphasising the importance of ensuring safety and dignity for all throughout the process.

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BRC's evaluation and analysis has identified six key insights which should be prioritised to ensure hosting assistance mechanisms are fit for purpose:

1. Hosting assistance should be well framed with adequate safeguards that ensure the safety, protection and dignity of guests and hosts, at all stages (arrival, during a hosted arrangement, and departure), including vulnerability screening and identification, and medical checks, considering the specific needs of guests. Sufficient resources must be allocated to ensure effective implementation of these safeguards.

2. Assisting guests with procedural issues and accessing services, that are necessary for their integration and foster autonomy, should not rely on hosts' goodwill. Formal systems should be put in place by the competent authorities to ensure guests' rights are protected, as well as to guarantee their access to essential and tailored services.

3. The duration of hosted arrangements should be explicitly defined, with a clear exit plan for how guests will transition to longer-term accommodation. The competent authorities should provide support to guests to find durable housing solutions and support their autonomy, recognising their individuality and aspirations.

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4. The authorities should be in a continuous dialogue with non-government organisations to anticipate and actively prepare mechanisms to respond in the event of mass internal displacement or mass arrivals of displaced people. Authorities should engage key stakeholders with experience in hosting assistance programmes to ensure well planned contingencies are in place and establish potential new programmes.

5. Hosting assistance programmes are not currently integrated as an official element of Belgium's reception system. Nevertheless, if in the future it is the case, it should by no means be guided by political purposes but by humanitarian needs and it should be complementary to other solutions. Moreover, the State has the primary responsibility to ensure that all migrants enjoy assistance and protection according to international and domestic law. If hosting assistance programmes are envisaged as a potentially official part of Belgium's support to accommodating displaced people in future, a coordinated policy needs to be in place, alongside structural support at both federal and regional levels. Any changes to official policy should be based on humanitarian priorities and be informed by the experiences of CSOs and NGOs – as well as guests and hosts – previously involved in hosting arrangements.

6. In general, double standards of treatment and access to rights of people with the same needs and vulnerabilities should be avoided. In cases of mass displacement, people who have been displaced should all enjoy the same rights and be able to access the same standards of assistance. Ensuring the effective respect of basic human rights and safeguards, such as the right to material reception, even in the event of challenging crisis situations, should remain an ongoing concern. Humane and adequate reception conditions have a strong influence on how people in need of international protection regard the new countries they arrive into and their place in them. Humane and adequate reception conditions are essential. Whilst poor reception conditions can aggravate mental health issues, and exacerbate feelings of helplessness and dependence, properly resourced, safe, and welcoming reception conditions offer a first step to recovery, integration and independence.

ANNEX: PRE-2022 HOSTING ASSISTANCE INITIATIVES IN BELGIUM

Several organisations in Belgium were actively involved in hosting assistance initiatives before 2022, offering tailored responses to the diverse needs of various groups.

1. The Singa's "CALM" project, initiated in 2017,[25] offers flat sharing solutions to single refugees or beneficiaries of subsidiary protection aged 18 and above, with the goal of preventing isolation and fostering integration. The project operates under two distinct mechanisms (1) temporary hosted arrangements offering private hosting for a period of six to nine months, supported by a contribution of 250 euros monthly and a Temporary Occupancy Agreement signed by both parties; and (2) flat sharing for a minimum year, renewable, with a lease agreement signed by both parties and a contribution of around 500 euros monthly for rent and charges.

By facilitating the integration of single refugees into existing shared flats, Singa prioritises adaptation, inclusion, and autonomy. The organization provides a structured framework for successful hosting arrangements, coaching and regular monitoring through an "AdminBuddy" system for a duration of six months. This includes meetings with the Singa community (locals and newcomers), active listening and mediation (if needed or requested) and support in finding permanent accommodation.

To limit risks, Singa ensures that the profiles of both parties are similar (e.g. language spoken, similar lifestyles) and that listed criteria on lifestyle habits match. An initial introductory meeting takes place to confirm the hosted arrangement.

Since 2019, Singa has set up 150 hosted arrangements. Of these, 93% of beneficiaries reported feeling satisfied and 70% felt more integrated thanks to the experience. 80% of hosts reported a positive relationship with their guest and they would consider hosting again.

2. The Citizen Platform for Refugee Support – Belrefugees, was created in 2015 to assist all migrants regardless of their administrative status in finding accommodation in private homes. The group built and coordinated an informal network of citizens willing to help. They used social media, enabling people from the local community to connect with potential guests experiencing homelessness and needing accommodation. The objective of this initiative was to "get them off the streets", to offer migrants safe temporary accommodation, and an alternative to potentially difficult or dangerous living conditions. Eventually, more than 10,000 households became hosts.[26]

Hosting assistance schemes were often based on informal agreements that facilitated flexible and voluntary commitments, allowing termination whenever deemed desirable by both hosts and guests. This was particularly important as in 2015 such initiatives in Belgium were considered illegal practices. Belrefugees is currently trying to formalise its practices and developed a secure and legal framework for hosts through guidelines, tools and advice on safe and secure housing for both parties.[27]

3. The MENA programme is an official reception programme dedicated to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. The programme is coordinated by Mentor Jeunes in the Brussels-Capital and Walloon Regions, and by Pleegzorg Vlaanderen in Flanders. Unaccompanied and separated children arriving in Belgium can stay with foster families participating in a special hosting assistance programme. In addition to a guardian appointed to represent the child and ensure their safety and well-being, children are accommodated with trained and vetted host tutors from various family configurations, including single-parent families, young couples, single individuals, and older people, without regard to gender or sexual orientation. To prepare potential host tutors, Mentor Jeunes in the Walloon Region and Pleegzorg Vlaanderen in the Flemish Region organise a series of meetings and training sessions. After completing the selection process and passing vetting procedures, host tutors receive comprehensive support, including psychosocial, administrative, and financial assistance. Families have the flexibility to care for a child for a few days, weeks, months, or occasionally during weekends and holidays, based on their capabilities and mutually agreed commitments. There are no criteria for becoming a host family at Mentor Jeunes. Any family can apply to become a host family. There are no standard profiles. Candidate families include nuclear families, single-parent families, single men/women without children, or older people.

4. In the Flemish Region, the Temporary Housing Registration (Melding Tijdelijk Wonen) created by he organisation ORBIT in 2016 enables citizens to host refugees for a maximum period of three years. The project provides numerous guidelines and documents to support hosts and guests in this process.

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25 - For more information see: https://en.singa-belgium.org/
26 - For more information see: https://perlesdaccueil.be/
27 - For more information see: https://www.bxlrefugees.be/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Cadre-de-lhebergement-DEC2023.pdf

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FRANCE

NAVIGATING AND (RE)DEFINING HOSTING ASSISTANCE IN AN UNPRECEDENTED EMERGENCY SITUATION

This case study explores how a combination of public and private resources in France helped address the urgent housing needs of people displaced from Ukraine, with a specific focus on the multifaceted collaboration required between local authorities and non-governmental partner organisations.

Number of people displaced from Ukraine granted temporary protection	**Between 100,000 and 120,000**
Number of people displaced from Ukraine accommodated in private houses under the scope of the governmental initiative	**Between 10,000 and 15,000**
Number of people displaced from Ukraine accommodated in "off radar" private houses	**50,000** [1]
Duration of the programme	**March 2022 – ongoing**
Location of the programme	**Continental France**

1 - Data as of May 2022.

BELGIUM **1**

FRANCE **2**

HUNGARY **3**

IRELAND **4**

NETHERLANDS **5**

LUXEMBOURG **6**

ROMANIA **7**

SLOVAKIA **8**

Photo taken at gare de l'Est, in Paris © French Red Cross

INTRODUCTION

In response to the unprecedented arrival of people displaced from Ukraine, French hosting assistance initiatives engaged a diverse array of stakeholders, including government and central authorities, departments, prefectures, and non-governmental partner organisations, as well as hosts and guests.

Aligned with the government's vision and approach, social and financial support provided at the local level (prefectures) was fundamental for the implementation of hosting assistance initiatives. Prefectures were assigned the responsibility of overseeing these initiatives, coordinating services, and managing funds and grants for activities intended to support people displaced from Ukraine. To fulfil these responsibilities, local authorities selected non-governmental partner organisations that were typically directly responsible for meeting guests' needs, vetting and supporting hosts, and ensuring the reliability and safety of accommodation being offered.

The key element in the implementation of hosting assistance initiatives at the local level was cooperation between prefectures, agencies, and non-governmental partner organisations. The initial absence of a structured approach to identifying hosts was a particular obstacle, with the scale and urgency of the emergency making it difficult for local authorities to complete crucial tasks before allocating guests to hosted accommodation. The lack of pre-established screening mechanisms and procedures to identify potential risks, coupled with limited knowledge of the processes and tools developed and used by non-governmental partner organisations, further compounded this.

Despite these challenges, French hosting assistance initiatives demonstrated how coordinated efforts between stakeholders at various levels can play a crucial role in responding to crises. The relationships established between non-governmental partner organisations, local authorities, and hosts were key in establishing inclusive and safe conditions for guests, and in providing tailored assistance and services to meet their needs.
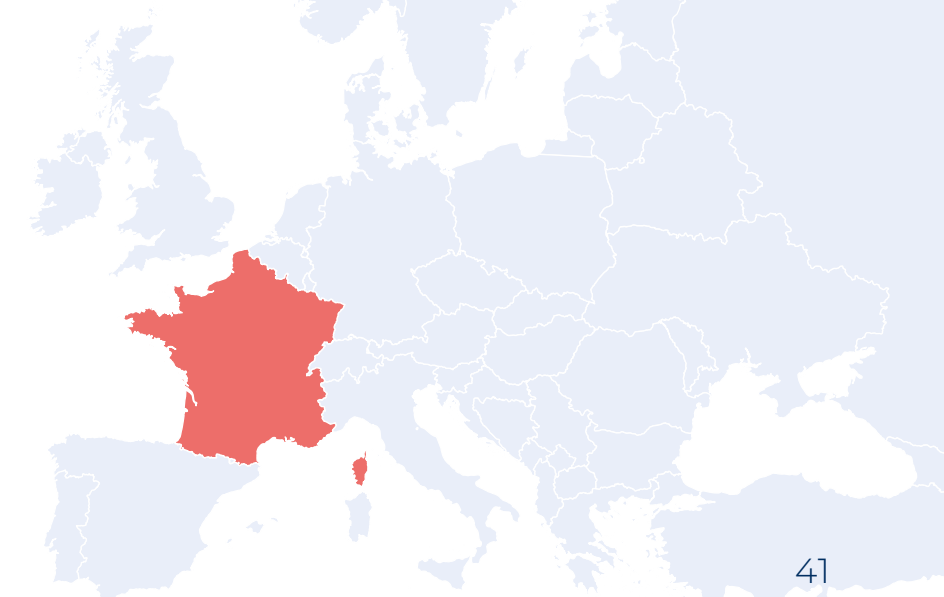
BACKGROUND

In France, the state's response to displacement from Ukraine was grounded in centrally formulated laws and policies. An instruction issued on 22 March 2022 by the central authorities outlined access to housing and accommodation[2] and introduced a special approach to accommodation of people granted temporary protection, separate to the existing reception system designated for asylum-seekers. It included three main steps:

1. Initially, emergency housing (usually for one or two nights), humanitarian assistance and social and basic medical support were provided at emergency reception centres known as "SAS". These centres, set up in hotels, sports halls, and similar premises, were strategically located near major arrival points such as train stations and airports. Simultaneously, prefectures adopted a "one-stop-shop" approach to streamline access to temporary protection and associated rights, including financial (ADA, allocation pour demandeur d'asile) and health support (PUMa + CSS – French Universal Health Coverage).

Referrals of groups and individuals to the SAS were made by public and civil society actors such as the French Red Cross (FRC). For example, as well as providing practical information, FRC volunteers deployed at major train stations would also refer new arrivals to the relevant SAS.

In cities with the highest number of arrivals such as Paris, Strasbourg, Lyon, Marseille, Montpellier and Nice, emergency reception centres took the form of platforms or "hubs'", consolidating various services in a single location. These services could include initial reception, social and health assistance, issuance of residence permits, procedures for acquiring rights, initial accommodation, and first aid, as well as guidance toward temporary or medium-term housing.

2. Next, people granted temporary protection were directed to ad-hoc transitional collective accommodation where they could stay for a few months. The French Red Cross managed collective centres in several departments where case workers provided social support, essential services and assistance.

3. In the final step, the government prioritised ensuring and encouraging access to hosting assistance (in particular to semi- or fully independent housing) referred to as a "buffer zone". This transitional stage aimed to provide individuals with a degree of independence while still offering necessary support, primarily facilitated through intermediary rental assistance and social support.

Alongside hosting assistance or housing options, social support and guidance was also provided. In each department, often a local, non-governmental partner organisation was appointed to direct displaced individuals to various services and offer specialised support and assistance. The French Red Cross was designated as the partner organisation in eight departments.
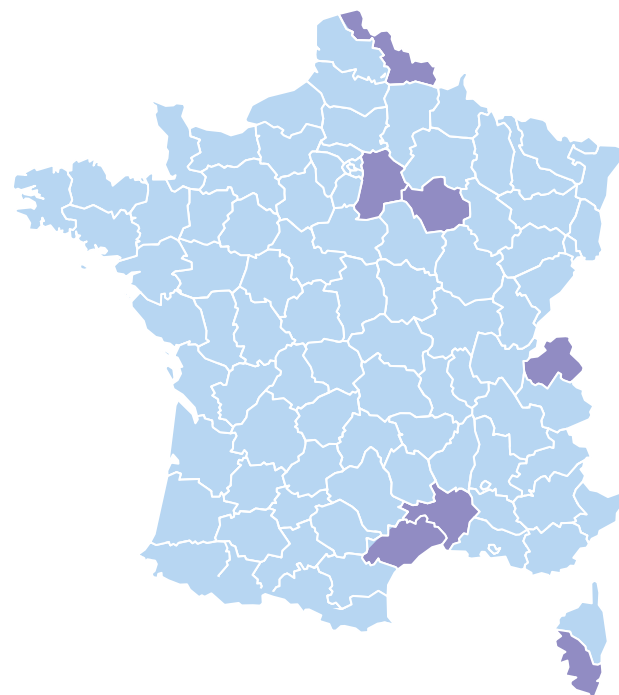
The central government's directives emphasised the importance of uninterrupted accommodation and swift access to independent housing for people displaced from Ukraine. To achieve this, local authorities were required to identify and utilise housing that private citizens had offered as being available for hosting. Anticipating the limited capacity of available accommodation in some departments, relocation to other regions was also arranged.

In February 2023, Cour des Comptes assessed that 40% of all available housing made available to people displaced from Ukraine was offered by citizens "driven by [their] unprecedented mobilisation". Most people displaced from Ukraine secured their accommodation through one of three main housing options: 27,000 had independent accommodation, 18,000 lived in collective centres, and 12,000 were accommodated through hosting assistance initiatives.[3] It should also be noted that the full scale of informal hosted arrangements is not known, making it impossible to assess the total number of hosts who opened their homes for people displaced from Ukraine.

The emergence of spontaneous networks of citizens at the local level, all seeking to support people displaced from Ukraine, created alternative ways for people to engage in hosting assistance. By facilitating humanitarian convoys and arranging bus transportation from the Ukrainian border to France, these grassroots initiatives showcased not only a proactive response, but also highlighted the capacity of ordinary citizens to mobilise and address immediate needs, offering a flexible and responsive approach to humanitarian assistance, including hosting assistance, outside traditional institutional frameworks.

In addition to providing accommodation and housing solutions, the central authorities also established a complementary support and assistance system. People granted temporary protection received a financial allowance based on household size and their specific housing situation to ensure they were able to cover the cost of essentials. For instance, the amount disbursed depended on whether the individual had to cover rent or if their accommodation was provided for free. People granted temporary protection had access to national health insurance, the labour market, social allowances, and education, including language classes offered at various locations across France. Financial support measures for hosts were also introduced.[4]

Financial allowances and social assistance were primarily provided by prefectures at the SAS with services from non-governmental organisations delivered through hubs. Additional support and services aimed at facilitating integration into French society were also provided outside these facilities. One major challenge was the need for each prefecture to understand how to provide various types of support and services to different groups. Local actors struggled with figuring out how to work efficiently and required time to adapt and operationalise the process.

2 - Instruction NOR LOGI2209326C (22 March 2022) "Accès à l'hébergement et au logement des personnes déplacées d'Ukraine bénéficiaires de la protection temporaire"

3 - See: https://www.ccomptes.fr/fr/documents/63541

4 - Instruction NOR LOGI2209326C (22 March 2022) "Accès à l'hébergement et au logement des personnes déplacées d'Ukraine bénéficiaires de la protection temporaire"

In practice, the implementation of the central authorities' strategy varied across the country. The use of, and approach to, hosting assistance varied significantly from one prefecture to another. Depending on the context – whether there were existing partnerships between local authorities and civil society, or established networks of local organisations – initiatives needed to be built from scratch or could be more easily developed based on existing arrangements.

The unprecedented scale of displacement and the number of people from Ukraine in need of housing posed significant challenges. Although the concept of hosting assistance was not new to French stakeholders and society, prefectures rarely drew from past experiences, primarily due to the emergency nature of the situation. Nonetheless, they relied on non-governmental organisations with limited experience in hosting assistance but strong expertise in social support.

Hosting assistance in France before 2022

Between 2017 and 2019 several housing assistance initiatives were launched to encourage citizens to offer accommodation to refugees and peoples granted international protection. The aims of these government-led programmes were, first, to propose alternative solutions in the context of the housing crisis and consequent growing difficulties for people under international protection to access a home and, second, to strengthen their socio-economic and cultural integration and adaptation to French society. Detailed information on various state- and citizen-led hosting assistance initiatives is presented in the annex below.

ABOUT THE HOSTING ASSISTANCE INITIATIVES

Decentralised approach and the role of non-governmental partner organisations

French central authorities' vision of hosting assistance initiatives for people displaced from Ukraine was based on a decentralised approach. Prefectures and, in particular, the respective Departmental Directorates of Employment, Labor, and Solidarity (DDETS[5]) were put at the centre of organisation, initiation, and implementation of practically all hosting-related activities, while the Ministry of Interior and the Interministerial Delegation for Accommodation and Access to Housing (DIHAL[6]) assumed responsibility for policy development and overall management.

Regarding hosting assistance, the directive from 22 March 2022, mandated the presence of a referral stakeholder, typically a non-governmental partner organisation, to facilitate information dissemination, vet housing conditions and match hosts and guests. Additionally, in all hosting or housing options, social support from a non-governmental organisation had to be offered. At the national level, the decision was made not to promote hosting assistance but instead to regulate and evaluate pledges.

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5 - Direction Départementale de l'Emploi, du Travail et des Solidarités
6 - Délégation interministérielle à l'hébergement et à l'accès au logement

CIC-Ukraine (la Cellule interministérielle de crise Ukraine) – A crisis unit for the reception of people displaced from Ukraine

Operated by the Ministry of Home Affairs, the inter-ministerial task force was established on 9 March 2022 to oversee and coordinate the reception mechanism. This crisis unit incorporated various delegations from the central administration responsible for migration issues, housing, integration, employment, and education. Its primary responsibility was to coordinate the actions of all relevant stakeholders, including ministries, local authorities, and other stakeholders. The unit centralised and shared pertinent information, monitored and forecasted developments, managed the reception mechanism, and organised the dissemination of crucial information for displaced people in multiple languages, including Ukrainian.

Four pillars guided the actions (1) accommodation and housing, (2) school enrolment, (3) healthcare and social rights, and (4) employment. In the first pillar, hosting assistance quickly emerged as the main issue. With 40,000 pledges received in a week, DIHAL recognised both the potential of hosting to provide accommodation to significant numbers of people, and the accompanying risks of abuse and trafficking. Non-governmental organisations with specialised expertise, such as JRS France, were invited to participate in this unit to share their tools, methods, and insights. According to stakeholders interviewed by the French Red Cross, this consultation was identified as a good practice in fostering open dialogue within an inclusive institutional environment.

The system that was established was designed to provide services through various channels, with hubs emerging as central focal points for hosting assistance activities, organising and managing the reception process, and responding to the diverse needs of individuals seeking assistance. The DDETS were tasked with overseeing and coordinating the entire hosting assistance initiative as well as distributing funds and grants for various activities. However, they had to collaborate with non-governmental partner organisations, such as the FRC, as these organisations typically were responsible for implementation and related support and assistance.

Partnerships between social services, non-governmental organisations and municipalities within the hub were instrumental in delivering comprehensive and effective assistance. To enhance communication and collaboration, regular monthly meetings were established, bringing together key stakeholders. These served as platforms for dialogue, decision-making, and the proactive adjustment of strategies based on evolving circumstances.

Photo taken near an Accommodation Center in Dijon.
© French Red Cross

The roles assigned to non-governmental partner organisations varied by prefecture and often went beyond mere selection and matching of pledged properties. Typically, there was a group of organisations contracted by the prefecture to carry out all planned activities and serving as focal points for social support, matching guests and hosts, vetting pledged accommodation, monitoring, and other assistance. Additionally, they might also be responsible for:

- Identifying and establishing contact with guests and hosts and facilitating communication between them.

- Contacting potential guests, checking the appropriateness of a hosted arrangement.

- Conducting needs assessments of guests to tailor support accordingly.

- Providing ongoing support to hosts and guests, including assessing the necessity for – and addressing potential conflicts through – mediation.

- Providing support for exit strategies, including facilitating housing through rental schemes, directing individuals to emergency or collective accommodation facilities, and guiding people being relocated to other regions or departments.

- Establishing contact and reaching out to property owners identified by the prefectures and inspecting pledged accommodation. Ensuring optimal living conditions in pledged accommodation.

- Supervising hosted arrangements, informing and training hosts and guests about the objectives of the initiative, legal implications, and responsibilities.

- Providing comprehensive support to guests with administrative procedures, registrations, enrolment in schools, language learning, job seeking, and accessing social assistance.

- Providing translation and interpretation services.

- Fostering dialogue and creating spaces for interaction between people displaced from Ukraine and wider French society, for example, by encouraging participation in cultural, sporting, and community activities.

- Implementing, coordinating, and establishing local connections to ensure coordination with regional and state policies and integration efforts.

Addressing the general housing needs of people displaced from Ukraine and specifically implementing hosting assistance initiatives on an unprecedented scale required the mobilisation of additional resources and the development of new tools to effectively assist and guide guests and hosts. Most non-governmental partner organisations entrusted with responsibilities for hosting assistance initiatives were relatively new to this type of activity. They were specifically selected by prefectures based on their involvement in managing collective centres and their expertise in migration and refugee law and administration. These organisations had experience in social assistance, child protection, housing rights, and were capable of intervention in emergency contexts.

These organisations were readily available to intervene and provide assistance if the need arose. Their commitment to being a constant and dependable resource impacted their capability to address the multifaceted challenges associated with hosting assistance.

Tools and challenges in matching hosts and guests

The "Pour l'Ukraine" (For Ukraine) web platform, developed and managed by the Interministerial Delegation for the Reception and Integration of Refugees (DIAIR[7]), functioned as the central hub for information and support offered to people displaced from Ukraine. It also facilitated volunteering and hosting assistance opportunities for French citizens. The platform facilitated individuals, organisations, and companies to learn more about various solidarity actions, extending beyond those solely focused on people displaced from Ukraine to encompass a broader range of individuals.

Accessible only in French and Ukrainian languages, the platform provided limited instructions for potential guests on how to find and connect with a potential host, instead focusing on providing more information relevant to potential hosts on how to pledge accommodation etc.

Potential hosts could pledge accommodation, either standalone houses and apartments or spare rooms and other types of housing, through a dedicated system called "démarches simplifiées" (simplified procedure). Alternative platforms were used to register offers made directly to local authorities. These registries were then shared with non-governmental partner organisations which typically assumed the role of matching hosts and guests and allocating pledged accommodation. In practice, prefectures exercised discretion in selecting and prioritising certain types of pledged accommodation. They also used different platforms, websites, and forms, changing and refining them to organise and structure the entire process.

Depending on the prefecture, priority was given to standalone and fully furnished houses or flats that had to be offered either for free or nominal "symbolic rent", with a minimum duration of three months. Recommendations from central authorities emphasised encouraging voluntary rent pledges, with hosts proposing a rent amount to be included in the agreement.

Pledged accommodation had to ensure privacy, independence, and proximity to public services and transportation. Each property could be checked by the non-governmental partner organisation or local authorities against specific conditions[8], however, this was not consistently followed in all prefectures. Inspection visits could be scheduled, or assessments conducted based on photos, videos, or through videoconferencing.

The next step included the host vetting process. Recommendations from central authorities advised that hosts be invited to an information meeting to learn about the requirements and conditions related to hosting. An interview could also be scheduled to assess their motivation and the accommodation conditions. Some prefectures offered follow-up intercultural training and sensitisation talks, covering good practices in hosting assistance and lessons learned. Depending on the prefecture, interested individuals were required to demonstrate a certain level of financial independence and motivation to become hosts.[9]

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7 - Délégation interministérielle à l'accueil et à l'intégration des réfugiés

8 - In the 2022 DIHAL guidelines, it was recommended to "visit the home to ensure that it is in good conditions (decency, private spaces, furnishings, etc.)". The responsibility of assessing these criteria was thus delegated to the authorities, institutions, and associations involved.

9 - In the 2022 DIHAL guidelines, a meeting with prospective hosts was recommended to "train them about commitments around private hosting, especially considering the vulnerability of the public". However, in practice, DDETS (préfectures) and associations, responsible for assessing host motivations, predominantly rejected offers that were contingent on gender, age, and race "preferences."

Hosts had the option to sign an agreement with the non-governmental partner organisation, which outlined the temporary and transitional nature of hosting assistance and specified the terms and conditions of the offered accommodation. However, in reality this document was symbolic had no legal implications or binding effect. Many hosts interviewed by the French Red Cross, refused to sign it as they could only offer accommodation for a limited period, typically a couple of weeks.

Only after a positive outcome of the assessment and vetting process, could a host be matched with potential guests. The non-governmental partner organisation could take the needs, profiles, and motivations of both parties into account to find the best match.

Experiences on an ad hock and unvetted matching process and subsequent challenges

"My husband used his network in France and found our host. We lived there for two months. During the first month, everything was going well. Then, our host became demanding of us and things didn't go well between him and my daughter, who would tell him off [...] One day, he became very aggressive about us using the oven in summer. He gave us five days to leave the house. I directly went to the French Red Cross and I got help".

Guest's perception

"In June 2022, we received a phone call at night, from a colleague of mine who worked for the Red Cross. She asked us if we could welcome a Ukrainian woman and her two daughters the very next day. We asked if we could have more time to set the house and get ready. But we had to pick them up right away. Otherwise, they would have been out on the street. So, the next day, we drove to the train station to pick them up".

Host's perception

In some cases, potential guests went through a selection process, beginning with a pre-admission interview to evaluate their motivation and suitability to be hosted. This interview typically included a detailed presentation of hosting assistance, its principles, and potential challenges that might arise during a hosted arrangement. Additional information could be provided, focusing on privacy, communal living rules, shared spaces, individual autonomy, and available support. However, due to urgent needs and overwhelming demand, very few guests actually underwent a formal "preadmission interview". When these interviews did take place, the content tended to be more explanatory than preparatory for intercultural life, with non-governmental partner organisations sharing minimal information.

Upon a positive match, both parties could agree to a hosted arrangement charter outlining basic rules and mutual relations. They could also choose to sign a formal tripartite agreement, between the host, guest, and the non-governmental partner organisation, specifying the rulesof engagement, hosted arrangement duration, potential financial contribution from the guest, and each party's obligations. Again, the document was symbolic and was not legally binding.

Throughout the duration of the hosted arrangement, dedicated social workers were available to hosts and guests. Their role was to facilitate and monitor the connection, communication, and cooperation between both parties. Regular follow-up meetings and calls were scheduled to assess the situation and offer support. Mediation was provided to address challenges and find solutions. Guests were also assisted in developing a potential exit strategy, including planning for future housing arrangements.

Non-governmental partner organisations were also tasked with formalising and supporting hosts who were hosting without official arrangements in place. Some organisations took the initiative to work with prefectures to identify and reach out to hosts and guests in this situation. Support offered included visiting and inspecting houses, offering social support, and providing advice to both parties. Often, hosts and/or guests themselves contacted these organisations seeking assistance, including to develop an exit strategy to move from their current hosted arrangement.

Roles and responsibilities of hosts and guests

Hosts played important roles that extended beyond simply providing accommodation. They often facilitated their guests' access to fundamental rights and services such as healthcare, education, and the labour market. The simple act of hosts spending time together with their guests, also actively contributed to adaptation and integration, introducing guests to French culture and customs.

> *A social worker was in charge of the initial steps (information, first appointments). Then, we [hosts] had to support them and do a lot of things. As we used to work in a hospital, we took care of the child who due to an accident was disabled. We accompanied him to all medical appointments. We took care of hisbig brother's school enrolment. We would drive them around. We helped them asking for social housing. In a nutshell, we were social workers. And we still are, including after they left our home.*
>
> — *A host on assistance provided to their guests*

The role of hosts was significant and to some of them unexpected. While many did not anticipate the extent of their responsibilities, it became evident that providing social support was an integral part of the hosting experience, driven by a sense of responsibility and a desire not to let their guests down. Several hosts who were interviewed expressed a commitment to swiftly address the needs of their guests, recognising the substantial workload on the non-governmental partner organisations. However, it was rare for hosts to receive support to prepare for the intercultural and interpersonal aspects of the hosting experience. Most hosts felt alone, with doubts and questions, such as how to balance their commitment, whether to handle administrative and social procedures for their guests, and when to return control over these processes. Concerns about the mental health and family situation of their guests added complexity to their role. These were important issues given the temporary nature of their guests' stay in France.

Starting from November 2022, hosts could apply for financial assistance offered by the state. They received 450 euros for the initial 90 days they provided accommodation to people displaced from Ukraine, followed by 5 euros for each additional day (approximately 150 euros per month). To qualify, hosts had to complete an application form and provide a certificate confirming that they were hosting a guest along with a copy of the guest's residence permit.

Only a small number of hosts interviewed by the FRC anticipated or expected such an incentive. They underlined that they did not expect financial incentives to provide accommodation to people displaced from Ukraine. Some hosts expressed discomfort with this approach and preferred to receive tax returns or other more formal recognition of their commitment by the state.

The dynamic between hosts and their guests highlighted the unanticipated challenges and complexities that arose in the absence of comprehensive preparation and guidance. Despite these challenges, the vast majority of hosts demonstrated a commendable commitment to providing support, contributing to the overall success of hosting assistance.

> *The host used to be a teacher in the neighbouring city. She made the school enrolment for our daughter much easier. She did everything she could to make sure that she would go to school in good conditions [...]The host used to be a doctor, but he is retired now, and he wants to rent his former office. He didn't want to rent it to just anyone, so he offered that we would live there.*
>
> — *A guest who together with his wife and daughter was hosted by a retired couple in northern France*

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

Coordination and authorities

- The absence of a structured approach to identifying individuals for hosting assistance presented an initial obstacle which impacted all subsequent issues and processes.

- A significant portion of hosting assistance was organised before local authorities established their own approaches, procedures and strategies, resulting in "unregulated", spontaneous hosted arrangements. These arrangements often resulted in negative outcomes, including unfavourable experiences for both hosts and guests, and insufficient exit strategies due to a lack of adequate support, including social support.

- The absence of screening mechanisms and procedures to identify risks, including potential human trafficking, during the hosting assistance process was a critical area of concern. Increased risks were evident in hosted arrangements, especially when hastily implemented under an "unseen therefore unknown" approach.

- Having only partial knowledge of processes and tools developed and used by non-governmental partner organisations, especially in vetting pledged accommodation, matching families, conducting background checks, and assessing risks and needs, prevented local authorities from effectively implementing hosting assistance.

- The emergency context of registering pledges, vetting pledged accommodation, and matching guests and hosts made it challenging (and sometimes impossible) to adhere to the recommendations of the central authorities, such as checking criminal records, providing training, and conducting in-depth interviews.

- Local authorities lacked the resources to conduct a thorough analysis of the specific needs of displaced people when accommodating them in emergency facilities or through hosting assistance.

- The government's initial objective was to establish a framework for hosting assistance rather than using it as an incentive. However, there were discrepancies observed in how this assistance was administered and utilised, indicating a departure from the original intention.

- A shortage of resources and available housing hindered the ability to provide alternative housing solutions when hosting assistance proved inadequate in certain departments and regions.

- Reliance on private hosting became the default solution to the housing needs of people displaced from Ukraine, suggesting insufficient planning by state and local authorities.

Non-governmental partner organisations

- Amid the efforts, some non-governmental partner organisations faced human resource issues, struggling to recruit and train social workers. This hindered timely assistance to families in hosted arrangements. Financial considerations, such as the inevitable high turnover resulting from the use of 6-month employment contracts, contributed to the fragility of social workers' roles.

- Communication hurdles arose among various stakeholders, including local authorities, non-governmental organisations, hosts, and guests. The establishment of clear roles proved complex, partly due to the emergency character of the situation. Clarity in roles and responsibilities, along with well-defined communication channels between non-governmental partner organisations, citizen-led initiatives, guests, hosts, local authorities, and public services, was crucial. Clearer communication and clarity in understanding between actors could, for example, have helped ensure more appropriate referrals for guests, significantly enhancing the effectiveness of the response overall.

- After the summer of 2022, there was a significant initiative from the Prime Minister to promote continued hosted arrangements. An "exception compensation" (indemnisation exceptionnelle) was introduced for citizens who had hosted one or more people displaced from Ukraine for at least three months. This initiative heavily depended on citizens, emphasising the hosted arrangement as a crucial resource in the overall housing process administration.

- A shortage of social workers led to the burden of social support falling on hosts. While some hosts were experienced in hosting assistance, others, especially those responding to the needs of individuals displaced from Ukraine, required significant support from both government and non-governmental partner organisations. This shortage created a vicious cycle where hosts perceived a heavy workload and assumed more responsibility for social support.

- When risks and challenges were identified, the provision of solutions was often inadequate. For example, guests being required to leave unsafe or unfit hosting arrangements at short notice and without specific needs being properly addressed.

- The processing of pledged accommodation typically took more than 30 days to complete, followed by an extensive vetting that impacted the matching process, the availability of hosts, and ultimately the availability of accommodation.

Hosts and guests

- Difficulties in addressing the conscious or unconscious expectations hosts had relating to people displaced from Ukraine led to uncomfortable situations and inappropriate requests. Managing cultural differences and expectations between Ukrainian guests and their hosts presented significant challenges. Coupled with language barriers, these issues posed substantial hurdles in guaranteeing appropriate and effective hosted arrangements.

- Hosts became fatigued from continuous hosting responsibilities and the demands of assisting their guests.

- Hosting assistance becoming the primary housing arrangement before proper vetting processes were in place, posed a serious risk for both guests and hosts. Vulnerable people in particular – such as single mothers and children – faced being housed in unsafe environments but also potentially faced additional challenges associated with accessing schooling and integration opportunities. This lack of vetting and appropriate safeguarding processes contributed to an environment ripe for exploitative relationships, in which people could face coercion, including sexual demands, and where guests could become trapped in abusive and unfit living situations.

- Some hosted arrangements were offered to unaccompanied children, however this required special attention to their unique needs and vulnerabilities.

- The lack of hosts' experience in accommodating families posed challenges, primarily because previous hosting assistance programmes were designed for individuals, not families. Additionally, for the majority of hosts, this was a new experience, necessitating adaptation and learning new approaches to accommodate families, which added complexity to the process.

- Hosting families had to contend with guests' trauma, depression, and occasionally more severe mental health episodes. Hosts often reported feeling unprepared for this and abandoned by public and health services.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. The lack of exit plans for guests to move from hosted arrangements to longer term accommodation eroded hosts' trust and increased the risk of guests becoming homeless. The absence of clear exit strategies created an imbalance of responsibility between authorities and hosts, fuelling negative sentiments.

2. For the effective coordination and implementation of hosting assistance, it is essential to establish clear roles, expectations, and responsibilities between all stakeholders involved.

3. Hosts often felt left to take on the role of social worker – a task that was beyond any realistic expectation for them to fulfil. Adequate recruitment, management and allocation of professional social workers, along with support (expectation management, cultural awareness sessions, psycho-social support training, dependable emergency contacts etc) for hosts is necessary to ensure appropriate support to guests and prevent hosts' burnout.

4. Implementing hosting assistance requires preparedness, training, and for a systematic plan and tools to be in place. This requires long-term planning and maintenance to ensure hosting can be quickly implemented at scale, and function effectively and safely. Such a long-term programme should be established in preparation for future emergencies.

5. Managing hosting arrangements and pledged accommodation is a full-time job. Previous hosting assistance programmes implemented in France focused on supporting small groups of displaced people. To operate at the scale required for the numbers of people displaced from Ukraine requires significant professional, dedicated resources.

6. Managing the expectations of hosts and guests and ensuring everybody has a clear shared understanding of the situation, is key.

7. The provision of hosting assistance will always be affected by the situation and attitudes prevalent in wider society. Stakeholders involved need to be sensitive to changing moods, adapt tools and processes, accordingly, constantly seek to improve, and understand and integrate lessons learned.

8. Sharing positive hosting experiences is crucial to promote more open and inclusive societies. Negative experiences not only impact on hosts and guests but can feed into perpetuating biased and negative stereotypes across society.

9. Hosted arrangements and related support should be tailored to guests' (and hosts') specific needs, supporting self-sustainability, and fostering integration into local communities.

10. Building a community around guests and their hosts is essential. Organising social events is key to achieving this. Whether these are formal discussion sessions, or purely social gatherings, such events and offer opportunities for interaction, including with local communities, enabling hosts and guests to share their experiences with their peers, get to know each other, and build stronger relationships.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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1. It is imperative that all stakeholders involved in hosting assistance implement standard procedures for vetting pledged accommodation, matching guests and hosts, and supporting families to ensure basic safeguards are in place.

2. All stakeholders implementing hosting assistance should formulate and communicate transition/exit strategies tailored to guests' needs.

3. All stakeholders involved in hosting assistance should prepare, accompany, and support families throughout the entire hosted arrangement experience, addressing needs before, during, and after this process.

4. Responsibility for assisting guests and guiding them in adapting and integrating into the host society cannot fall solely on hosts. This should primarily be the role of social workers employed by local authorities and non-governmental partner organisations.

5. A focal contact person or people responsible for social support and facilitating the overall hosting experience should be designated by local authorities and other stakeholders implementing hosting assistance.

6. Clear roles and responsibilities must be defined from the outset for all stakeholders involved in the implementation of hosting assistance. This should follow established procedures and referrals.

7. It should be acknowledged that hosting assistance is demanding for all stakeholders, including hosts and guests. The development of clear policies and procedures which learn from the experiences of supporting people displaced from Ukraine, recognise the demands of hosting assistance, and seek to address and ameliorate them as far as possible, should be made a priority to help ensure effective provision of hosting assistance in future.

ANNEX: PREVIOUS EXPERIENCES OF HOSTING ASSISTANCE PROGRAMMES IN FRANCE

Overseen by the Interministerial Delegation for Accommodation and Access to Housing (DIHAL) and involving twelve non-governmental partner organisations, including the French Red Cross , these hosting assistance initiatives focused on matching refugees with hosts, providing language courses, housing aid, and social support:

- The "Hébergement Citoyen" (Citizen accommodation) programme facilitated mutual understanding by placing refugees in private accommodation located near public services. Tailored social support and proper host-refugee relations were crucial for building positive experiences and fostering integration.

- The "Dispositifs de cohabitations solidaires avec des personnes réfugiées" (Cohabitation in solidarity with refugees), a call for proposals initiative, launched by the French central authorities through the Interministerial Delegation for the Reception and Integration of Refugees (DIAIR) in 2019, aimed to establish secure living environments for refugees. Various non-governmental organisations, including the French Red Cross, were involved in the implementation of this programme in selected prefectures and municipalities. This programme connected refugees with households or flatmates, fostering mutual understanding and integration. Eligible applicants, including NGOs and local departments, worked closely with various government bodies such as DIHAL, DIAIR, the General Directorate of Social Cohesion (DGCS), and the Ministry of Interior. Successful projects involved matching refugees with hosts, preparing both parties for living together, conducting home visits, and ensuring ongoing social support. Funding was provided for one year, covering all necessary costs.

There were also independent initiatives, implemented by groups of citizens , faith-based organisations, and non-governmental organisations independently of government programmes. For example:

- The "J'accueille" (I host) hosting assistance initiative was launched in 2015 by a non-governmental organisation called SINGA. It was created to address homelessness among refugees in France and connect those in need of housing with citizens offering spare rooms. Hosts had to offer a room for a minimum of three and up to twelve months for individuals, families, or single-parent families, including children. The project facilitated community integration, job finding, and education for guests, and provided support to hosts throughout the entire hosted arrangement.

- JRS Welcome, hospitality programme led by JRS France since 2009 in the Parisian region and later expanded all over the French territory. The programme is based on a network of volunteers willing to open their homes to single asylum seekers. People accessing the programme are hosted by families for four to six weeks before moving to another home. They are also supported by a "tutor" or "buddy", who accompanies them throughout the programme. Another organisation is in charge of providing social support.

- Merci pour l'Invit' (Thanks for the Invite) by Solinum relies on a network of citizens, primarily in south-western France. For two years, this programme focused on opening private homes to homeless women for a maximum duration of twelve months. Solinum worked with a consortium of associations, participating in the vetting and matching processes along with social support and exit strategies, focusing on employment and access to housing. Solinum created their own tools, toolboxes and trainings on private hosting. The programme closed after two years with an impact measurement, highlighting 98% of "positive exits". In the context of Ukraine, Solinum focused on providing support and tools for newly involved stakeholders in hosting assistance.

Finally, there has been a plurality of engagements in France to open private homes to people on the move, regardless of their legal status. Among these initiatives, Utopia 56 has been building a community of hosts willing to accommodate undocumented children, adults, families, asylum-seekers, and refugees for a few nights or longer-term. Utopia 56, along with other civil society actors, praised social workers being deployed to welcome people displaced from Ukraine, but underlined the double standards this represented. In July 2022, they published an inter-associative manifesto calling on the authorities to open up emergency facilities to all people, regardless of their nationality or status. In the face of variations in arrivals from Ukraine, a number of emergency accommodation places in hubs remained vacant but their access was denied to other groups.

© French Red Cross

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HUNGARY

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN HOSTING ASSISTANCE INITIATIVES

This case study presents the experience of how Hungarian citizens engaged in offering accommodation to people displaced from Ukraine.

Ukrainian refugee boy during medical examination © Hungarian Red Cross

Number of people displaced from Ukraine granted temporary protection in Hungary

34965[1]

Number of people displaced from Ukraine who held dual Hungarian and Ukrainian citizenship and had access to services and assistance available to individuals granted temporary protection

30,000 – 40,000[2]

[1] - Source: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/ukraine/population-migration
[2] - This is an estimate of the Hungarian Red Cross. The precise number cannot be determined

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Ukrainian refugee family at a Hungarian shelter © Hungarian Red Cross

INTRODUCTION

For the majority of the more than one million people displaced from Ukraine who have crossed the border into Hungary since February 2022, their time in the country has been brief, part of an onward journey to other destinations. Only 34,965 of those more than one million people have applied for and been granted temporary protection in Hungary, with a further estimated 30,000 – 40,000 people possessing dual Hungarian and Ukrainian citizenship remaining in Hungary and entitled to the same services and assistance as those granted temporary protection.

Although the authorities issued decrees on the status of people granted temporary protection, and special financial support schemes were introduced, no comprehensive policy on addressing the situation of people displaced from Ukraine was publicly announced. Aside from some coordination between central and local authorities in the provision of emergency housing, structured coordination was largely absent. Additionally, communication between different stakeholders – including state authorities, non-governmental organisations, and charities run by churches and religious communities – was limited.

People displaced from Ukraine were offered emergency housing in shelters or collective accommodation centres. No structured approach to hosting assistance was in place and the authorities were not actively engaged in developing or supporting such initiatives. Some non-governmental organisations attempted to initiate hosting projects, but these efforts were short-lived or could not be sustained. Other organisations subsequently directed their efforts towards providing rental subsidy support.

In Hungary, the majority of initiatives related to hosting assistance, were spontaneously organised by individuals and informal groups of citizens who came to train stations and border checkpoints to help. These groups either offered direct assistance or sought support from various stakeholders, such as churches or non-governmental organisations. Grassroots initiatives emerged as pivotal in facilitating accommodation and coordinating efforts at the local and community level.

Communication and matching between potential hosts and guests took place through emerging online platforms and chat groups on social media set up by individuals and communities. During the first months of the conflict, Hungarians demonstrated a high degree of solidarity and openness towards people displaced from Ukraine arriving in the country.

BACKGROUND

In Hungary, people arriving from Ukraine were provided access to short-term accommodation in emergency shelters organised by local authorities, non-governmental and church organisations. These shelters were usually based in schools, hotels, and other residential buildings. By the end of March 2022, authorities established collective accommodation centres, these took over functions previously managed by some emergency shelters. The landscape of services being provided underwent continuous change. During the summer of 2022, many emergency accommodation centres, such as those in schools, were closed while the state-financed system, introduced at the end of March 2022, facilitated the establishment of accommodation in hotels and other premises capable of hosting more than 20 people.[3]

In March 2022, the Hungarian Charity Council consisting of six organisations, including the Hungarian Red Cross (HRC), received government funding to assist people displaced from Ukraine through Help Points located at the border and railway stations across the country, as well as in other designated locations such as the BOK Stadium in Budapest. This allowed teams to operate in the regions and respond to the urgent needs of displaced people arriving from Ukraine. The Help Points offered various types of assistance such as access to emergency accommodation, health care, and food.

The BOK Stadium became a central hub for coordinating accommodation-related activities, overseeing both long-term accommodation within the nationwide shelter system and short-term arrangements.[4] In addition, the Hungarian Red Cross, International Organisation for Migration (IOM)[5], Migration Aid, Dorcas Ministries, Hungarian Interchurch Aid, and the Municipality of Budapest ran collective accommodation centres in Budapest, other cities and near the border with Ukraine.[6] Some of those services were funded by UNHCR at the emergency phase of the responses too. In Budapest, three organisations offered rental subsidies, namely the Lutheran Church Diaconia, Jesuit Refugee Service, and Caritas. While the former two had been offering such support to refugees prior to the escalation of the conflict in Ukraine.The Integration Center of Catholic Caritas was particularly called to life for helping Ukrainian refugees. It has been operating since June 2022. The organisations extended their social services and offered partial rent support for short-term housing needs, typically lasting around three months.

Additionally, schemes were developed whereby people displaced from Ukraine could receive financial assistance to cover all accommodation expenses, usually for a duration of one year.[7] The Hungarian Reformed Church Aid, in collaboration with Kalunba, initiated such a project in April 2022, providing housing for approximately 200 guests in 35 rented apartments. In June 2022, the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta also started a similar project. In the last half of 2023, three organisations, including the Hungarian Red Cross, received support from the Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (AMIF) for projects within which accommodation and other expenses for people displaced from Ukraine were covered.[8]

During the first months of displacement from Ukraine, several non-governmental organisations and church charity organisations (including Caritas and Hungarian Interchurch Aid) were involved in spontaneously connecting potential guests and hosts, however a structured approach or coordination between these stakeholders was not developed. Two non-governmental organisations did try to implement formal hosting assistance initiatives, but these were short-lived.

At district offices (járási hivatal/kerületi hivatal), individuals displaced from Ukraine, including people with dual citizenship who arrived after 24 February 2022, were eligible to receive monthly financial support.[9] A special form had to be requested at the National Directorate for Aliens Policing (Országos Idegenrendészeti Főigazgatóság – OIF) and then submitted to the district office. Once accepted, people were then required to report to these offices every month in person and register as employment-seekers. The financial assistance was paid as long as the person concerned remained unemployed or could not receive their pension. In addition, employers who hired and accommodated people displaced from Ukraine could be reimbursed by the state for accommodation-related costs.[10]

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3 - The county-level accommodation system operated under the principle that provided housing should not be concentrated in one county to avoid excessive burden. Initially, people displaced from Ukraine could stay in the shelters throughout the duration of their temporary protection status. However, some restrictions in this regard were introduced in September 2023.

4 - The latter of which were delegated to Migration Aid.

5 - Additionally, IOM implemented a joint project with Airbnb that offered accommodation in private apartments in Budapest for up to 30 days.

6 - Shortly after the conflict in Ukraine started, the HRC opened a collective accommodation for 150 people; Hunguest Hotels Ltd. provided its Budapest hotels for 360 people for one month; and Migration Aid opened the "Madridi" transit shelter. State-coordinated response began on 21 March 2022 when the BOK, focusing on longer-term collective accommodation, started operating.

7 - Those accessing the grants were required to contribute towards the cost of utility bills after the initial 3 months.

8 - Some of those organisations provided additional assistance to people displaced from Ukraine. For example, the Hungarian Red Cross offered language courses, community work, support on the labour market, and social and cash assistance.

9 - The amount of support for adults was HUF 22,800 per month, and for children, it was HUF 13,700. However, it was not enough to self-sustain in Hungary.

10- Initially, this was half of the accommodation costs, up to a maximum of HUF 60,000 per month (plus HUF 12,000 per child), for a maximum period of one year. In August 2023, the respective regulation changed and the employers could request HUF 80,000/120,000 per month (depending on the location).

HOSTING ASSISTANCE INITIATIVES

During the first months following the escalation of the armed conflict, a wide array of actors, including ordinary citizens, non-governmental organisations, churches, and local communities, mobilised to provide assistance to people who had been displaced. Citizens either provided immediate assistance on the spot or proactively contacted different stakeholders to provide accommodation. While a number of organisations attempted to facilitate communication between hosts and potential guests and led the coordination efforts at the local and community level, instances of hosting assistance were largely spontaneous.

Stakeholders on pledges of accommodation

"In the beginning, there were a lot of pledges, both from parishes and from citizens, and it is likely that only a part of the pledges was entered into the system, as pledges were often made locally and without any registration through a volunteer of the organisation. The priority was to find accommodation for the family in question, not the documentation."

Caritas Hungary

"Most of the pledges were for about a few months length, and were offered spontaneously by citizens, on the central telephone number of the organisation. We could not follow most of those hosting, and these days we have contact only with a few exceptionally long-term hosts [and guests]."

Hungarian Interchurch Aid

Several informal groups and chats on social media emerged as the primary means of communication between people displaced from Ukraine, local volunteers, and aid organisations and grassroot groups.

For example:

- The Facebook group "Segítségnyújtás Ukrajna, Kárpátalja" (Hungary Refugee Help Digital Network: Ukraine, Zakarpattia) garnered over 100,000 members within a week and received thousands of daily posts; or the ShelterUKR website, Hungary's largest peer-to-peer hosting platform, was created in less than a week by volunteers aiming to provide a peer-to-peer accommodation application tailored to the specific needs of displaced people. In the first month of displacement from Ukraine, over 10,000 individuals found hosts via grassroot organizations and through the platform which included customised filters and optimised mobile experiences, and was extensively promoted on social media. Later, the development team added features to support requests coming from local non governmental organisations.[11]

11- See: Zita Lengyel-Wang, The use of digital technologies in the Hungarian refugee response, available at: https://www.fmreview.org/ukraine/lengyelwang

They contacted me through people they knew. There were many Ukrainians from Kiev or other Ukrainian cities who wrote to me to say that I had helped a friend or a friend of a friend to find accommodation and that they needed help. Several people wrote from the train that they had nowhere to go because someone had cancelled. And most of them probably came from the FB group. The number of the FB Group's members grew to 100 thousand already in the 1st week of the crises. And they regularly tagged me there with accommodation requests.

— A Hungarian volunteer assisting people displaced from Ukraine

At least two non-governmental organisations initially planned to launch comprehensive hosting assistance initiatives, however, they either did not materialise or were transformed into rental subsidy projects.

The "Solidarity Housing Programme" run by the From Streets to Homes Association (Utcáról Lakásba Egyesület – ULE) together with Habitat for Humanity Hungary from mid-March until summer 2022, was originally planned to offer accommodation for free or below market price in Budapest and its surroundings. Guests were expected to commit to stay with their hosts for at least a few months. The initiative was advertised on social media, in particular the "Segítségnyújtás Ukrajna, Kárpátalja" Facebook group, but potential guests and hosts were also referred by other stakeholders. Eventually, the organisations worked with a group of 40 guests (families) and 40 hosts.

Most of the flats were not available any longer, but 6 flats were transferred from the solidarity housing programme to the rent subsidy programme, and one remained which continued to provide housing on a solidarity basis. (...) In the rent subsidy programme there is no set target for how long a family will be supported, the aim is of course to make them self-sufficient, but for many this is not realistic. Some of our clients would manage if they did not receive rent subsidies from tomorrow, but there would be some who would be caught in spirals of favours, which could end up at the worst end of housing poverty.

— *From Streets to Homes Association*

Some offers included "typical" hosting, where a host family takes refugees in their apartment. In the beginning, our only rule was that we didn't put a single woman in one apartment with a single man. There was no written protocol yet. The matching was mostly done by volunteers.

— *From Streets to Homes Association*

The number of offers gradually declined and by the end of spring 2022 there was almost no available accommodation being offered. As the offered housing consisted mostly of temporarily vacant apartments, often during a gap between tenants, many hosts were unable to continue to provide their houses for free. In summer 2022,[12] the initiative was transformed into a rental subsidy programme, providing around 50% of rental costs direct to landlords, with tenants required to contribute the remaining 50% themselves.[13]

The Mira! Intercultural Community of Artemisszió Foundation was another non-governmental organisation that planned to launch a hosting assistance initiative. The organisation developed a comprehensive methodology[14] for its "Flatmate project" and planned to use several practical approaches anchored in fostering positive and open relations between guests and hosts. However, due to limited resources and delays, the initiative which intended to launch in early summer 2022, ultimately never got off the ground.

12- The hosting assistance initiative was operational from March 2022 until summer 2022.

13- In the last quarter of 2023, the revised project assisted 115 families, twice as many families compared to the initial, solidarity housing phase. Moreover, additional services were planned to be provided such a social assistance, interpretation, community events, and peer mentoring.

14- It was developed based on the French SINGA J'accueille hosting assistance programme.

Hungarian Red Cross worker playing with Ukrainian children
© Hungarian Red Cross

Overall, despite an initial enthusiastic response in Hungary, there was a decline in interest among potential hosts in providing accommodation to people displaced from Ukraine. This was attributed to rising maintenance and utility expenses as well as the general cost of living.

By the end of summer, hosting started to become a burden, and hosts turned to us too for accommodating their guests. The increase in utility prices deepened this process. At the same time the demand for longer-term accommodation increased and it became more and more difficult to find rentals in Budapest.

— *Worker of an international organisation operational in Hungary*

The main objective of the "Flatmate project" initiative was to (1) offer secure housing for individuals in need for 3 to 6 months; (2) assist guests in improving their language proficiency and comprehension of the Hungarian environment; (3) expand the social networks of guests; and (4) enhance awareness among hosts about the current situation. The project was to include people displaced from Ukraine but also individuals granted international protection in Hungary and hosts who could offer a room or part of their apartment in Budapest or its vicinity, especially if well-connected with the city by public transport.

Finally, there was also a risk management component included in the "Flatmate project" to prevent and respond to emerging challenges. It was to be conducted based on (1) monitoring and follow-up calls with guests and hosts, while keeping records of these interactions to refer to them if needed; (2) developing flexible scenarios and relevant procedures and testing them; and (3) providing learning opportunities to guests and hosts and raising their awareness about the importance of communication, mutual listening, and potential cultural differences.

The concept of hosting assistance was not formally introduced, supported or promoted within Hungary. Offering private housing was often a spontaneous gesture rather than a well-thought-out decision. With time, most of potential hosts expressed greater interest in accommodating guests only in return for rental payments and other type of financial support. According to a survey conducted by the Hungarian Red Cross, by the end of 2022 two out of three hosts stopped offering accommodation to people displaced from Ukraine. Most of these hosts, whether providing short or long-term accommodation, had offered housing from around February or March 2022.

IMPACT OF THE HOSTING ASSISTANCE INITIATIVES

> *There is a big FB group on the Internet, Help Ukraine, where many people have received help. I wrote a post that we were looking for some kind of accommodation, because at that time we were living in a workers' hostel, where the room was full of bedbugs and there were hardly any cooking facilities. And that's how I got in touch with the helper and that's how I got to know ULE, and got into a solidarity housing, where we could live for a few months.*
>
> — *A guest on their experience in connecting with a host*
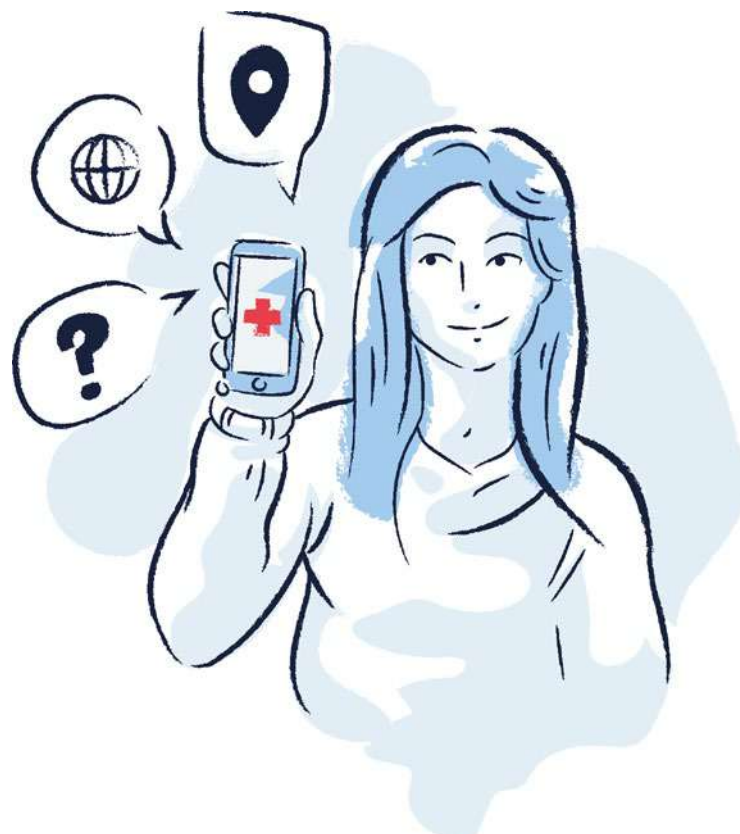
The noteworthy aspect of the response to the housing needs of people displaced from Ukraine arriving in Hungary, was the spontaneous engagement of thousands of citizens who provided short- or longer-term accommodation for free.

Moreover, the emergence of the Facebook group "Segítségnyújtás Ukrajna, Kárpátalja"[15], chat groups, webpages and platforms such as shelterukr.com played a crucial role in facilitating community-driven actions. This also showcased the impact and importance of using technology and online tools in crisis response.

Although only one initiative formalised a hosting assistance programme, which lasted about four months, numerous non-governmental and church organisations found themselves providing ad-hoc coordination between potential hosts and guests. Often this was the first time these stakeholders had been involved in supporting or coordinating hosting arrangements. Despite the lack of preparation or established frameworks, some were savvy enough to compile guidelines for hosts and implement safety measures. This was particularly significant in the beginning, when thousands of people were arriving each day, necessitating emergency services and prompt assistance, including housing.

15- The "Segítségnyújtás Ukrajna, Kárpátalja" group evolving into a professionalised platform, not only provided information and services but also surpassed UNHCR standards with its developed safety disclaimers.

An examination of the impact of housing assistance on guests, reveals that being accommodated with a host for three to four months upon arrival in Hungary yielded numerous benefits. During this period, guests not only found rest but also established connections with hosts and neighbours. They familiarised themselves with Hungarian everyday life, including aspects such as housing, the labour market, and social support. Importantly, this time allowed them to save money and search for and secure their own rented accommodation.

Stories people shared with the Hungarian Red Cross emphasise that mid-term hosting significantly contributed to their integration into Hungarian society. Although long-term hosting was less prevalent than short- or mid-term hosting, examples demonstrated that longer hosting significantly increased adaptation and integration, especially in cases where guests shared the same property with their hosts, guests gained valuable human connections, often becoming like surrogate family members.

Host and guests on building strong and caring relations

"Grandpa was very kind to us, he helped us a lot with all kinds of things. It was a relief that there was no language barrier and he treated us like relatives. In his house, there was a smaller room where Grandpa slept and a bigger one for us. There was also a bathroom and a kitchen. He offered us to use everything, all the utensils, including the kitchen and to make ourselves at home. (...) It was a very family atmosphere and we were happy to help out in any way we could with the household. We got along very well and there was not a single disagreement between us."

A family hosted by an older Hungarian man

"It was nice, the apartment was very welcoming and I felt at home. At the beginning she was like a grandmother to me, then she became like a second mother. She did a lot for me; I am very grateful to her and her family. They are fantastic people; I am very happy to have met them. It's like having a second family here, in Hungary (...) Somehow, we slowly became a family; I met her relatives, I think I know everyone in the family now. And we started looking after each other. And we really became like a family."

A young woman hosted by an older Hungarian woman

"We played a lot with the children. They were always here with us. My sons would often bring their kids to have playmates and they were wonderful to be with, they understood each other. Sometimes we had all 8 grandchildren here, plus the three of them. When the older boys played basketball, the little girl tried to play, but she could barely shoot the ball half a foot. And then my grandson brought her a stool and put her on it and showed her how. After 20 minutes the little girl was putting the ball in the basket."

A host on fostering connections between his guests and family members

*Ukrainian girl at a family programme at Hungarian Red Cross National Headquarters
Please let me know if you have any questions or doubts. © Hungarian Red Cross*

Guests on their experiences with hosted arrangements in Hungary

"A friend of ours offered us a flat as a favour, so that we could stay in the flat until the war was over (...) This was a very small flat but it was really nice to have a safe place for the family."

"We were allowed to move into my best friend's boyfriend's flat for six months. It's not a very big flat, but I like it because everything is close by, the shop, the school my daughter goes to. We have very nice neighbours, which is very important to me. We have a common language with everyone. Several of them speak English, one older man speaks Russian and German. I know everyone and everyone is very helpful."

"My apartment wasn't furnished, but there was kitchen furniture, and we each had a bed, and there was a very small wardrobe. But we didn't have any problems, we had our own bathroom, kitchen and a tiny room. And we didn't have to pay any rent. Those 3 months helped us to get the 2 months deposit and the first month's rent."

"We were pledged an apartment for 3 months by a very kind Hungarian man who lived abroad. In the meantime, we were looking for a rental, but it was very difficult... we didn't succeed. And our neighbour, who really liked us helped us in many things, like enrolling the kid to school, and finding a rental. But even she couldn't succeed. At the end we moved into the vacant apartment of her childhood friend."

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

- Hosting assistance initiatives were community-driven and operated without a defined framework. The organisations involved often lacked experience, human resources, and time. Hosts, motivated by community spirit, offered various forms of assistance to guests without professional or financial support. When the state-run collective accommodation system was developed, state underscored that people displaced from Ukraine were being cared for by the state.

- The majority of hosting assistance initiatives did not materialise and/or were transformed into rental subsidy projects funded by non-governmental and international organisations. There was a decline in interest among potential hosts to provide accommodation to people displaced from Ukraine.

- Difficulties in accessing sustainable accommodation, including huge challenges in securing rental apartments on the open market, significantly affected the integration of people displaced from Ukraine. Many families resorted to temporary accommodation as a long-term housing solution due to the unavailability of affordable alternatives. For many people it was simply not possible to access sustainable, affordable long-term housing.

- Exiting collective accommodation and rental subsidy programmes presented challenges for specific groups, including non-Hungarian speakers, households without a primary breadwinner or with limited income, and people from the Roma community.

- There was limited or no public financial assistance provided to non-governmental organisations to enable the implementation of projects supporting access to short- and long-term accommodation for people displaced from Ukraine[16]. Public financial assistance for private housing support only became available from June 2022 when AMIF started accepting proposals for projects. Non-governmental organisations could then apply to run projects in the field of housing. However, these initiatives proved unsustainable, failing to adequately support independent and dignified housing for people displaced from Ukraine.

- For any future responses, it is highly recommended to increase coordination between the governmental and non-governmental national actors to deliver a more impactful and informed response regarding accommodation options and services.

16- The lack of cooperation between national stakeholders and non-governmental organisation exacerbated the situation. For instance, Migration Aid's long-term accommodation centre in Győr was incorporated into the state-run accommodation system, providing the organisation the head quota, but this only occurred in December 2022, despite opening in March 2022.

I helped her with practically all the administration. I knew that the ecumenists [Hungarian Interchurch Aid Organisation] were very busy, and I agreed that with hosting her I also I took over the administration. It didn't feel like a terrible burden, and we went to do things together, and we went out a lot, had coffee together. We were fine, it wasn't a terrible burden for me. And I didn't want to keep calling them because poor people didn't have the capacity."

— *A host on assisting her guest*

LESSONS LEARNED

Based on research conducted by the Hungarian Red Cross, it was observed that housing-related initiatives covering all expenses for a full year or even extending for another half a year – such as the Maltese Order's housing initiative – were considered unsustainable. Individuals living in private housing during this period, had limited contact with the realities of Hungarian everyday life.

In contrast, rental subsidy initiatives, such as those by ULE, Lutheran Church Diakonia, Jesuit Refugee Mission, and later Caritas Hungary, provided partial support rather than covering the entire amount. These programmes were found to contribute to the independent housing of people displaced from Ukrainian, fostering a more sustainable and integrated living experience.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Authorities, in cooperation with relevant stakeholders, should develop a comprehensive policy and framework for addressing the situation of displaced people, comprising a structured approach to housing, including hosting assistance and financial support schemes. Such a strategy should also include access to additional services such as social assistance, interpretation, access to education, vocational training, the labour market, health care, host community engagement, mentoring, and psychological support. This strategy could also include complementary (financial) subsidy programmes for displaced people, hosts, and the hosting community, to help alleviate the potential burden and ensure access to sustainable accommodation.

2. Relevant stakeholders should consider undertaking awareness-raising and promotional activities relating to hosting assistance to engage potential Hungarian hosts and improve community participation in housing provision for displaced people.

3. Stakeholders, including state and local authorities, should develop a comprehensive strategy for displaced people to access sustainable and affordable long-term housing solutions, this includes developing exit strategies and addressing the needs of vulnerable people.

4. Stakeholders involved in assisting displaced people could provide intercultural training and awareness-raising sessions for host and displaced communities that cover effective communication, practical skills, managing expectations, developing intercultural competence, addressing unconscious biases, and more.

5. Additional research could be conducted on the role of technology and online tools in crisis response and how these tools can be applied to facilitate community-led action.

6. Additional research on access to housing, citizens' initiatives, and involvement of other stakeholders in hosting assistance could further inform the development of strategies and policies to address the situation of people displaced from Ukraine, including those with dual Hungarian and Ukrainian citizenship.

Ukrainian boy at a family programme at Hungarian Red Cross National Headquarte. © Hungarian Red Cross

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IRELAND

THE EVOLUTION OF A PRIVATE HOSTING MODEL BASED ON PARTNERSHIP AND CASEWORK

This case study examine how Ireland adapted an existing private hosting programme to address the accommodation needs of people displaced from Ukraine and the essential role that partnership played in the evolution of the response.

Marie McPartlin; Location: Sligo ; Length of time as a host: 1 year (shared home). © ProfileTree, Belfast.

Number of people displaced from Ukraine granted temporary protection	**105, 596** [1]
Number of people granted temporary protection in state-provided accommodation (including pledged/private accommodation)	**75,031**
Cumulative number of pledged accommodation hosting guests	**13,897**
Cumulative number of registered guests in pledged accommodation	**28,000**
Current number of registered guests in place	**20,902**
Duration of the Ukraine programme	**2022 - ongoing** [2]
Location of the programme	**Throughout the Republic of Ireland**

1 - All presented data as of 31 December 2023.
Source: Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

2 - As of March 2024.

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Irish Red Cross

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, the Irish Red Cross (IRC), in partnership with the Department of Justice, established a "Register of Pledges" (ROP) website enabling Irish residents to pledge accommodation, goods, and services for programme and emergency refugees entering Ireland. The Register was designed and developed by the Irish Red Cross.[3] Starting from mid-2016, the IRC began matching suitable pledged accommodation with Syrian and later, Afghan refugees, among others, under the Irish Refugee Protection Programme and via its own family reunification programme. In addition to supporting access to safe pledged accommodation and later onward movement to private rented accommodation, the Migration Programme provided direct social supports for refugees to foster their integration in Ireland.

After the escalation of the armed conflict in Ukraine and the arrival of people displaced from that country in Ireland from late February 2022, there was a resurgence of interest in the IRC Register of Pledges, with Irish residents seeking to open their homes to those fleeing the conflict. The Irish Red Cross, in partnership with the Department of Children, Equality, Diversity, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY), built on the experience of the 2015 model, scaled up call centre response, data management capacity and the human resources needed to respond to the high volume of pledges, preparing the groundwork for the later placement of people granted temporary protection status in hosted accommodation. This work developed concurrently over a period of 10 months in four stages.

During the initial stage, efforts were focused on the triage of pledges through call centres and external volunteer groups, the development of a network of volunteer onsite property assessors, and a Garda (police) vetting service in the cases of children placed in shared homes. In the second phase hosts were matched with guests, with viable and available pledges being forwarded to DCEDIY for placement, mainly by the Local Authorities with support from voluntary organisations. The third phase saw the IRC and DCEDIY develop a central reporting database (CRM) to hold the triaged pledges suitable for matching. This information was shared with other organisations briefed to match the people in need of shelter with the pledges. In the fourth and final phase, from December 2022, the IRC developed and led a Consortium of organisations engaged in matching and placing people displaced from Ukraine with hosts. From April 2023 onwards, the Consortium was recognised and funded by Government to deliver the pledge programme.

Two themes stand out in the case of hosting assistance in Ireland over those ten months: the evolution of the original 2015 Migration Programme to expedite access to private accommodation by people displaced from Ukraine, and the development of a consortium partnership model formalising engagement with national and local government authorities, and establishing partnership with key implementing actors such as the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) Peter McVerry Trust (PMVT) and Helping Irish Hosts (HIH).

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3 - With the key assistance of a volunteer IT designer.

Dmytro Kikvidze and Anastasiia Honcharova; Location: Sligo; Length of time as guests: 1 year and 1 month (vacant home) © ProfileTree, Belfast.

BACKGROUND – BUILDING THE UKRAINE CRISIS RESPONSE

Since May 2022, upon their arrival in Ireland, people displaced from Ukraine were required to register at the City West refugee administrative centre situated on the outskirts of Dublin. Here, the Department of Justice and several other Government departments collaborated to facilitate the application process for temporary protection and issuance of a Personal Public Service number (PPSN). Having a PPSN, enabled new arrivals under temporary protection to be registered into Ireland's social welfare system, granting access to various essential services, including healthcare, unemployment benefits, education and other services.

In terms of accommodation and housing, new arrivals without a prearranged accommodation plan were first placed in emergency accommodation centres. This was administered by the Ukraine Crisis Temporary Accommodation Team (UCTAT), a special unit within the International Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS) of the DCEDIY. Emergency accommodation options included hotel rooms, dormitory-style lodgings, open-floor sleeping arrangements in sports halls and, if none of these were available, tented accommodation. Allocation of emergency accommodation was based on an assessment of availability, and the profile of the displaced person, with priority placed on individuals with children or those with special medical needs.

From June 2022, guests in pledged accommodation were people who had been transferred from state accommodation centres. The Irish government tasked organisations and IRC caseworkers with visiting emergency accommodation centres to identify people looking to enter pledged accommodation. During the initial engagement the Irish Red Cross were focused on placing vulnerable cases and designing an efficient garda/ police vetting system. From this period onwards, the pledging evolved into a more systematic approach. This transition was aided by the fact that there was a verified (and thus reduced) number of pledges to work with after call centres triaged the most suitable and available accommodation offers. From December 2023 onwards, rather than IRC and other partner organisations visiting emergency accommodation centres to identify people to be hosted, people granted temporary protection could contact the various placing partners directly to seek pledged accommodation. On occasion, DCEDIY requested the placing partners to secure accommodation for specific groups as the availability of emergency accommodation reduced.

Hosting assistance quickly emerged as an efficient policy response given the high market rates and scarcity of rental accommodation in Ireland. This shortage presented a significant challenge to people granted temporary protection as they sought to transition out of emergency accommodation. In the context of such a shortage of rental accommodation, hosting assistance was particularly helpful and while designed as a short-term transitionary measure, in some cases, it developed into a medium-term accommodation support.

ABOUT THE PROGRAMME

In the first months following the escalation of the conflict, which saw the arrival of many people displaced from Ukraine into Ireland, the Irish Red Cross Register of Pledges set up in 2015 was already active and available to the public. The platform quickly became a natural vehicle for people who wished to pledge available rooms and properties. However, the sheer volume of offers of pledged accommodation – totalling 21,428[4] in the initial three months, presented several challenges in successfully matching displaced people with hosts in the first half of 2022.

Firstly, the capacity of the system was insufficient to handle the high volume of pledges, leading to the crashing of the ROP website. Originally designed in 2015, the ROP was not equipped to manage such high numbers. The website and infrastructure to manage and deliver pledges had not received government funding since 2018 and required immediate investment in systems and personnel by the IRC and the Department of Justice to enable its re-establishment as an effective matching vehicle.

Another challenge was managing the expectations of both potential hosts and the government while actively expanding the programme. Pledgers understandably sought swift responses to their generous offers and while four call centres were engaged over a four-month period, there was frustration over the months-long wait for those pledging accommodation to be matched with guests.

Two additional factors contributing to the delays were property safety assessments and police vetting of pledgers offering accommodation to families with children. Government required that all members of prospective host households over 16 years of age, who would be accommodating guests with children, had to be Garda (police) vetted. While the Garda Vetting Bureau efficiently assisted with this process, the administrative procedures required significantly slowed the process of moving guests into pledged accommodation.

Additionally, all vacant properties being made available to guests had to undergo a thorough health and safety assessment. These assessments were undertaken on a voluntary basis by members of Ireland's professional engineers and auctioneers' associations. The IRC, with support from central government, allocated specific funds to remediate structural issues in the pledged properties. They also committed to appropriately furnish the properties ahead of the placement. These delays triggered a number of individuals and groups to offer shared accommodation informally, bypassing the formal safeguards.

Policy developments that supported the programme

From March 2022, DCEDIY funded the IRC to enhance the capacity of the ROP and support guests transferring to pledged accommodation. Irish Red Cross and DCEDIY jointly administered the system and by October 2022 had built a Customer Relations Management (CRM) tool to receive and manage the triaged data from the ROP. The CRM database was a critical management and reporting tool that enabled the tracking, progressing and utilisation of each pledge. Prior to the implementation of this tool, organisations tasked with matching pledgers and guests faced challenges in verifying activated pledges as they relied on spreadsheets to track each case. The CRM system made this process far quicker and more effective.
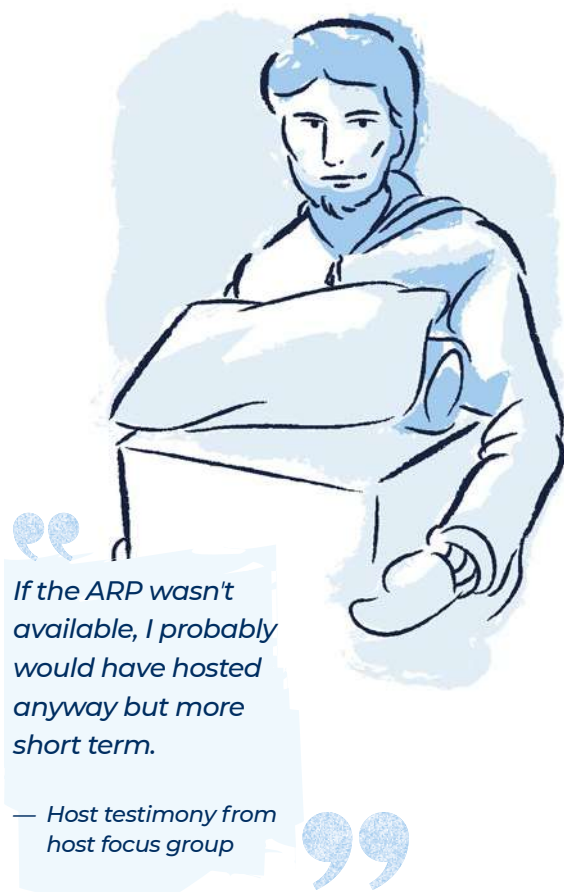

Dmytro Kikvidze and Anastasiia Honcharova; Location: Sligo; Length of time as guests: 1 year and 1 month (vacant home) - © ProfileTree, Belfast.

4 - Irish Red Cross Register of Pledges.

Establishing data protection and sharing agreements to comply with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requirements and ensure transparency for pledgers was essential for effective data sharing among various partners including government, local authorities, call centres, and consortium partners.

Another key policy intervention was a financial support package for private hosts. Maintaining pledges over the long term represented a significant and ongoing challenge. In July 2022, the government announced the introduction of the Accommodation Recognition Payment (ARP), initially set at 400 euros per month and later increased to 800 euros, as a tax-free monthly recognition payment for pledgers hosting one or more guests. It encouraged the longevity of pledges and participation by some initially uncertain hosts and some of the larger institutional pledges from religious communities. While there was, at that time, no long-term commitment to either the continued provision of the ARP or the availability of the pledged accommodation, the ARP met an important need by providing hosts with financial support to cover the additional costs of sharing their home, enabling them to host for a longer period of time. This was particularly important in the context of the high-inflation and utility costs at the time.

If the ARP wasn't available, I probably would have hosted anyway but more short term.

— *Host testimony from host focus group*

An evolving partnership model

While the offers of accommodation made in early 2022 were initially thought to have been a potential solution, it soon became evident that utilising these pledges would be a lengthy process, requiring specific data management and- human resources. This highlighted the need for increased capacity to support pledged accommodation and other emergency solutions.

Between March and June 2022, as the IRC, developed its infrastructure, additional stakeholders were brought in to support the pledge programme. Funded by government, the IRC brought in a commercial call centre Uniquely (formerly SaleSency)supported by call centres from the National Post Service, the Defence Forces, and volunteers from the IT industry to respond to and triage pledger details. IRC also developed a partnership with voluntary property assessors drawn from the professional membership of Engineers Ireland, and the Institute of Professional Auctioneers and Valuers (IPAV).

In addition, a number of organisations began working alongside the IRC to place people in pledged accommodation using data provided to DCEDIY by the IRC call centres. These organisations were initially local government authorities supported by the International Organisation for Migration and Peter McVerry Trust. The activation of the local authorities and their partners in private accommodation allocation served to bolster the capacity of the response. However, given the scale of the work involved, the lack of coordination across the large number of actors involved, and the fact that this was a new undertaking for both the local authority staff and the assisting organisations (apart from the IRC), the pace of placement was slower than anticipated, leading to continued frustration for many hosts and central government.

In November 2022, local authorities launched their own scheme "Offer a Home", specifically targeting pledgers offering vacant properties. The introduction of the Offer a Home scheme facilitated responding to pledged accommodation by local authorities, resulting in a significant increase in the volume of placements. This development coincided with the new CRM providing direct information to all placing partners and the increase in the ARP, serving as a welcome financial support for hosts.

By September 2022, IRC had built up significant human resource capacities, allowing it to successfully support more placements. The IRC also brought in and funded a new placement agency "Helping Irish Hosts" (HIH) which emerged as a host-led initiative. At this stage, the IOM and PMVT, had also become engaged in activating pledged accommodation and placing guest with hosts. Within the IRC, the expansion of the casework team enabled more people to be placed in accommodation and increased assistance to people granted temporary protection to access healthcare, education, and other services granted by the Irish state under the Temporary Protection Directive.

The arrival of new actors supporting hosting resulted in a variety of different policies and approaches to matching potential guests to pledged accommodation. Organisations and local authority staff all worked to their own policies and procedures resulting in a lack of standardisation. Some organisations, for example, facilitated introductions between hosts and guests prior to moving in while others did not. Another key difference in approach was the use of license agreements between guests and hosts and Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) between organisations facilitating the process and guests. The IRC have always used formal licence agreements to clarify arrangements between hosts and guests and an MOU to guarantee continued support to hosts from the IRC team, but this was not the case with all organisations.

Living in a rural area excludes the possibility of finding a job and finding any socially active occupation. Renting housing in the city is difficult, expensive, high electricity costs... I believe these are the reasons why most young people are leaving Ireland.

— *Guest testimony, guest survey*

Part of me wants to be back in Ukraine but part of me wants to be here. I might go back to Ukraine just to see. But another part tells me to stay and try here first.

— *Ukrainian guest, focus group*

A new year, a new coordinated approach

By January 2023, key stakeholders acknowledged that the capacity constraints of state accommodation, the data sharing challenges, the continuing high levels of arrivals of people displaced from Ukraine and the ongoing Irish housing crisis, demanded a new more coordinated approach to encourage and support pledged accommodation as a viable option for a larger portion of new arrivals.

At the request of government, in April 2023 the IRC, alongside HIH, IOM, and PMVT, established a Consortium of Partners engaged in matching and placing people displaced from Ukraine (see Annex 1 to learn more about those organisations). An MOA between the DCEDIY and IRC established IRC as the managing partner for the consortium[5]. The MOA put in place a set of new processes ensuring guests were matched with safe and suitable homes and hosts based on the model IRC designed in 2016. It was important the Consortium would not only place guest families, but also assure hosts that their homes would be respected (through licence agreements) and that staff would be available to act as mediators if any problems arose.

While Local Authorities were not part of the Consortium, their representative and coordinating body - the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) - met with IRC and the DCEDIY each month to coordinate activities and processes leading to a more streamlined approach to placements.

In November 2023, the Consortium partnered with local and national government to lead a nationwide campaign to bolster the number of pledges, with partners appealing. across social media, radio, and TV. The campaign resulted in 320[6] new pledges to the ROP. During this period, it was noticed that pledges originally committed to earlier in 2022 were coming to the end of their term, which put the onus on the Consortium to engage with these pledgers one month prior to the official end date of the pledge to discuss the possibility of an extension. At the time of writing, 82% of these pledgers had agreed to extend.

As of December 2023, given the extended and ongoing nature of the pledge programme, the Consortium adapted their activities to prioritise matching people displaced from Ukraine who were then living in emergency accommodation. The pledge programme as designed in 2015/2016 and as operated since, envisaged pledged accommodation as a precursor to guests moving into social housing or entering the private rental sector. Given these options were not available to people granted temporary protection, and the continuing conflict in Ukraine, hosting was evolving to become a more medium-term solution.

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5 - While IOM were a consortium partner, they had their own formal funding and data protection arrangements with DCEDIY.

6 - Irish Red Cross Register of Pledges

A partnership of support

Hosting assistance involved two main components: the accommodation pledged by hosts, and the allocation and distribution of people granted temporary protection as guests into those pledged properties. Core to the pledge programme were the staff providing direct assistance to displaced people, including families, seeking accommodation through the provision of casework. Each Consortium member had a team of caseworkers (or 'matchmakers' as in HIH) who liaised with both pledgers and guests to organise matches and provide signposting support to help them access education, employment, social protection, and health services after placement.

The IRC's caseworker model, built on the experiences and lessons learned from the Refugee Resettlement Programme in operation since 2015, was rapidly revised to address the high volume of pledged accommodation and those seeking housing, and the differing degree of integration supports required by people displaced from Ukraine. The overarching goal of the migration casework team in the IRC was to support people displaced from Ukraine and other refugees to find accommodation and provide them with the "soft landing" required to enable them to find alternative long-term accommodation, access the labour market, and begin their new lives. A key strength of the Consortium was that all four organisations attributes different strengths. Under the overall management of the IRC, each group was encouraged to utilise their own specific skills, experiences and expertise to deliver the agreed activities, while ensuring a standardised approach as much as possible.

> *A lot of the people who came to Ireland from Ukraine have quite a limited understanding about the state services in Ireland such as medical and education system and we support them with this.*
>
> — *IRC Caseworker*

> *We have to remember that whilst we are working with very vulnerable people, every one of our clients is an adult, either on their own or an adult at the head of a family, and it is our job to remind them of that.*
>
> — *IRC Caseworker*

> *I have a very positive experience. The officer from Irish Red Cross met me in the bus station when I came from Donegal. He called a taxi and we went together to the new house to my host family. And he supported me. Every time I asked him about something, he also supported my host. He always asked about how it's going, to see if he could help us.*
>
> — *Guest focus group participant*

IRC Caseworker Model

At the core of casework were four key steps: matching displaced people seeking accommodation with hosts, following up with ongoing services, working to support the extension of contracts beyond the initial agreed 6 months one year term, and a special category of responding to high-needs cases. Initially, each IRC caseworker was responsible for all four steps. Following ongoing revision of the caseworker model, from October 2023 the four-step model was amended into a rotating model, to address the issue of caseworker burnout and ensure effective follow-up with guests and hosts. Under the revised model, caseworkers were allocated to a casework team who were responsible for a specific casework element. The model also included the implementation of an official escalation process for complex cases and an initial needs assessment to be carried out by the caseworker lead.

CASEWORK MANAGEMENT

MATCHING

EXTENSIONS

FOLLOW UP

HIGH NEEDS

MATCHING
Match BoTP with suitable pledged accomodation. Complete all paperwork and move-in procedures.

EXTENSIONS
Follow up with ending pledges and manage extensions

HIGH NEEDS
Undertake casework for high needs clients and manage complex cases.

FOLLOW UP
Follow up with clients and pledgers both matched and unmatched

> *My caseworkers were excellent from day one.*
>
> — *Testimony from host focus group November 2023*

IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME AND CONSORTIUM

As of December 2023, the pledge process, while it required time and resources to develop into an effective programme, was providing over 25% of the accommodation being delivered to Ukrainians granted temporary protection in Ireland.

The creation of the Consortium brought many advantages to the earlier model. Firstly, it meant that activities aimed at supporting both hosts and guests conducted by IRC, NGOs and local authorities could be more efficiently streamlined and coordinated, especially the core activities of transport, casework, and on-the-ground support. It also ensured that public campaigns and awareness-raising activities about hosting assistance would be coordinated at both national and local levels.

The partnership also facilitated Consortium members to engage more formally and effectively with government. The Consortium partners worked together to develop all messaging and policy recommendations for the government. While IOM participated in all messaging and were part of the team agreeing changes to Consortium policy and operations, as an organisation with special UN status IOM was funded by, and reported directly to, government.

Working in a consortium allowed member organisations to speak with greater authority and unity in their communications with government. It also enabled more efficient engagement with local authorities, and other local and informal groups, to raise awareness about the use of vacant homes or home sharing. For example, Helping Irish Hosts held informational roadshows around the country showcasing the experiences of hosts to help recruit new hosts. In close partnership with local authority partners and affiliates in Galway County, the Irish Red Cross hosted informational clinics for people displaced from Ukraine to share information on the steps necessary to find hosted/shared accommodation.

External to the Consortium, the value of partnership could also be seen in the expanded work and improved working relationships of certain local authorities with local service providers and the wider NGO sector via the Community Response Fora. These Fora supported the coordination of services and provision of information for people granted temporary protection in the local community through civil society groups, community volunteers, and local government officials. A number of local authorities developed and built-up relationships with local community actors, working in coordination to provide wraparound integration support to people granted temporary protection who were living in pledged or state-provided accommodation.

Another notable impact of the evolving partnership model was that Consortium organisations became the leading providers of information on pledged accommodation for displaced people in Ireland – see graph below.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON HOSTING ASSISTANCE OF PEOPLE GRANTED TEMPORARY PROTECTION [7]
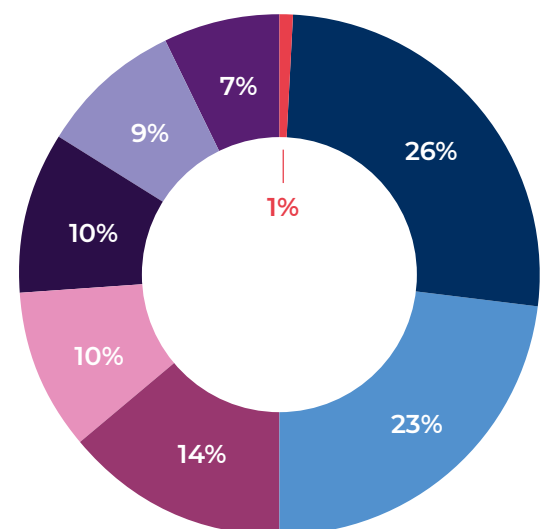
- 26% A consortium organisation
- 23% From a friend/person in my network
- 14% A non-consortium org or volunteer
- 10% The emergency accomodation where I was staying
- 10% Host who made a direct offer
- 9% Research online (Googling/searching a question)
- 7% Social media
- 1% Other

A Local Links volunteers with a displaced Ukrainian lady at the IRC pop-up support hub at Maynooth University in 2022 during Ukrainian Independence Day celebrations - © Irish Red Cross

Results from the Consortium survey issued to people that were hosting suggest that[8] of hosts were matched via a Consortium organisation, with the rest via local authorities or direct/informal contact with guests. The Consortium was seen as a key source of information and guidance: 66% of host survey respondents reported making use of Consortium resources, with caseworker check in calls, the Helping Irish Hosts Facebook group and website, and Ukrainian resources for their guests being the top three most used resources.

Nearly a third, 29%[9], of respondents reported being "self-sufficient" and not needing any of the available resources. However, when IRC organised focus groups for hosts, to share their experiences, many of those who had matched directly with their guests rather than through IRC or one of the other consortium, reported regretting not having had access to the support offered through the Consortium and its members.

The introduction of the ARP financial support package for those who pledged their spare rooms or vacant properties was viewed as fostering greater participation and more lengthy commitments to the hosting assistance programme. It also may have alleviated the need for guests to contribute towards bills and other household costs, with 81%[10] of guests who participated in the IRC's survey reporting not being asked to contribute financially by their hosts. Interestingly, of those guests who were asked to contribute financially, 60% were those who matched directly with hosts or through social media etc. This suggests that matching through a partner organisation provided a source of external accountability between hosts and guests.

The programme created a need and space for the emergence of new stakeholders, such as Helping Irish Hosts and saw well established actors like the Peter McVerry Trust expand their mandate from providing housing assistance to individuals leaving direct provision, to engaging in the provision and facilitation of pledged accommodation.

7 - Source: IRC Safe Homes survey issued to BOTPs with experience in pledged accommodation. 430 total responses (1 February 2024).

8 - The IRC Safe Homes Programme host survey

9 - Ibid.

10- The IRC Safe Homes Programme guest survey

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

- Lack of exit strategy. A key difference between the Migration programmes for the Syrian and Afghani refugee cohorts, and people from Ukraine granted temporary protection, was that for the Syrian and Afghani refugees, a clear exit strategy was identified at the beginning of their pledge process which involved the eventual move to independent private rented accommodation with a support payment (Housing Assistance Payment from the state). Applying a similar strategy to people from Ukraine granted temporary protection proved exceedingly challenging amidst the ongoing housing crisis in Ireland and the uncertain duration of the temporary protection as well as the volume of people from Ukraine in Ireland.

- Maintaining and ensuring consistent assessments of pledged housing to guarantee the safety and comfort of guests. Variations in the standard of accommodation across the Consortium and Local Authorities mean there was a lack of consistency in the standard of housing being approved in different areas. This led in some cases to the housing of people in sub-standard or unsafe accommodation in , or in other cases the potential disqualification of habitable accommodation. Approximately 312 pledged properties were not assigned to displaced people because they did not meet the criteria. Differences in budget allocations for the refurbishment of potential properties also had an impact, with the IRC's higher financial supplement contributing to more potential pledge properties being brought into use.

- Coordination with government. Despite excellent operational coordination with government, there was often a lack of communication by government with the Consortium around government policy changes, often requiring partners to rapidly pivot their approaches to suit the evolving context. These policy changes could exert a strong impact on the volume or people presenting to Consortium members in need of accommodation.

- Uncertainty. Due to the temporary nature of the protection granted to people displaced from Ukraine, longer term integration needs could not be adequately addressed and supported. Focus was on providing accommodation and sometimes these properties were in rural areas where access to services was limited.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. National and local collaborative partnerships deliver more effective results: Foster and maintain collaborative partnerships between government agencies, non-governmental organisations, local authorities, and local communities, to ensure a coordinated and effective response to displaced people' needs with national reach.

2. Build standards but respect diversity in approach. Hosting involves diverse components best handled by various partners, many of whom had varying capacities and ethos. Partnerships finding an equilibrium between standardising approaches and drawing on the different strengths of actors work most effectively.

3. Define roles and responsibilities early. Effective partnerships in hosting assistance that involve multiple-stakeholders operating at multiple levels, and cross-sectoral collaborations, must emphasise clear roles, expectations, and responsibilities among partners.

4. Keep an open line of communication between implementing partners. The holding bi-weekly meetings both in person and online is crucial to ensure that teams are all on track and deliver a reliable and effective service.

5. Consider granting a neutral humanitarian organisation ownership of the pledge data. The Irish Red Cross manages the ROP and CRM data that is shared with Consortium members and government partners.

The IRC's possession of this data has meant that a trusted, neutral humanitarian organisation has the core responsibility for citizens' personal information, with important implications for trust in the overall pledge programme. This role has also supported IRC to develop relationships with national and local government and Consortium partner organisations, all of whom regularly make use of the data.

6. Support mediation and regular communication between hosts and guests. Caseworkers play a crucial role as mediators to facilitate agreements and communication between hosts and guests, helping them to build trust in one another. However, sometimes there is a need for additional support. IRC partnered with Mediation Ireland to assist caseworkers in conflict resolution and to deliver bespoke trainings for their professional development. Regular quarterly communications to all hosts were helpful in sustaining commitment.

7. Flexibility in approach and readiness to adapt to changes in context. Effective partnership in crisis response requires partners to consistently review and adapt casework models and services provided as needs and the policy environment changes.

8. The application of a temporary financial support for those offering pledged accommodation is to be recommended. Safe Homes focus groups with hosts shows that the ARP has allowed hosts to continue the arrangement for a longer period of time.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Future preparedness.** The government should prioritise continual investment in data and case management tools. Organisations involved in hosting assistance should be supported to invest in data and case management systems that enable swift responses to emerging needs, allow easy access to data, and have the capacity to process and deliver large amounts of hosted accommodation. This support should be maintained even in quieter periods to be ready to meet emergency demand.

2. **Provision of wraparound support.** Hosting has proven successful when paired with the provision of comprehensive support to both hosts and guests such as a casework model. This support protects the interests of both parties, addresses conflict should it emerge, and works to prevent potential protection risks. However, it is a labour intensive system which requires adequate training and safeguarding supports.

3. **Provide durable solutions.** While the pledge programme has served as a highly valued source of shelter for people in Ireland who have been displaced from Ukraine, pledged accommodation should be viewed as part of a broader journey to self-sufficiency, rather than a long-term solution. The lack of clear pathways from pledged accommodation to rental accommodation as a result of the housing crisis in Ireland, serves as a bottleneck in the longer-term integration of people granted temporary protection. However, in the context of a housing crisis, with additional support from the state, hosted accommodation could evolve into a consistent form of temporary shelter for a wider set of people. This support could include ongoing assistance for hosts as well as measures facilitating the transition of pledged accommodation to become private rental in the long term..

ANNEX 1

Consortium members in addition to the Irish Red Cross were:

— International Organisation for Migration (IOM) which delivered the Transfer Project funded by DCEDIY since April 2022. The project supported the movement of people granted temporary protection in Ireland from emergency accommodation into transitional accommodation either in pledged accommodation or specifically built modular homes. IOM also facilitated moves into shared and vacant accommodation that were pledged to the IRC and Local Authorities in close coordination with the Consortium.

— Peter McVerry Trust, established in 1983 to reduce homelessness and poverty in Ireland, since late February 2022 the trust has provided social care support services to around 2,000 people displaced from Ukrainian and was a member of the Consortium working closely with IRC, DCEDIY and local authorities in efforts to support pledge accommodation activation.

— Helping Irish Hosts was a limited companyformed by a group of hosts, working together with displaced and Irish based Ukrainians, to get people into Irish homes – quickly – to give them a soft landing, while avoiding emergency accommodation and long-term hotel or government accommodation stays. They arose in direct response to the Ukraine crisis in March 2022 and created a vibrant, trusted support network for hosts and presented a strong voice in advocacy for hosts at all levels. By April 2022, the organisation had secured funding to enable them to employ two staff members to support the day-to-day operations of a rapidly growing project. A voluntary Board of Directors was established, and all matchmaking was done by volunteers until July 2022 when they began recruiting part-time staff to fulfil this role. When they joined the Consortium, they were able to put in place a team of 27 full and part-time staff members. However, volunteers continued to play a vital role in enabling them to achieve their aims. As of December 2023, the organisation had 16 volunteers providing varying levels of assistance, supported by their Volunteer & Community Engagement Lead.

ANNEX 2

Volunteerism

A network of IRC volunteers across Ireland supported caseworkers in matching pledgers with displaced people and providing a responsive ongoing service. Since February 2022, the IRC has been mobilising its long-established network of volunteers to assist with welcoming displaced people at airport and seaports, signposting to appropriate services and assisting with accommodation assessments. The volunteer network emerged as a vital element of the humanitarian response and to date, 73,000 hours of volunteer interactions have assisted people granted temporary protection since February 2022. As of December 2023, the Irish Red Cross had 115 specifically assigned and trained volunteers nationally, ready to assist with the activation of pledged accommodation. The volunteers were averaging 3 tasks per week, with most tasks composed of carrying out property viewings, assisting in moves, and providing transport support.

Challenges remained with respect to recruitment, the geographic location of volunteers, and maintaining the boundary between the work carried out by caseworkers and that of volunteers. There was a need to protect the volunteers from overextending themselves and prevent people granted temporary protection from developing dependency on their support.

The IRC would like to acknowledge the development of the original Register of Pledgers by volunteer Niamh Phelan.

Sligo town.
© ProfileTree,
Belfast.

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NETHERLANDS

WORKING IN A CONSORTIUM TO PROVIDE TAILORED ASSISTANCE TO HOSTS AND GUESTS

This case study presents the Dutch hosting assistance programme (RefugeeHomeNL), which supported guests and hosts through a series of activities tailored to their specific situations and needs.

Number of people displaced from Ukraine granted temporary protection	**100,050**	BELGIUM 1
Number of guests registered with RefugeeHomeNL	**6,872** households (around 13,000 people)	FRANCE 2
Number of host households registered with RefugeeHomeNL	**32,000** households pledged accommodation 11,000 were found suitable 5,000 passed the vetting process 2,500 were immediately available and suitable	HUNGARY 3 IRELAND 4
Number of guests within the RefugeeHomeNL programme	**3,468**	**NETHERLANDS 5**
Number of host households who hosted people displaced from Ukraine within the RefugeeHomeNL programme	**1,726**	LUXEMBOURG 6
Average duration of hosted arrangements within the RefugeeHomeNL programme	**Over seven months**	ROMANIA 7
Duration of the RefugeeHomeNL programme	**April 2022 – December 2023**	SLOVAKIA 8
Location of the RefugeeHomeNL programme	**Entire country**	

Rode Kruis

"We have a good relationship with the family. They even trust me, their home. For example, not so long time ago, they went to Italy for three weeks and I stay here alone but with their dog, I just walk with him every day."

Ihor Skorobohatko (guest for more than one year.
© Netherlands Red Cross

INTRODUCTION

Between February 2022 and December 2023, approximately 100,000 people displaced from Ukraine arrived in the Netherlands, with roughly 80% of them staying in municipal shelters, spread across the country. The remaining 20% were in hosted arrangements or housing they found themselves.

RefugeeHomeNL, a consortium comprising the Dutch Red Cross, the Salvation Army, the Dutch Council for Refugees (VluchtelingenWerk Nederland) and Takecarebnb, was created to coordinate and facilitate hosting assistance. The consortium was established at the request of and financially supported by the Ministry of Justice and Security.

BACKGROUND

Reception in the Netherlands

As a response to the arrival of people displaced from Ukraine in early 2022, the Dutch government delegated the responsibility of providing housing and services to the 'safety regions', comprising of a number of municipalities. This decision aimed to address the crisis through a separate decision-making line, supported by the Ukrainian Displaced Persons Directorate (DG Oek) and the National Reception Organisation (NOO). This decentralised approach differed significantly from the usual process of refugee reception, where the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) typically assumes responsibility.

Government focus was on municipal shelter in numerous (small) locations across the country. The accommodation of displaced people in private homes also happened without any direct government involvement.

The government developed two guidelines: one for municipal shelter and another for hosting assistance which served as a framework for municipalities for how their activities should be organised. This was not a set of regulations but rather guidelines that provided municipalities with a framework on how to deal with hosting assistance within their community.

The government was firm that cohabitation between hosting households and guests was voluntary, prohibiting compensation to hosting households to prevent participation based upon financial motives. Instead, guests living with hosting households received additional living allowances from the government to help cover costs for utilities.

Managing hosting assistance

The armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine prompted significant spontaneous offers of help from Dutch society, including offers by Dutch homeowners to host people displaced from Ukraine in their homes. In the initial weeks following the escalation of the armed conflict, hosting was largely facilitated through citizen led initiatives at local and regional levels. These initiatives often came from foundations and organisations that already had connections and ties with Ukraine, frequently organised through religious communities.

Recognising the importance of ensuring people's safety and well-being, the government worked with NGOs to establish supervision and regulation of hosting. This led to the establishment of RefugeeHomeNL.

RefugeeHomeNL was a collaboration between the Red Cross, the Dutch Council for Refugees, The Salvation Army, and Takecarebnb, initiated by and subsidised by the Ministry of Justice and Security. Its goal was to coordinate hosted arrangements, ensuring safe and sustainable temporary accommodation for people displaced from Ukraine in Dutch host households. This role included supporting guests and hosts with information and reporting to authorities on the progress and scale of hosting as a solution.

RefugeeHomeNL's approach focuse on four main areas:

registering guests and hosts

matching and introducing guests and hosts

assisting in establishing hosted arrangements

mediating the termination of hosted arrangements

An additional task of RefugeeHomeNL was to relieve pressure on municipal emergency shelters and act as an overflow when these facilities reached capacity. However, the number of places in municipal shelters consistently proved sufficient.

In total, from April 2022 to December 2023, RefugeeHomeNL accommodated 3,468 people displaced from Ukraine in 1,726 Dutch host families. This accounted for approximately 3.5% of all people displaced from Ukraine in the Netherlands and about 17% of hosted arrangements, meaning roughly 83% of hosted arrangements in the Netherlands occurred outside the scope of RefugeeHomeNL.

ABOUT THE PROGRAMME

RefugeeHomeNL's approach revolved around four steps:

→ Registration. Guests and hosts signed up online. Guests underwent an intake interview to discuss their wishesand preferences while hosts underwent a screening interview to determine their suitability and availability for participation.

→ Match & meet. Using an algorithm, guests and hosts were matched for potential compatibility. Subsequently, they engaged in a video call to get acquainted. A successful match was made if both sides found the introduction agreeable.

→ Living together. This phase was facilitated by a designated point of contact: the Household Supporter. They conducted one or more home visits and provided assistance to ensure a pleasant and secure living arrangement for both parties.

→ Departure. At the end of the hosted arrangement, RefugeeHomeNL provided information on alternative options. The Household Supporter assisted the guest and host family with the departure process.

For more detailed information about those four steps see Annex: The way of working.

The programme operated on a voluntary basis, with hosts not receiving any financial compensation for accommodating individuals from Ukraine. Accommodation, whether a room or an entire apartment or house, was provided to guests free of charge. Any type of payment from the guests to the host, other than voluntary contributions covering monthly utility costs was prohibited.

The initial period of hosted arrangements was set at three months, extendable for an additional three months upon mutual agreement. There was no set limit on the duration of hosted arrangements. Prior to each extension, an evaluation meeting was arranged between the host and the Salvation Army.

To register for the hosting assistance programme, guests had to have already been granted temporary protection and listed in the Municipal Personal Records Database (BRP). In exceptional circumstances, people intending to come to the Netherlands within the timeframe of 2-3 weeks were also eligible to register for the programme upon presenting a proof of scheduled travel such as a train ticket.

Structure of RefugeeHomeNL

The four consortium parties all had their own tasks within the project but operated with collective responsibility for RefugeeHomeNL as a whole.

Takecarebnb

Screening host households.

Screening (around 32,000) applications.

A CRM system was used to manage data from host households and guests.

An algorithm was used to identify initial pre-matches.

Rode Kruis

Overall programme management.

Conducting initial follow-up phone-calls with guests after online signup.

Analysing pre-matches to identify firm matches to move forward with.

Setting up and facilitating introductory meetings between potentially matching guests and hosts.

Managing the WhatsApp Helpline.

Leger des Heils

Supporting host households .

Supporting hosts through home visits, phone, and WhatsApp calls.

Empowering the host and assisting with potential challenges faced.

Supporting and mediating to reduce tensions and possible conflict between hosts and guests.

VluchtelingenWerk Nederland

Consulting guests.

Contacting guests to provide information and assistance. Usually done by volunteers working for the organisation.

Managing the online RefugeeHelp platform and providing information and other support options (helpdesk, webinars, consultation hours).

I thought I have kind of a moral debt to my parents who were refugees in the Second World War. They went to Belgium and I thought they had never had the chance to pay back to someone else, so I did it.

To help people and because I had previous experience hosting.

It just came up. When I heard about all the bombing going on there, and about the fact that actually the whole of Holland was preparing to host Ukrainian women, and it was about women, you know, I am an 80-year-old woman and I live alone in a big house. Well, I would not have had a man in here. I mean it was easy to have a woman.

— *Hosts sharing their motivation to invite guests to their homes*

Timeline of the programme

There were four phases in the programme between April 2022 and December 2023:

1. PILOT (APRIL TO JUNE 2022).

— RefugeeHomeNL's initial hosted arrangements commenced in April 2022. Pilot projects were conducted around central registration locations in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Eindhoven. Enrolment and intake processes primarily occurred in person as did introductions between guest and host families. During this period, screening was conducted for almost all 32,000 registered host households.

2. NATIONAL ROLLOUT (JUNE TO DECEMBER 2022).

— The programme was extended nationwide. A key difference with the pilot phase was the transition to online registration forms and introductions through video calls. The majority of hosted arrangements were facilitated during this period with 3,052 guests accommodated by 1,468 host households. By late 2022 it was decided to continue the programme into 2023, however exit criteria were agreed to assess if it should continue through 2023 and beyond. The criteria were:

a. Fewer than 700 suitable and available host families;

b. More than 20 cases in which the mutual voluntariness of hosted arrangements was at stake;

c. More than 20 municipalities that were unable to provide RefugeeHomeNL participants with a place in the Municipal Shelter;

d. Less than 50 new guest registrations per month for a period of two consecutive months.

3. DECREASING INTEREST (JANUARY TO JULY 2023).

— From the start of 2023, there was a notable decline in both guest and host applications, with existing registered hosts increasingly opting not to host guests. At the same time, it became increasingly difficult to match the housing preferences of guests (who often wanted to live in and around larger cities) with the available hosts. Due to the shortage of pledged accommodation, and the growing realisation that being in pledged arrangements could hinder families' subsequent access to semi-permanent municipal accommodation, it was decided to no longer match guests who already had places in municipal shelters.

4. COMPLETION (AUGUST TO DECEMBER 2023).

— By the summer of 2023, all exit criteria were met, indicating that RefugeeHomeNL would not continue into 2024. In collective agreement with the consortium parties and the Ministry, it was decided not to seek or grant new subsidies for 2024. As of August 2023, registration forms were closed, and new hosted arrangements were established only until 1 October 2023. Until the end of 2023, RefugeeHomeNL focused on guiding and finalising hosted arrangements, and transitioning guests and host families choosing to continue living together in 2024 over to municipality administration. In total throughout the duration of the programme, 3,468 people displaced from Ukraine found accommodation with 1,726 hosts.

> *Sometimes it really feels like the guest and host family are destined to meet. Striking similarities, the feeling that they have known each other for a very long time, the relief at a successful introduction. Mothers who look at each other and feel connected in their concerns and caring. There are many beautiful moments in which you experience humanity. Everyone needs safety, security, and understanding, whoever you are and whatever you do. Everyone can understand each other as long as you are willing to open your heart.*

— *A Red Cross worker on their motivation in engaging in the hosting assistance programme*

Guests and hosts about their experiences with matching process

Host: The matching conversation was important for us, especially the first time. We also had a conversation with the guest, and she finally did not stay with us because she wanted something else. But it was really nice that somebody from the Red Cross was present during this conversation because one did not know what to talk about and what were the most important things to discuss.

Host: I think that this process was carefully planned. I think the introductory meetings were very helpful because you could discuss various things with someone who guided the conversation. It was good to do that, to get to know each other a little bit, to see the other person, how they were and what they looked like, how they were thinking.

Guest: The conversation we had together was lovely. We just talked a bit about me and a bit about them. They showed me the house, the rooms. It was like a short conversation, maybe 10 minutes long. I think for them it was important to see and talk with me. I already knew that if someone gave me a place to stay, they were good people.

Guest: We had calls with the Red Cross and then a video call with the hosts to meet them before deciding to move in. The introductory online meeting was a good way to read body language and notice that they were really friendly and welcoming people. We did not want to disturb them, we are very simple people, so we were lucky enough to have a separate space where we could live without interfering in their routines. After the call we were contacted to see what we thought about them and if we felt comfortable choosing this host family, so our opinion was always taken into account with a lot of sensitivity.

Hosts involvement in supporting their guests

Hosts played an important role in observing their guests and alerting Salvation Army volunteers about cases of distress, stress, and trauma; however, they did not receive any formal training on those matters. The hosts were the first ones to observe their guests and if they have questions about distress, stress, loneliness, trauma they could discuss these with the household supporter. Every household supporter was trained in several topics set out on a platform that the Salvation Army developed with Takecarebenb. This platform was especially for household supporters to get more background information about Ukraine in general, cultural differences and other customs. There were also videos and information about: trauma, sexual and labour exploitation, and trafficking in human beings. There were also references to sites and organisations working in these fields. When a potential case relating to trauma or exploitation was identified, the volunteer asked the coordinator for help. And the coordinator could ask the project team for advice. Importantly, the Salvation Army itself employed many trained professionals in the field of trauma, parenting problems, addiction, human trafficking etc. The Salvation Army had a human trafficking contact in each region who could be approached in case of a question. Volunteers were reminded to attend a number of digital training courses, of which the training on exploitation and human trafficking was mandatory.

> *A bit nervous, I did my first two visits. I had decided to be honest and admit that I didn't know much yet but had a support network I could always turn to. Almost all questions and answers are available on the internet. I encourage host families to search online first if they have a question. I emphasise that I am there for the host family, that they can always call me, and that I am the contact person if something comes up. During the first home visit, I carefully observe and sense if everyone is satisfied with the situation. If I feel that it's not clicking, I address the host family, letting them know they can discuss it with me. This has only been the case with two families.*

— *A volunteer on conducting home visits*

IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME

"I want to help" Marja wanted to do something for those affected by the conflict in Ukraine and she invited people to stay in her home. - © Netherlands Red Cross

The hosting assistance programme provided temporary homes to 3,468 people displaced from Ukraine, not only providing safe accommodation, but also reducing strain on emergency and municipal shelters.

It is important to add that hosted arrangements:

- alleviated the strain on the overall reception and asylum system

- eased the pressure on the housing market

- provided advantages concerning integration and participation in society

- contributed to a sense of fulfilment and usefulness amongst hosts taking part in the programme.

It was also recognised that hospitality from hosts could help facilitate guests' integration into society, ensuring that guests not only felt at home in their accommodation, but also assisting in finding employment, language lessons and helping facilitate social and cultural engagement. The RefugeeHomeNL programme did not initially focus on integration as its focus was on temporary shelter assistance. Although RefugeeHomeNL did assist with important practical administrative activites, such as supporting guests' registration in the Municipal Personal Records Database, address registration, understanding how the healthcare system works, and obtaining insurance, it was only later in 2023 that there was an increased demand for deeper integration support. The RefugeeHomeNL communicated this change to the government and municipalities, which are ultimately responsible for these aspects.

BARRIERS, CHALLENGES, AND FINDINGS

On registration:

- About two-thirds of the registered hosts withdrew their offer between registration and screening interview. The momentum of spontaneous offers of help was not fully utilised. However, the suitable and available hosts who did continue through participated thoughtfully and were well informed, ultimately benefiting the safety and sustainability of hosted arrangements.

- RefugeeHomeNL was regarded as a "trustworthy haven" for hosts wanting a well-managed, regulated process, and guidance in providing hosted arrangements.

On the matching process:

- Hosting assistance occurs through a mutual voluntary agreement between the guest and host, with the guest's preferences being the guiding factor in RefugeeHomeNL's matching process. Following the process in this way meant that we could not always meet guests' preferences and desires. (Consider, for example, the preference to live in large cities or in the western part of the Netherlands).

- Online introductions between guests and hosts before having to make a firm decision about whether to proceed proved valuable for both parties.

On establishing hosted arrangements:

- Hosted arrangements proceeded harmoniously in almost all cases: the number of prematurely terminated arrangements and interventions was relatively low.

- Hosts felt well-supported, and the easy accessibility of the Household Supporters contributed to this success.

On ending hosted arrangements:

- Hosted arrangements were frequently extended, resulting in an average hosted period of 215 days (more than seven months). The initially temporary period of three months often turned into a semi-permanent arrangement.Limited alternative options after exiting the programme, and the growing connection with guests meant hosts were often willing to extend hosted arrangements.

- It proved challenging to explain to guests that they were responsible for determining their next steps. There was insufficient emphasis on guiding the guests' decisions, and many hosted arrangements continued as a status quo.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Hosting assistance is essentially a matter between individuals and thus primarily a shared responsibility of the guests and hosts.

2. Citizen-led initiatives have proven to be able to act faster and more decisively in organising hosting assistance schemes than the government and NGOs, however swiftly established informal arrangements can pose significant protection risks.

3. The safety and sustainability of hosting assistance schemes can be enhanced through a facilitating and supporting role played by the government and NGOs.

4. As well as helping manage protection risks, regulated processes for registration, screening, introduction, and guidance, helps generate confidence in both guests and hosts.

5. Guests may benefit from a light form of guidance while living together.

6. From the very outset, hosted arrangements must be understood by all parties as a temporary solution.

7. Guests should be encouraged and supported to use their period in hosted accommodation to find long term solutions to their housing, livelihoods, and education needs, as well as to engage in social, cultural, and leisure activities.

8. The lack of prospects for longer-term solutions is an important factor influencing both hosts and guests to allow hosted arrangements to persist for extended periods.

Jolanda Terstappen Hosted a Ukrainian Family in her home in the Netherlands for more than two years. - © Netherlands Red Cross

RECOMMENDATIONS

The authorities should:

1. develop and implement a comprehensive emergency response plan with designated contacts and support organisations to effectively address crises

2. mandate local authorities to collaborate with local stakeholders, grassroots groups and NGOs to ensure a coordinated and effective response

3. develop a structured approach to hosting assistance, emphasising short-term solutions complemented by long-term strategies

4. focus efforts on supporting existing hosting assistance initiatives, collaborating with NGOs, and strengthening community engagement, supporting and providing guidance and resources to grassroots efforts

Stakeholders implementing a hosting assistance programme should:

1. Establish a robust system for ongoing programme evaluation, ensuring prompt adjustments as needed to improve effectiveness

2. Diversify guest-host matching strategies to accommodate regional preferences and leverage available technology more effectively

3. Streamline programme initiation to avoid delays and sustain momentum during critical phases of implementation

4. Enhance collaboration with local governments, by clearly defining roles and expectations fostering better coordination between stakeholders

5. Enhance communication with hosts, providing clear guidelines and ongoing support through the hosting assistance programme

6. Emphasise a structured approach to hosting assistance and prioritise support for vulnerable groups among displaced people, tailoring assistance and directing additional resources to meeting their specific needs.

Other recommendations for all stakeholders involved in hosting assistance:

1. Strength of society. Recognise the efficacy of small-scale private initiatives as they are often able to act faster and more decisively in organising hosting assistance.

2. Organisational structure. Evaluate the structure, emphasise interests and objectives, and underline the independence and comparative advantages of stakeholders engaging in the implementation of hosting assistance programmes.

3. The role and engagement of volunteers. Pay special attention to managing and clearly delineating tasks and responsibilities for volunteers engaged in hosting assistance.

4. Customer journey. Develop a well-thought-out blueprint for the process to facilitate effective and efficient action. Establish frameworks and principles outlining responsibilities and objectives for providing support.

5. Database control and data safety. Clearly understand your legal responsibilities and define ownership of and ultimate responsibility for database management and data security in advance.

6. Personal responsibility. Provide clarity to the guest and host (family) regarding their own responsibilities in advance.

7. Linking up. Recognise the diverse landscape of public and private initiatives in the Netherlands aimed at health, participation, well-being, resilience and social encounters. Foster collaboration and coordination among these initiatives to maximise impact.

8. Cultural and Linguistic differences. Pay greater attention to the impact of language and cultural differences on the quality of living together. Provide tools and guidance for bridging these differences to promote harmonious cohabitation.

9. Perspective. Emphasise that hosting assistance is temporary in nature and ensure that there is a clear pathway to longer term solutions for shelter and housing in advance.

10. Responding to legislation and policy. Remain agile and adaptable to changes in legislation and policy, particularly those stemming from the EU directives that are implemented at the national level. Anticipate and translate these changes into effective communication and operational processes.

ANNEX: WAY OF WORKING

1. Registration, screening, and intake

Host households	GUESTS
Registration at RefugeeHomeNL (www.rhnl.nl) was obligatory for hosts.Hosts were required to indicate their home's location and respond to several questions about spoken languages, household composition, employment situation, interests, and availability. Completing dedicated questionnaires took approximately ten minutes.	Registration at RefugeeHomeNL (www.rhnl.nl) was obligatory for guests. Guests were asked to provide contact details and where they were in the Netherlands or abroad. Also, they were asked to provide Information about family composition, pets, smoking, spoken languages, English proficiency, and preferred stay location.
Following registration, host households underwent a screening process and were requested to provide a certificate of conduct (Verklaring Omtrent het Gedrag – VOG) for one adult member of the household. Then they were notified by TakecareBNB if they were deemed suitable to become a host.	For guests registered on the platform a follow-up 30-minute intake call was scheduled. The purpose of this call was to reiterate the aims of the programme, provide preliminary information about potential locations of available accommodation, and manage expectations.

2. Matching and introduction

The matching process of guests and hosts consisted of three main steps:

— Pre-matching: an algorithm made a series of pre-matches with host households deemed most suitable for a particular guest.

— Matching: possible matches were contacted to confirm availability and for consent to have an introductory meeting.

— Meeting: an online introduction was set up via video call between potential guests and hosts, after which parties could decide whether to proceed or not.

Introductory meetings lasted about 45 minutes with the primary purpose of providing hosts and guests the opportunity to get to know each other, discuss any outstanding issues, and agree on the next steps. If required, an interpreter could be present during the call to facilitate communication.

Issues discussed between hosts and guests during an initial get-to-know call:

• daily routines

• house rules

• common interests, hobbies and activities that could be done jointly

• utilities and a potential division of costs for utilities

• host's assistance with the registration, opening bank account, identifying general practitioner in the area

• keys to the apartment or house

• duration of stay

• move-in date

Hosts were advised to make practical arrangements with their guests regarding daily routines, shared activities, cleaning responsibilities, cooking and eating practicalities, access to keys, and permission to enter other areas within the house. No formal agreements between parties were made or signed on behalf of RefugeeHomeNL. The introductory meetings allowed guests and hosts to make the final decision. In the event of a positive response, the case was transferred from the Red Cross to the regional office of the Salvation Army.

3. Supporting hosted arrangements

At the start of a hosted arrangement, both guests and hosts received digital information packs containing tips and advice for a pleasant stay, along with instructions for handling difficult or uncomfortable situations.

Household Supporters (volunteers from the Salvation Army) visited guests and hosts in the first week of each hosted arrangement, addressing questions, providing information and advice, and assisting in formulating rules and agreements for a safe and pleasant stay.

Throughout the stay, Household Supporters served as the primary contact for the host household regarding any questions, concerns, or doubts, usually through phone calls or WhatsApp. If desired and agreed upon with the host family, Household Supporters could make one or more follow-up visits. In some cases, Household Supporters created WhatsApp groups for communication and discussion between different host households.

The Dutch Council of Refugees initiated telephone contact with guests at the beginning of the hosted arrangement period to inform them about rights and obligations, and to highlight contact options (online, office hours at the location). Guests were also able to access information and advice regarding their stay in the Netherlands through the platform www.RefugeeHelp.nl.

Guests received ad-hoc newsletters and emails regarding current developments. Hosts receive bi-weekly newsletters with news, tips and advice.

4. Ending hosted arrangements

Hosted arrangements through RefugeeHomeNL were initially agreed upon for a period of three months. Towards the end of the second month, the Household Supporter contacted both the host and the guest regarding options at the end of hosted arrangement. These options included:

• extending the hosted arrangement for another 3-month period

• placement in Municipal Accommodation

• reassignment within RefugeeHomeNL to a new host family (possible only until September 2023)

• placement in private accommodation (outside RefugeeHomeNL)

• finding independent housing (rent, short-stay, shared housing, purchase

• returning to Ukraine.

Household Supporters offered the necessary support for concluding the cohabitation period. In all cases, guests were primarily responsible for taking action, with the option to seek advice and information from VluchtelingenWerk Nederland and www.RefugeeHelp.nl

At the end of the programme, it was agreed between guests and hosts in 297 cases that hosted arrangements would continue into 2024.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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LUXEMBOURG

CREATING A SUPPORTIVE, RESPECTFUL, AND SAFE ENVIRONMENT FOR GUESTS AND HOSTS

Through a systematic and careful approach to matching hosts and guests, and regularly monitoring hosted arrangements, Luxembourg Red Cross – together with Caritas and Luxembourg government authorities – helped ensure safe and dignified accommodation was provided to guests, while hosts were able to access the support they needed, fostering solidarity, social cohesion, and mutual understanding.

*Joachim KALMBAYI,
Case worker
at LISKO
(Luxembourg
Centre for
Integration and
Social Cohesion)
© Luxembourg
Red Cross*

Number of people displaced from Ukraine granted temporary protection[1]	**5,858** people [2] 1,132 men, 2,856 women, 1,870 children	
Number of registered guests *Luxembourg Red Cross only*	**978**	
Number of effective matches *Luxembourg Red Cross only*	**89**	
Number of guests (individuals) *Luxembourg Red Cross only*	**183** 18 men, 93 women, 72 children	
Number of hosts	**89 through formal matching 86 spontaneous matches** [3]	
Average duration of hosted arrangement	**Minimum 3 months**	
Duration of the programme	**March to Dec. 2022**	
Location of the programme	**Entire country**	

BELGIUM 1

FRANCE 2

HUNGARY 3

IRELAND 4

NETHERLANDS 5

LUXEMBOURG 6

ROMANIA 7

SLOVAKIA 8

1 - Source: Le ministère des affaires étrangères et européennes, e-mail to the Luxembourg Red Cross dated 15 November 2023.

2 - As of October 2023, 4,188 persons granted temporary protection stayed in Luxembourg, including 927 men, 2,067 women, and 1,194 children.

3 - Matches done outside of the scope of the programme, usually directly agreed between hosts and guests.

croix-rouge luxembourgeoise ✚

Mënschen hëllefen

At the Strassen shelter, Tom, an educator, meets a young man of 17 who has arrived in Luxembourg after fleeing the conflict in Ukraine.
© Luxembourg Red Cross

INTRODUCTION

In response to the arrival of people displaced from Ukraine, Luxembourg implemented a comprehensive hosting assistance programme to provide arriving individuals with safe and dignified accommodation. This initiative, established by the authorities in coordination with Caritas Luxembourg and the Luxembourg Red Cross (LRC), aimed to create a supportive environment for both guests and hosts.

Housing options for people displaced from Ukraine included temporary accommodation centres, rented apartments [4], and hosted arrangements, alongside which, people granted temporary protection received essential support such as food and clothing, as well as access to the labour market, medical services, and education.

The hosting assistance programme went beyond providing accommodation and became a catalyst for inclusion in and acceptance by local communities. Through a careful matching process, the programme facilitated meaningful connections between hosts and guests and provided practical support during the hosted arrangement. Regular home visits and social services provided by the LRC, ensured that both parties were equipped with the necessary resources to share their living space, emphasising the importance of human connection, mutual respect, understanding, and communication.

4 - In a separate initiative, the Luxembourg Red Cross coordinated efforts to provide accommodation for people displaced from Ukraine in vacant apartments and houses offered by citizens. A total of 162 private accommodations were pledged, providing housing for 556 individuals (90 men, 223 women, and 243 children). The LRC vetted apartments, assisted potential landlords, and facilitated communication between landlords and their potential tenants. All pledged accommodation was offered free of charge, and the LRC covered the costs of utilities, minor adjustments and repairs, purchasing furniture, and other necessary equipment.

> " *This journey has proven to be enriching. From my perspective, employing a humane approach and bringing together the strengths of individuals we work with has proven to be an effective strategy in fostering motivation and confidence for people to actively engage with their new communities. We have welcomed families from a diverse range of backgrounds, and I hope our work is helping them overcome their challenges, even in the face of the traumas they have experienced.* "
>
> — *Luxembourg Red Cross social worker*

BACKGROUND

Upon arrival in Luxembourg, people displaced from Ukraine were welcomed at a reception point for people applying for international protection, or people already under temporary protection. Here basic information was provided about their stay in the country, as well as access to emergency assistance. The Luxembourg Red Cross also conducted initial needs assessments with people at reception points, identifying housing needs and providing appropriate guidance and support.

A special registration procedure for people seeking temporary protection status was introduced. Initially, an application for temporary protection, available in English, French, Ukrainian, and Russian, had to be completed and submitted at the Directorate of Immigration of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (MFEA)[5]. Immediately after, the accommodation was provided. However, since August 2023, people displaced from Ukraine were required to inform the Ministry of their intention to submit a request for temporary protection. Upon receiving a response from the MFEA, or being provided with their temporary protection certificate, individuals become eligible for housing support. Exceptions[6] were introduced to address the needs of vulnerable individuals.

Housing options included temporary accommodation centres[7] operated by the National Reception Office (Office National de l'Accueil – ONA) with accompanying social support from Caritas Luxembourg or LRC. Alternatively, people displaced from Ukraine could opt to stay in a hosted arrangement, stay with family or friends, or rent their own apartment or house.

A Ukraine One-Stop Shop ("Ukraine Guichet Unique Enregistrement") was set up in Luxembourg City where all initial administrative procedures related to temporary protection could be completed in a single appointment. ONA, along with other stakeholders such as the Immigration Directorate, Luxembourg Police, Health Ministry, Ministry of National Education, Children and Youth, and Luxembourg Post, were present to provide various types of assistance and services. Once granted temporary protection, people displaced from Ukraine became eligible to access in-kind or cash support for food, clothing, and school materials, as well as to health services, education and the labour market.

In March 2022, just after the conflict in Ukraine started, there was a surge in private initiatives to bring people displaced from Ukraine to Luxembourg. Authorities required the registration of these initiatives with the MFEA, emphasising the necessity of guaranteed short- and long-term housing arrangements. This measure aimed to prevent overburdening the reception system and ensure access to safe and dignified housing arrangements, ideally within hosted arrangements.

The Luxembourg Red Cross and Caritas Luxembourg, supported by the authorities[8], initiated the development of a hosting assistance programme. An online form was created enabling individuals to express their readiness to welcome people displaced from Ukraine into their homes. In the first days of March 2022, 400 pledges were received from people expressing their willingness to help.

As the first people displaced from Ukraine arrived in Luxembourg, the Prime Minister Xavier Bettel shared a tweet on 3 March 2022, expressing pride in the tremendous solidarity and willingness to help shown by the people of Luxembourg[9]. The media also actively reported on the country's humanitarian efforts, including the hosting assistance programme and other activities implemented by the Luxembourg Red Cross, Caritas Luxembourg, the government, and other stakeholders.

We were genuinely surprised and deeply moved by the overwhelmingly positive response from the people of Luxembourg who eagerly opened their homes to those who have lost everything. It was a testament to their compassionate spirit especially taking into account that this act of providing hosting assistance was entirely voluntary, driven solely by a profound sense of solidarity and empathy.

— *Staff member of the Luxembourg Red Cross on welcoming persons displaced from Ukraine*
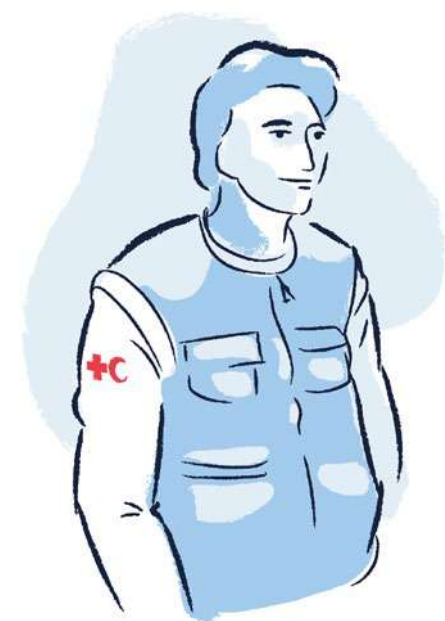
ABOUT THE PROGRAMME

The hosting assistance programme in Luxembourg aimed to foster solidarity with people displaced from Ukraine, ensuring safe and dignified housing and a supportive environment for all parties involved - including local hosts offering accommodation. Interested individuals seeking information about the initiative could contact a hotline operated by Caritas Luxembourg and the Luxembourg Red Cross.

The primary objective of the programme was to promote solidarity and enable those willing to open their homes to be matched with individuals fleeing the conflict in Ukraine. The programme's specific objectives were to:

→ Information provided by potential hosts.

→ Analyse to identify the most suitable potential guests for the accommodation being offered.

→ Ensure the provision of safe and dignified accommodation for people granted temporary protection.

→ Establish an online registration platform for guests seeking accommodation with a host family.

→ Facilitate connections between guests registered on the platform and hosts based on objective criteria.

→ Mitigate the risk of human trafficking and uphold the dignity of both guests and host families through regular home visits.

→ Establish a dedicated contact and information point for people granted temporary protection.

→ Provide appropriate support to enable hosts to properly welcome their guests.

→ Deliver social support services for guests living with host families.

The needs of potential guests, including their housing requirements, were assessed from the initial stages, starting with the submission of the application for temporary protection and during appointments at the one-stop shop. The national reception officer[10] inquired about willingness to participate in the hosting assistance programme and be accommodated with a local host. During appointments with the National Reception Office, individuals granted temporary protection were also asked about their preferred housing arrangement. If people showed interest in being hosted, a link or a QR code for the online application form was provided where they could register to be matched with a host. Applications were equally divided between the Luxembourg Red Cross and Caritas, but guests also had the option to choose which of them would conduct the assessment.

A dedicated online registration platform was developed for hosts and guests to register for the programme, ensuring a fair and objective matching process. The form, available in four languages (French, English, Ukrainian, and Russian) collected essential data to ensure compatibility. On one hand, applicants seeking accommodation provided personal data, information about family composition including family members who may join them in future, pets, smoking habits, and specific needs related to mobility and health. Follow up was then carried out by the assessing organisation to confirm the information provided and eligibility for the scheme, as well as to obtain additional details of any special needs. Social workers discussed the objectives and expectations of the programme with potential guests, informed them about their rights and duties, and sensitised them about possible risks, such as exploitation, abuse and human trafficking, and how they could seek help if they felt in danger.

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5 - Since November 2023 the Ministry of Home Affairs.

6 - Such as families with children, persons with special needs, medical conditions, disabilities and elderly people.

7 - Certificates issued by the Immigration Department Directorate facilitated entry into the primary reception shelter. Individuals could present one of the following: (1) a valid temporary protection certificate (blue paper); (2) an official summons for an appointment with the Immigration Department to submit an application for protection (with an email serving as proof).

8 - In particular, the Ministry of Family, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and ONA. Funds were also available through the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund.

9 - See: https://x.com/Xavier_Bettel/status/1499455921226932226?s=20

10- Additionally, the LRC's social workers working in the collective accommodation centres assisting in filling out all the required forms and documents also collated information on individuals' needs.

On the other hand, potential hosts were required to complete an online form, providing details about themselves and the available property, including number of beds, rooms[11] , bathrooms[12] ; fire, gas and electrical installations, safety measures, cleaning arrangements, availability of kitchen appliances, storage space, and furniture.

The host screening process required individuals or families to be willing to provide housing for a minimum of three months. Some Individuals with specific circumstances, such as single men offering to host women, those offering to accommodate unaccompanied children, and those offering accommodation only in exchange for services were automatically excluded.

11- They had to have at least nine square meters.
12- Maximum six persons per bathroom was allowed.

Migrants and Refugees Service staff at the initial reception centre Tony Rollman in Luxembourg-Kirchberg - © Luxembourg Red Cross

All uploaded applications underwent daily screening, and the selection of potential candidates then followed several steps:

1. HOST INTERVIEW

— Hosts and members of their household were invited for an interview with a social worker. The objective of these interviews was to raise awareness and provide support to families considering hosting people displaced from Ukraine. It gave an opportunity for hosts and their families to discuss their motivations and understand their expectations, including those related to potential guests, emphasising awareness of the traumas associated with war and displacement, along with Ukrainian culture and history. Additionally, topics including the potential impact of hosting on their family dynamics and daily lives, questions of intimacy, and the current family system and considerations regarding potential impacts on married life and children were also covered. The interviews also explored the availability of spaces that would not be accessible to guests, provided a detailed description of the accommodation offered (including bedrooms and bathrooms), and shared essential information to prevent tensions in shared living spaces. Practical aspects, such as the expected length of stay and the possibility of engaging in unpaid voluntary work were also discussed to enable families to make informed decisions about welcoming potential guests.

— These comprehensive interviews aimed to address various factors to ensure a thoughtful and well-informed decision-making process for hosts and their families. They also aimed to:

a. Emphasise that hosting assistance was an act of solidarity, and no financial subsidies were available to cover any associated and increased costs of living.

b. Verify if hosts were financially stable to cover extra costs associated with the guest's stay.

c. Conduct a criminal record check for hosts.

d. Explain and seek consent to cooperate fully with representatives of Caritas Luxembourg, the Luxembourg Red Cross and National Reception Centre and Ministry of Family Affairs and Integration.

e. Confirm that hosting assistance would last for at least three months, with preferences for pledges extending beyond this period.

f. Gather information about house rules, including uninterrupted access to kitchen and bathroom, acceptability of children and pets, and emphasise the need for hosts to prepare the accommodation adequately to welcome guests.

In addition, all hosts were provided with a guide prepared by Caritas Luxembourg and the Luxembourg Red Cross.

Host's Guidebook

The guide for hosts developed by the Luxembourg Red Cross and Caritas Luxembourg, encompassed comprehensive information about the hosting assistance programme, including requirements for hosts to qualify for hosting assistance, procedures related to selection and vetting, and a list of frequently asked questions such as: the duration of hosting arrangements, managing host-guest relations, financial assistance, managing potential conflicts, type of assistance that hosts might provide, and the rights and obligations of people granted temporary protection in Luxembourg.

Hosts could also consult a check list to be followed before the arrival guests and during the hosting period. The main issues highlighted concerned host's attitudes and acceptable behaviours, as well as the wellbeing of hosts and their families, stressful situations, psychological safety and post-traumatic stress disorder. Hosts were encouraged to bear in mind and pay attention to their own wellbeing and the wellbeing for their loved ones both during and after the hosting period.

2. ASSESSMENT

Following the interview, a comprehensive report was prepared to assess the potential host's abilities to take part in the programme.

3. REFLECTION PERIOD

Individuals and families who met the assessment criteria were given a 24-hour reflection period, during which they could finalise their decision on whether to proceed and eventually accept potential guests.

4. HOME VISIT

Those who expressed readiness to proceed underwent a home visit conducted by a dedicated social worker from LRC. During these visits, the social worker completed an assessment checklist and took photographs of the pledged accommodation.

5. FINAL APPROVAL

The final approval of hosts was based on information combined from the application, interview and the home visit, which was carefully evaluated and vetted against established criteria. This process ensured that only hosts and host families meeting the required standards progressed forward, contributing to the overall success and effectiveness of the programme.

It was important to us to do something. We wanted to help people in need. We would also have liked to have been helped if we had been in their situation.

I could do it because I have a small house with a garden, I live alone, and I also have a holiday flat.

In 1940, my parents and grandparents fled to France and were taken care of by friends there. Some people took them in, I think it was right to help refugees now too.

— Different hosts on their motivation to welcome people displaced from Ukraine

The housing service of the Luxembourg Red Cross offers individual emergency accommodation to people who need it most. In Rosport, the owner agreed to accommodate two families fleeing the conflict in Ukraine, who had been granted temporary protection, for several months. - © Luxembourg Red Cross

I asked my host to be as much open and sincere as possible. There were no specific rules, she did not disturb me, I did not disturb her. Living with a host is a great experience to have. It is very important to be proactive in contribution to the household you live in.

When we arrived, the family was already waiting for us. The fridge was stocked, towels, toothbrushes, toilet paper, water etc. were all prepared to welcome us. They were super welcoming from the start, with smiles on their faces."

— *Guests on their experiences with living together with their hosts*

With information gathered and consent secured from both parties, case workers then initiated the matching process. The first stage focussed on simply matching hosts' accommodation capacity with the guests' number of people to be accommodated, whilst also considering the key exclusion criteria. After this, preference criteria were used to identify the best match between hosts and guests. This process, encompassing analysis of both compatibility and preferences, aimed to ensure harmonious and suitable pairings.

A successful match led to an approach to potential guests first, presenting them with the proposed option and seeking their consent to proceed with contacting the host. If the potential guest did not agree, another match was conducted, unless the guests' criteria could not be met, or they withdrew their application.

If both parties were ready to proceed with the hosting, a move in was arranged. There was no prior meeting between hosts and guests and no specific formal contract or agreement was signed between the parties, other than a standard document on the conditions of the arrangement prepared by the National Reception Office. This document assisted in monitoring the guests' whereabouts and fulfilled the reporting requirements for both the Luxembourg Red Cross and Caritas Luxembourg.

Luxembourg Red Cross [13] and Caritas Luxembourg both offered assistance and support to guests and hosts throughout the hosting period ensuring assistance was accessible at any time to answer questions or address challenges faced by either party. The Luxembourg Red Cross, for example, established a dedicated social services office [14] offering social assistance services and addressing any questions or concerns. To ensure the well-being of both guests and hosts, regular interviews and home visits were conducted every six to eight weeks. These visits reinforced a protective environment that safeguarded against the threats of trafficking, abuse, and exploitation.

13- To provide a comprehensive and tailored assistance throughout the entire hosted arrangement period the Luxemburg Red Cross involved several units and departments such as: migrants and refugees service, foster care, housing service, facility management service, daycare centre and relay house, and social clothing bank, but also communication department and transversal crisis centre.

14- All persons displaced from Ukraine, including those in hosted arrangements and living in collective centres operated by the Luxembourg Red Cross had access to services provided by the organisation.

I have learned to adapt my approaches and to switch from individual to group social work when disseminating information, raising awareness or managing a crisis. I managed to better understand their state of vulnerability; raise my empathy for their situation and their losses (human or material); and offer individual social support tailored to the individual's predispositions, vulnerability, and expectations.

— *Luxembourg Red Cross social worker*

The authorities and partner organisations implemented proactive measures throughout to prevent and address trafficking in human beings, abuse and exploitation including:

• screening against and identifying any potential signs of risks or vulnerabilities during initial interviews;

• providing information at different stages of the host arrangements, starting from the initial interviews and raising awareness on people's rights, including those related to work conditions and workers' rights;

• maintaining ongoing communication and support as well as regular contact with guests through visits, calls, and emails.

Hosts, integral to the support network, were actively engaged and could approach the Luxembourg Red Cross and Caritas Luxembourg at any time to address any concerns. Additionally, hosts played an important role in supporting their guests with everyday tasks, including registrations and administrative procedures, as well as physically guiding people around their new localities and explaining practical skills, like how to use public transport or access other useful services.

Discussion groups with host families were organised since March 2022, providing a monthly opportunity to gather at the Luxembourg Red Cross premises and discuss any potential challenges and difficulties. These discussions were of huge importance, serving not only as a platform to share information and advice and learn about each other's challenges, but also as a collaborative space for discussing and exchanging solutions for the future.

If a hosted arrangement became untenable, and if the LRC has no other options, the ONA ensures the return of the guest to collective accommodation centres.

When two families live together in the same household, conflicts may inevitably arise. Hence, the introduction of mediation becomes important to finding resolutions, fostering harmonious living, well-being and a sense of safety. From the host side, conflicts might arise when their guests fail to follow communal living rules or are not yet well integrated. Cultural differences pose a challenge, as what may be clear to some may not be so for others. This is why, a crucial aspect involves delving into an understanding of Luxembourg's system and effectively integrating into society. The language barrier further steams these challenges and becomes particularly complex in urgent or spontaneous communications when no interpreter is readily accessible for translation. Additionally, a significant number of individuals experience profound frustration as they do not want to return to reception facilities, often feeling cornered without available alternatives. This leaves them bewildered, grappling with the realisation that their difficulties emanate from their special status."

— *Staff member of the Luxembourg Red Cross on welcoming persons displaced from Ukraine*

LUkraine asbl, a non-government organisation based in Luxembourg, supported the Ukrainian community as they arrived in the country working alongside Caritas Luxembourg and the Luxembourg Red Cross to assist people displaced from Ukraine to find accommodation, learn the language, and providing administrative support, psychological counselling, and organising activities for children.

LUkraine asbl developed a list of practical tips for hosts. They concerned two stages of each hosted arrangement:

Upon arrival:

→ Understand your guests' feelings. They might feel uneasy or anxious due to their recent experiences, be understanding and patient. It is not about you.

→ Offer comfort. A cup of tea or a snack can be comforting. Understand if they prefer to eat alone. It is a stressful time for them.

→ Put yourself in their shoes. Imagine their situation; empathy goes a long way.

→ Provide basics. Simple gestures, smiles, rest, and internet access are essential. They may need time to contact loved ones.

→ Show them around, their room, bathroom, toilet, and kitchen.

→ Respect their space. Some guests may need alone time. Be mindful of their need for calm down and rest.

→ Be sensitive. Some guests might be embarrassed about needing help. Be discreet and respectful.

→ Use communication tools. Use translation applications and gestures to overcome language barriers. Patience is key.

Living together:

→ Treat everyone equally. Avoid discrimination; treat your guests as you would any other house guest, and with respect.

→ Respect personalities. Value each other's personalities without judgment for successful communal living.

→ Share food. Offer snacks and meals; sharing food fosters connection.

→ Offer without imposing. Be respectful and mindful of everyone's boundaries; avoid expectations or obligations.

→ Do not exchange money, jobs, goods, or services for any favours. It is illegal.

→ Discuss cultural differences openly and respectfully; find common ground.

→ Engage in activities. Suggest activities to keep everyone engaged and distracted from worries. Assist with formalities, if needed.

→ Address conflicts. Encourage dialogue to resolve conflicts calmly and seek translation if language is a barrier.

→ Take care of your own well-being to prevent fatigue; prioritise your needs and well-being.

→ Stay alert, kind and understanding. This is a stressful and difficult situation for your guests. Be aware that they may be distressed, anxious and emotionally challenged.

IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME

The impact of the hosting assistance programme went beyond the physical aspects of accommodation, evolving into a potent catalyst for inclusion within the host society. By facilitating participation in social activities and providing orientation, the programme created a nurturing environment and facilitated intercultural sharing and understanding.

The programme brought about profound changes in people's living conditions, particularly supporting children's well-being and access to education. The organisations involved dedicated time and effort to ease people's adjustment to their new environment and conditions. This comprehensive approach ensured that the positive effects of the programme endured, helped mitigate potential challenges, and fostered a lasting, positive experience.

Sometimes we talked in the kitchen. I work and have not had much time. She asked how my day went. She communicates more with my daughter and helps her a lot in learning French. She always takes our dog for a walk. It seems to me that we have become a family, because she always worries about us very much.

I think [that staying with a host helps to] integrate and learn the language.

I still live in this host family, there are no problems, we can always discuss all issues together and help each other.

If we have any questions, we can ask. They [host family] also help with integration. For example, they recommended that I apply for a job. I am still employed there.

— *Guests' testimonies*
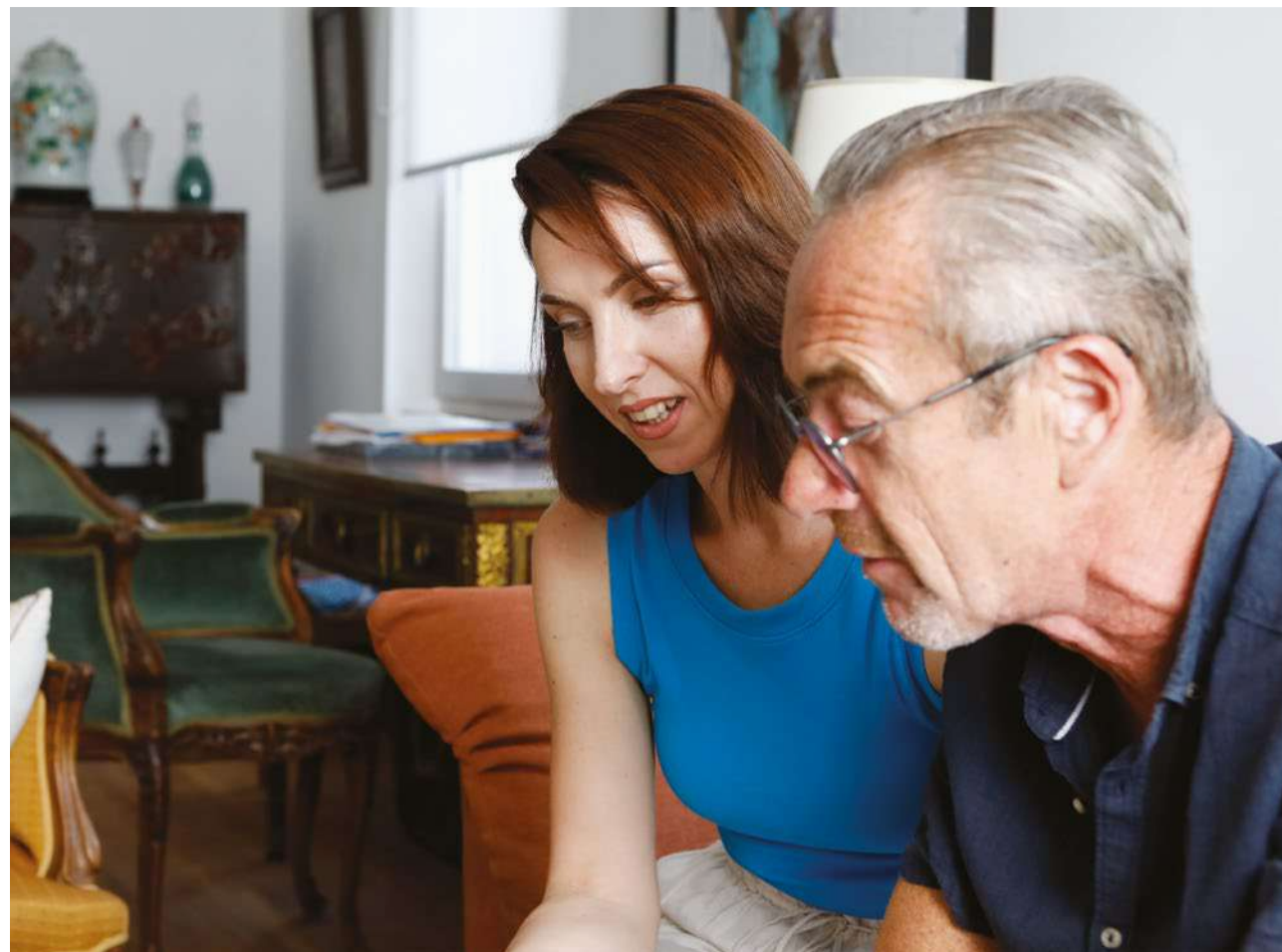
Ukrainian refugees in a host family in Luxembourg - © Luxembourg Red Cross

LESSONS LEARNED

1. **Strategic exit planning.** Consider sustainability and how people will transition out of hosted arrangement from the very beginning to prevent the return to collective accomodation centres and maintain trust.Thoughtful planning for the conclusion of hosted arrangements is crucial for the well-being of everybody involved.

2. **Collaborative partnerships.** Foster partnerships with diverse stakeholders, ensuring clear roles, regular communication, and government support for successful hosting assistance.

3. **Informed decision-making.** Understand the existing accommodation landscape before implementing new hosting schemes, support existing initiatives to avoid duplication and ensure optimal use of resources.

4. **Thoughtful financial incentives.** Design financial incentives for hosts carefully to ensure sustainability, prevent market distortion, and address potential negative consequences.

5. **Mediation and trust building.** Organisations play a crucial role in mediating agreements, building trust with hosts and guests, and addressing concerns about potential damages.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Authorities must seek permanent plans and solutions to the housing needs of people who have been displaced that go beyond an "emergency solution". These include:

   a. offering similar accommodation for people granted temporary protection, asylum-seekers, and refugees;

   b. creating a centralised platform for citizen involvement in supporting people granted temporary protection and refugees;

   c. developing and encouraging host-family online networks for shared support;

   d. fostering municipalities' commitment to supporting refugees;

   e. offering concise training for hosts on inter-cultural understanding, migration and trauma, protection status, asylum procedures, and other relevant topics.

2. Creating a welcoming environment requires collaborative efforts, education, and ongoing communication among all stakeholders involved in the hosting assistance programme.

3. A group of host families has put together their ideas to approach the government with a number of proposals such as a financial compensation, tax breaks, direct subsidies and civil liability insurance. These incentives could promote hosting assistance schemes, alleviating pressure on emergency and temporary accommodation facilities and fostering the mental health, autonomy, and societal inclusion of guests. Offering allowances or contributing to rental costs can enhance the stability of host-guest relationships, reinforce their binding nature, and encourage long-term commitments from hosts.

4. An official platform for citizen engagement to facilitate citizen involvement in welcoming people who have been displaced (and refugees) should be created. Such a platform should streamline participation in existing projects, increasing accessibility and encouraging more citizens to take part and contribute.

5. Standard formal agreements between hosts and their guests could be developed and adapted to each hosted arrangement. Such agreements could outline key aspects, including the length of stay, living conditions, and rules for hosted arrangement. Clarity in expectations promotes positive hosting experiences.

6. Understand that hosting cannot be forever. For the wellbeing of all parties, authorities in collaboration with other stakeholders need to propose viable solutions and sustainable accommodation options once hosting ends, to ensure a smooth transition to longer-term accommodation and avoid regression to emergency accommodation options.

7. A framework for host networking and the etablishment of discussion groups to enhance communication and mutual support among hosts and their families, should be developed to promote a stronger sense of community, shared experiences, and learning.

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ROMANIA

FINANCIAL INCENTIVES FOR HOSTS, CASH SUPPORT TO GUESTS, AND A HOSTING ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME

This case study primarily focuses on the lessons learned from the introduction of financial schemes for guests and hosts, and the impact these have had on hosting assistance in Romania.

Number of people displaced from Ukraine granted temporary protection	**152,342** [1]
Duration of the 50/20 financial scheme (for hosts)	**February 2022 – April 2023**
Duration of the revised financial scheme (for guests)	**May 2023 – June 2024**
Location of the 50/20 and revised financial schemes	**Entire country**

1 - As of 1 February 2024, source: UNHCR, Romania: Overview of Temporary Protection Directive, https://data.unhcr.org/en/dataviz/234?sv=54&geo=10782

BELGIUM 1

FRANCE 2

HUNGARY 3

IRELAND 4

NETHERLANDS 5

LUXEMBOURG 6

ROMANIA 7

SLOVAKIA 8

The Romanian Red Cross Multicultural in Bucharest, a space where displaced people from Ukraine can receive a large range of support. © Romanian Red Cross

INTRODUCTION

In response to the arrival of people displaced from Ukraine, several measures were introduced in Romania to address their urgent needs. The government, in collaboration with international and non-governmental organisations, established information points for immediate assistance, provided essential services, and created Regional Integration Centres to facilitate integration. Additionally, a legislative and policy framework, including the "National Plan of Measures for the Protection and Inclusion of Displaced Persons from Ukraine", was instituted, outlining both short and long-term strategies of support to people.

The authorities provided places in collective accommodation centres and extended support for hosting assistance. Platforms such as "Un Acoperiș" and "Dopomoha" (Ajutor pentru ucrainenii din Romania) played an important role in facilitating collaboration between hosts and displaced people, offering a structured framework for accommodation pledges.

The introduction of the "50/20" financial scheme, designed to incentivise homeowners accommodating people displaced from Ukraine led to a surge of interest in hosting assistance in Romania.

But despite initial support and success, challenges emerged in the 50/20 scheme over time, including: overcrowding as property owners tried to maximise government financial support by accommodating more people than appropriate; potential misuse of payments used to cover non-eligible spending; and emerging tensions between host communities and people displaced from Ukraine.

The 50/20 scheme also exerted significant pressures on the local rental market. Prior to the conclusion of the scheme in April 2023, the number of landlords offering properties for hosting resulted in a shortage of available rentals and increased rental costs on the open market, affecting both host communities and people displaced from Ukraine.

Modifications to the scheme made it so people displaced from Ukraine, rather than landlords, were the sole recipients of financial aid through monthly grants to assist with rental costs provided alongside payments for food expenses. Changes in eligibility conditions were also introduced, requiring those accessing the grants to be employed and their children enrolled in school. This scheme was set to run until the end of June 2024.
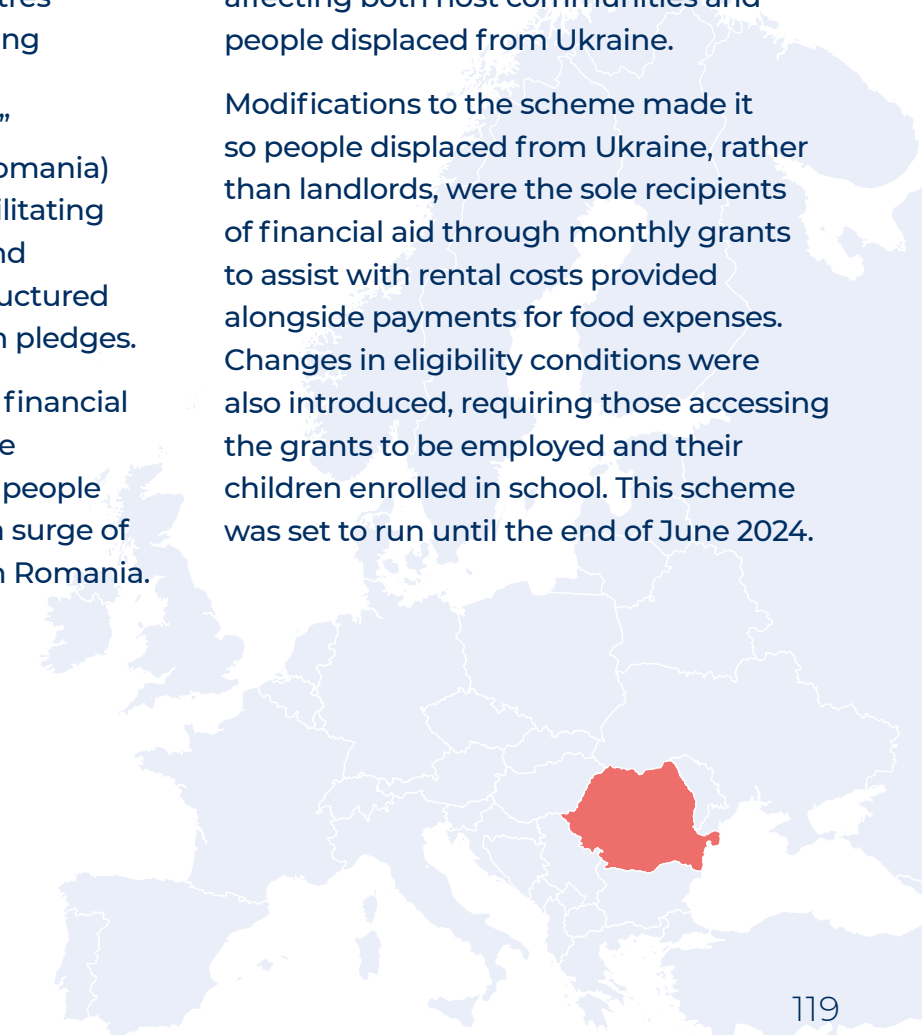
BACKGROUND

A neighbouring country to Ukraine, Romanian authorities responded swiftly to the flow of people crossing the border by establishing multiple information points offering emergency accommodation, food provisions, and healthcare assistance. The General Inspectorate for Immigration also set up 46 immigration points across the country where people could register and apply for temporary protection.

Those granted temporary protection were issued residence permits, granting immediate access to essential services including the labour market, healthcare, education, and social support systems. Twelve Regional Integration Centres were also established providing comprehensive support services to including information and counselling, interpretation to support engagement with local authorities, Romanian language courses, and socio-cultural and educational activities, as well as psychological and medical assistance.

International organizations, such as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and International Organization for Migration (IOM), played an important role in coordinating relief efforts and supporting actors such as non-governmental organizations and the Romanian Red Cross (RRC).[2]

Adopted in June 2022, the "National Plan of Measures for the Protection and Inclusion of Displaced Persons from Ukraine" outlined strategies to address the emerging situation in Romania and provided short and long-term measures to address the protection and integration of displaced people, this included setting out activities and operational interventions, and identifying the stakeholders involved. It introduced several measures to be coordinated at the central and local levels.[3]

The plan included four approaches to housing:

(1) allocating or reallocating housing owned by the National Housing Agency's Youth Housing Programme

(2) allocating or reallocating housing ownedb by local public authorities and devolved branches of central authorities

(3) rehabilitating and adapting properties owned by the state

(4) constructing housing units through the Social Housing Programme.

People displaced from Ukraine in need of housing could access emergency accommodation in collective shelters run by local authorities, NGOs or companies. For example, the Bucharest General Directorate of Social Assistance (Direcția Generală de Asistență Socială a Municipiului București – DGASMB) established a collective accommodation centre at the North Train Station in Bucharest, while the Concordia organisation opened a shelter where people displaced from Ukraine could stay without the need to pay rent or for utilities. Residents of this shelter were also provided with hot meals throughout the day. The authorities aimed to provide more sustainable and long-term accommodation options through a financial scheme that facilitated hosting assistance. A centralized platform "un Acoperiș" ("a roof") and its extension "Dopomoha" were set up and managed by the authorities in cooperation with other stakeholders to provide information to displaced people about available services and assistance, collate public and private offers of accommodation, and allow potential guests to browse available housing. Through the "Dopomoha" platform, people displaced from Ukraine could register for the 50/20 financial scheme.

2 - The Romanian Red Cross, particularly through the Health Caravan project implemented in collaboration with the French Red Cross, aimed to enhance access to essential medical services in Romania for people displaced from Ukraine. Six Health Promotion Centres were established in key cities, and a Mobile Caravan with six medical units operated in 14 counties providing a variety of services such as: medical assistance, recreational and psychosocial activities, kindergarten and after-school programmes, first aid courses, Romanian and English language courses, food, hygiene items, and clothing, and financial assistance, and support with finding employment.

3 - According to UNHCR's survey available at: https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine/location/10782

Displaced people from Ukraine hosted by Anton, a Romanian host who owns a building and supported by the Romanian Red Cross. - © Romanian Red Cross

Guests and people granted temporary protection who were renting apartments or staying in collective accommodation centres could also receive cash assistance offered by UNHCR, the RRC or the Federation of Non-governmental Organisations providing Social Services (Federatiei Organizatiilor Neguvernamentale pentru Servicii Sociale – FONSS). The Romanian Red Cross, for example, provided a one-time payment of 568 lei per person to eligible households, while UNHCR gave 630 lei per person for a maximum of four months. Priority was given to people identified as being most vulnerable. Other stakeholders such as Caritas and Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) offered cash and voucher assistance on a three-monthly basis. People were intended to access only one of these schemes – those who had already accessed support from one could not receive cash assistance from any of the others.

A cluster of stakeholders was set up to divide work and responsibilities for providing services and assistance. World Vision Romania took charge of educational initiatives, Aidrom oversaw social assistance, cultural integration, healthcare assistance and language and food provisions, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) handled protection related issues and integration, assistance accessing the labour market, language support, and provided tailored services to people with disabilities, Autism Voice took the lead on education for people with special needs, and psychosocial therapy, while the Romanian National Council for Refugees was responsible for legal and social assistance. Government institutions were also involved overseeing social assistance and issuing documents (DGASMB) or providing services for children (Child Protection Services, Direcția Generală de Asistență Socială și Protecția Copilului – DGASPC).

More than 95% of all displaced people were women and children, with the majority residing in Bucharest[4] (almost one third) and cities close to the northern and eastern border with Ukraine, such as Constanța, Galați, Iași and Tulcea. Almost half were accommodated in state or non-governmental-run collective centres, 35% were housed through hosting assistance, and 13% managed to rent an apartment.

4 - According to UNHCR's survey available at: https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine/location/10782

ABOUT THE PROGRAMME

The Romanian Government and the Department for Emergency Situations (Centrul Național de Conducere și Coordonare a Intervenției – CNCCI) of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, in collaboration with IOM and UNHCR, partnered with Code4Romania, a non-governmental organisation, to develop and manage various support programmes, including hosting assistance. Through a dedicated webpage "un Acoperiș" (https://unacoperis.ro/), hosts could pledge accommodation and guests search for available housing.

Developed and maintained by Code4Romania, the platform was managed by the CNCCI, who were responsible for the coordination and organisation of the emergency response and assistance to people displaced from Ukraine. IOM and UNHCR provided various types of support and services, including accommodation in collective centres.

Potential guests could self-enrol in the programme directly on the web-page, or through the Border Police and the affiliated non-governmental organisations, IOM and UNHCR. The self-enrolment followed a validation process which included confirming people's identities, understanding their motivation for seeking hosted arrangement, identifying any particular needs in terms of housing, education or health, and assessing applicants' financial situation. Applicants were also required to provide documents proving they had lived or resided in Ukraine and left the country after February 2022 or could not return there. The programme was open to Ukrainian citizens and third country nationals previously located in Ukraine who were eligible for temporary protection.

For hosts, it was recommended that the pledged property be owned by the host (an affidavit was requested to be presented). A photo of the accommodation had to be shared, and the period of availability confirmed along with how many people the property would be suitable for, and whether it would be appropriate for children, older people, or people with disability. Hosts were also asked if they would accept pets. Although included in the guidance, in practice pledged accommodations were not assessed against several criteria including:

- access to electricity and heating;
- living space of 4 square meters per guest;
- providing an appropriate level of privacy;
- available furniture, including at least a bed and wardrobe;
- basic household items such as towels and bed linen;
- access to a toilet, including hot and cold water, and washing space;
- maintenance and cleanliness;
- space for food preparation and storage;
- proximity to healthcare facilities.

According to the accepted rules of the programme, hosts could not refuse guests based on their race, colour, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation, marital status or gender identity. They were expected to commit to take responsibility for their guests and also had to agree to give the General Inspectorate of Immigration, associated non-governmental and international organisations' representatives access to the pledged accommodation.

The matching process was carried out by stakeholders involved in "un Acoperiș" based on the information provided by guests and hosts. The primary consideration was prioritising family unity and addressing specific requirements such as mobility impairments, age, and health needs. Allocation of accommodation was based on the available housing, with guests' preferences for particular locations only taken into account in very specific situations.

Guests were required to maintain their allocated accommodation, but in numerous cases this did not happen, particularly where guests did not receive financial support and neglected to, or were unable to, pay utility bills.

It was a requirement that hosts could not keep guests' original documents (e.g. passports, ID cards etc), and only copies would be provided. A hosting arrangement could be terminated by the host with at least one month's notice period, allowing time for guests to find new accommodation before moving out.

If any of the parties faced challenges in their cohabitation, they could contact Code4 Romania or another affiliated non-governmental organisation. Guests could report incidents and request to be relocated, while hosts could terminate the hosting assistance, but a one-month notice period applied. It was made clear that hosts could not expect or request any work or other in-kind services be provided by guests, and that any such cases should be reported to the Department for Emergency Situations.

In March 2022, the government introduced the 50/20 financial scheme[5], for those who hosted displaced people or who rented apartments or rooms to people displaced from Ukraine[6]. Initially, hosts and landlords received 50 lei for accommodation and 20 lei for food expenses per day per hosted person or tenant. This income was tax-free and did not have to be declared. This support was discontinued in April 2023 when a revised financial scheme was announced.[7]

In December 2022, UNHCR surveyed displaced persons from Ukraine on the 50/20 financial scheme:[8]

→ Almost 95% of people interviewed had accessed the scheme, and if they had not, it was often because they already had other housing arrangements.

→ More than 70% found accommodation through friends or groups on social media (primarily Facebook and Telegram).

→ 30% were asked to pay a deposit to their hosts or landlords, and 80% were asked to provide some form of identity document.

→ 36% neither received food nor a food allowance from their hosts or landlords.

→ 92% did not have problems with their hosts or landlords, but more than 50% did not know where to report any challenges they faced.

→ For financial reasons, hosts or landlords did not usually accept single people on their own.

→ Suggestions for potential improvements to the programme focused on increasing the amount provided for food, giving more clarity on the future of the scheme, improved screening of hosts and landlords, offering some financial assistance to guests or tenants, and requiring the signing of a hosting agreement between hosts and guests.

5 - Decision No. 336 regarding the establishment of the amount, conditions, and mechanism for granting lump sums according to Emergency Ordinance No. 15/2022 of the Government regarding the provision of support and humanitarian assistance by the Romanian state to foreign citizens or stateless persons in exceptional situations, originating from the armed conflict zone in Ukraine.

6 - This also included people who did not have temporary protection or refugee status.

7 - Decision No. 368 regarding the establishment of the amount, conditions, and mechanism for granting lump sums according to Emergency Ordinance No. 15/2022 of the Government regardin the provision of support and humanitarian assistance by the Romanian state to foreign citizens or stateless persons in exceptional situations, originating from the armed conflict zone in Ukraine.

8 - https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/97974

The revised scheme[9] which started in May 2023 allocated payments to guests instead of hosts. People displaced from Ukraine, granted temporary protection, were offered 750 lei for a single person and 2,000 lei for a family per month as well as additional 600 lei for each person to cover food expenses. After the first four months, food expenses were removed and the grant only consisted of the housing allowance.

The new regulation also included changes to eligibility. For the first month, the only condition to accessing the grant was that people had to be under temporary protection. For the next three months, there were two additional requirements: (1) either being registered with one of the county agencies for employment or being employed in Romania, and (2) having children enrolled in pre-secondary education, either through attending educational activities provided by other organizations or by attending pre-schools or cultural centres. From the fifth month onwards, working-age adults accessing the support had to be employed. Older people, people with disabilities and caregivers were excepted from the employment and/or school enrolment requirements.

The allocation of lump sums for housing and food was managed through the "Dopomoha" platform, with each application verified online by the municipality. Paid directly to people displaced from Ukraine through the modifications the government sought to align financial incentives, job opportunities, enrolment in educational programmes, and protection status, as well as seeking to prevent to prevent abuses and corruption.[10]

9 - In Autumn 2022, 80% of people in Romania who had been displaced from Ukraine planned to remain in their current location, the implication being that they were considering hosting assistance to be a long-term solution. However, those surveyed, also said they would only want to continue staying with their hosts or rent apartments as long as the 50/20 financial scheme (as initially offered to hosts) was ongoing. (Source: https://www.habitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/RO-case%20study.pdf). This necessitated the modification of the scheme in 2023, and - as identified and discussed by the government at the beginning of 2024 – further revision of the financial support and related policies was crucial for the continuation of the hosting assistance programme. (Source: https://reliefweb.int/report/romania/regional-refugee-response-plan-ukraine-situation-inter-agency-operational-update-romania-december-2023).

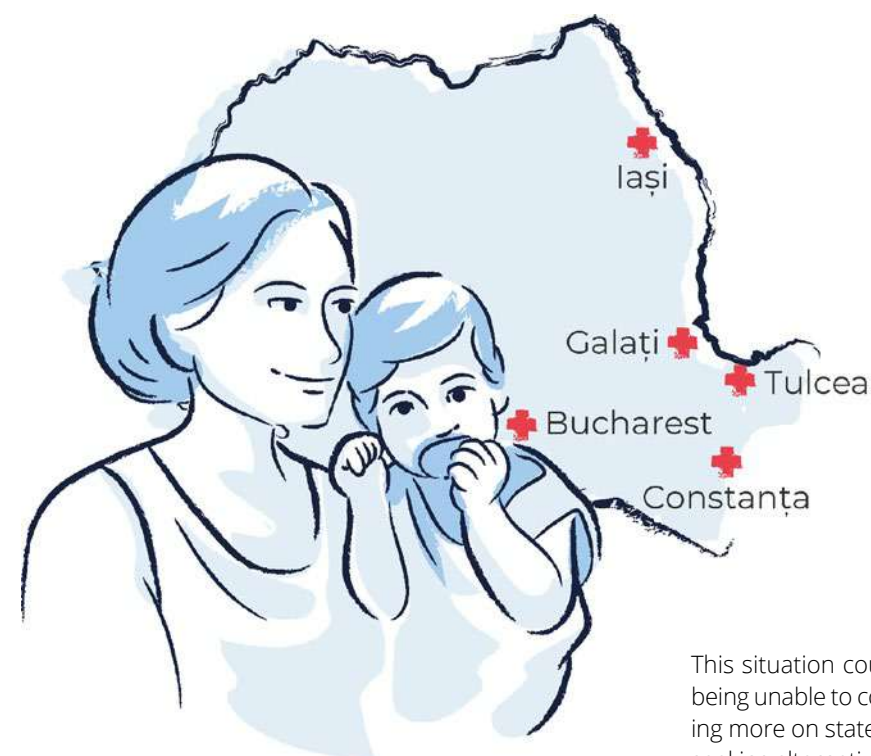10- https://www.juridice.ro/679776/guvernul-modifica-programul-50-20-pentru-ucraineni.html and https://dopomoha.ro/en/the-5020-program

11- https://www.habitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/RO-case%20study.pdf

According to the assessment carried out by Habitat for Humanity in January 2023,[11] the 50/20 scheme created several challenges and difficulties, including:

→ The scheme was unsustainable as in the long run it could not meet demand for housing or the associated financial costs.

→ Loopholes in the scheme enabled abuse by hosts. For example, some hosts did not provide food or pocketed the 20 lei paid for utilities and maintenance themselves. In some cases, hosts demanded guests (or tenants) sign a "contract" stating they would not move out in the next 6 months; or that a cash deposit be paid.

→ There was no host screening process or complaint mechanism in place.

→ Because payments were calculated on the number of people being hosted, hosts and landlords consistently sought large families and groups, excluding people who were single or in smaller family groups. Some hosts/landlords crammed as many beds as possible into their accommodation, creating potentially dangerous overcrowding, to maximise the payments they could receive.

→ The focus on providing accommodation to people displaced from Ukraine (in June 2022, hosts and landlords received funds for more than 21,000 people displaced from Ukraine) and provision of financial support to hosts and landlords to do that, skewed rental markets effectively excluding locals from accessing housing and increasing rents.

These challenges led to the introduction of a revised scheme for people displaced from Ukraine.

IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME

On the one hand, the programme and accompanying financial schemes assisted people displaced from Ukraine to quickly access accommodation. Habitat for Humanity observed that it enabled people to secure housing in major cities, which would have been challenging otherwise. Being located in the biggest cities potentially allowed for better access to services, education, the labour market, and healthcare, and people were less keen on finding housing in suburbs or rural areas.[12]

From the outset, some people displaced from Ukraine successfully secured their own accommodation outside of the hosting assistance programme and were able to sustain themselves in Romania. Some of those displaced, at least initially, had financial means beyond the average Romanian. However, in February 2024, UNHCR noted that people who had been displaced were beginning to encounter economic challenges. Extended displacement was eroding financial reserves, with 70% reporting a decline in purchasing power compared to during their first months in Romania in 2022. This situation was especially worrying for single-headed households, older people, and people with disabilities.[13]

This situation could result in growing numbers of people being unable to cover accommodation and living costs, relying more on state and other stakeholders for support, and seeking alternative housing options, including hosting assistance. Combined, the already high demand for apartments, elevated rents, and negative attitudes towards Ukrainians, could make accessing housing extremely difficult.

The deteriorating economic situation of people displaced from Ukraine and resulting increased vulnerability could intensify pressure on the revised financial scheme, and increase demand for state support. Concerns have already been voiced over adequate access to the scheme. In December 2023, UNHCR and other organizations reported delays in payments,[14] while, requirements, such as employment and enrolling children in school, have blocked some people granted temporary protection from accessing the support. Although approximately 33% of working-age people in Romania displaced from Ukraine are in employment, there remain substantial barriers to participation in the labour market, not least language difficulties and a lack of opportunities aligned with existing skills. Despite a rise in formal school enrolment among school-aged children displaced from Ukraine, only approximately 40% reported active attendance.[15]

12- https://www.habitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/RO-case%20study.pdf

13- https://reliefweb.int/report/poland/ukraine-situation-regional-refugee-response-plan-january-december-2024-enrobg

14- https://reliefweb.int/report/romania/regional-refugee-response-plan-ukraine-situation-inter-agency-operational-update-romania-december-2023

15- https://reliefweb.int/report/poland/ukraine-situation-regional-refugee-response-plan-january-december-2024-enrobg

Xenia, a Ukrainian former business owner who now works for the Romanian Red Cross Humanitarian Concept Store in Bucharest. - © Romanian Red Cross

Disseminating accurate information, countering misinformation, monitoring social media platforms, and prioritizing language training were identified as essential measures to ensure social cohesion and overcome potential barriers to accessing services.[16] In a nod to supporting social cohesion, Romania's hosting assistance programme already incorporated incentives and support for both guests and hosts, fostering inclusion by extending services to both groups.

Recognising the ongoing crisis and emerging difficulties on the country's housing market, the Romanian Government emphasised the critical importance of prioritising the preservation of social cohesion and to balance the support offered to people displaced from Ukraine with the assistance provided to host communities, particularly those who were most vulnerable.[17]

Over time, the perceptions and attitudes towards people displaced from Ukraine changed. In March 2022, over 70% of respondents to online interviews conducted by DataDiggers expressed support or strong support for providing assistance to people displaced from Ukraine, but a year later, that figure had declined to 50%[18] The overall openness toward displaced people from Ukraine however still remained considerably higher than in September 2015 when more than 70% of the population opposed welcoming Syrian refugees.[19]

According to a survey conducted by UNICEF in early 2023[20], 40% of respondents believed that people displaced from Ukraine should be accommodated exclusively in collective shelters, 32% disagreed with this proposition, and 23% neither agreed nor disagreed. Approximately 40% of Romanians surveyed supported providing people displaced from Ukraine with material and financial aid, while 60% believed assistance should be limited to accommodation and meals for a specific period only.

16- https://reliefweb.int/report/poland/ukraine-situation-regional-refugee-response-plan-january-december-2024-enrobg

17- https://protectieucraina.gov.ro/1/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/ANNUAL-STATUS-REPORT-ROMANIA-DEC-2022-2-1-1.pdf

18- https://www.g4media.ro/studiu-sarbii-si-ungurii-sustin-razboiul-lui-putin-cum-se-pozitioneaza-romanii-polonezii-slovacii-si-moldovenii-in-conflictul-din-ucraina.html

19- https://www.fondation-pierredubois.ch/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/2022-no6-Cretu-1.pdf

20- https://www.unicef.org/romania/media/11201/file/Survey%20regarding%20the%20social%20cohesion%20in%20the%20context%20of%20Ukrainian%20crisis%20-%20Study%20Report%202023.pdf

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

- While 90% of displaced people surveyed by IOM in October 2022[21] reported not encountering difficulties in accessing housing, the Romanian Government observed in January 2023[22] that the majority of those surveyed resided in collective, short-term accommodation, and although adequately housed, faced serious challenges in local integration.

- The 50/20 financial scheme created tensions between Romanians and people displaced from Ukraine, and even among displaced people. Romanians were accused of benefiting excessively from EU funds allocated for people displaced from Ukraine, while people displaced from Ukraine faced allegations of not fully appreciating the support received. Some were accused of renting out their homes in Ukraine while living in Romania for free. The perception was also that people displaced from Ukraine received more support than other refugees

in Romania.[23] As of February 2024, according to UNHCR, over 25% of surveyed households of people displaced from Ukraine reported negative experiences, such as discrimination or verbal aggression.[24]

- In two-thirds of cases, hosts and guests did not sign formal agreements to clarify their roles and contributions, creating space for abuse and exploitation.

21- https://dtm.iom.int/reports/romania-ukraine-evolution-needs-report-round-01-25-march-10-october-2022

22- https://protectieucraina.gov.ro/1/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/ANNUAL-STATUS-REPORT-ROMANIA-DEC-2022-2-1-1.pdf

23- www.unicef.org/romania/media/11101/file/Survey%20regarding%20the%20social%20cohesion%20in%20the%20context%20of%20Ukrainian%20crisis%20-%20Study%20Report%202023.pdf

24- https://reliefweb.int/report/poland/ukraine-situation-regional-refugee-response-plan-january-december-2024-enrobg

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Successful hosting relies on developing and implementing comprehensive programmes that cater to the specific needs of guests and hosts, including activities aimed at providing support for accessing financial, legal, and social assistance, and integration with the host community.

2. Evaluating and highlighting previous experiences of hosting assistance and the reception of refugees and migrants can help identify good practices that contribute to success as well as areas that require improvement, and support the development of a tailored risk management strategy.

3. Fostering collaboration and partnership among stakeholders, including public and private institutions, NGOs, and people accessing support themselves, is necessary to effectively and efficiently implement a hosting assistance programme.

4. Ensuring the participation of displaced families in the design and implementation of programmes and initiatives that affect their lives is crucial in building programmes that effectively and safely meet their needs.

5. Conducting regular evaluations helps monitor programmes' success and effectiveness while also providing necessary data to inform course correction.

6. Building capacity among stakeholders and people accessing services in areas such as conflict resolution, leadership, and advocacy, supports ownership of programmes and initiatives and their integration into communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Transparent coordination among state and local authorities and other stakeholders should be the foundation of any hosting assistance programme.

- Data, including statistics, and information concerning the implementation of any hosting assistance programme and related incentives should be collated, regularly updated, and published by the authorities.

- A host vetting process, necessary to prevent abuses and exploitation, should be a key part of any programme from the beginning and implemented by all stakeholders involved.

- Assessment of pledged accommodation and ongoing monitoring of living conditions is necessary to guarantee an effective and sustainable hosting assistance programme.

- A comprehensive complaint and feedback system should be in place, promoted among both guests and hosts.

- Particular consideration needs to be given to any financial incentives provided to hosts and guests with clear, transparent and timely communication a priority, especially if any changes are made to the programme.

- The setup and management of any future financial schemes should be informed by lessons learned from 50/20 and subsequent revisions to the scheme. This includes a comprehensive understanding of the original schemes' issues and challenges, potential areas of exploitation, and insights for developing more effective and sustainable assistance.

- Integration opportunities and support for self-reliance and local integration, as well as other durable solutions, should be explored by the authorities, with the inclusion of relevant stakeholders. A comprehensive integration strategy should be developed early on, with attention paid to how the integration strategy relates to the housing solutions being offered.

- Revised or new hosting assistance programmes or initiatives should be designed to address the specific needs of both those accessing the service and host communities. Future initiatives should build upon best practices and incorporate these into new programmes.

Anca, Romanian
Red Cross volunteer involved
in supporting displaced
people from Ukraine.
© Romanian Red Cross

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SLOVAKIA

EMPLOYING CASE MANAGEMENT TO STREAMLINE THE DELIVERY OF HOSTING ASSISTANCE

This case study highlights the importance of case management to facilitate the successful implementation of hosting assistance and community outreach.

Number of people displaced from Ukraine granted temporary protection in slovakia	**116,186** [1]
Number of registered host households [2]	**274**
Number of host households which hosted people displaced from ukraine	**241**
Average duration of the support provided by the slovak red cross	**6-12 months** [3]
Duration of the programme	**Oct. 2022 – Feb. 2024**
Location of the programme	**Five regions covered** **6 Humanitarian Service Points (HSPs) run by 5 branches in Banska Bystrica, Nitra/ Topolčany, Košice, Žilina, and Poprad.**

1 - As of 2 February 2024, the Slovak Ministry of the Interior: https://www.minv.sk/?docasne-utocisko

2 - Not all registered households were actually enrolled in the programme and met the programme's criteria.

3 - The actual hosted arrangement could have been longer than the duration of the assistance provided by the SRC.

BELGIUM 1

FRANCE 2

HUNGARY 3

IRELAND 4

NETHERLANDS 5

LUXEMBOURG 6

ROMANIA 7

SLOVAKIA **8**

72-year-old Vera and her husband left Kharkiv in March 2022 and staying with Veronika in Kosice. The decision to accept an older couple in their home was not an easy one to make. Eventually, Vera and her husband moved in. Now, they do everything like a normal family, eating and celebrating holidays together. "Here we feel as if this was our own family. Everyone is treating us with respect and care, we could not wish for anything better. If we ever go back home, with God's help, I will put their picture on the wall", says Vera. - © Slovak Red Cross

INTRODUCTION

The government of Slovakia took various steps in response to the emergency housing needs of people in the country who had been displaced from Ukraine. Collective accommodation centres and government facilities were made available, while at the same time authorities also supported hosting assistance initiatives.

The Slovak Red Cross (SRC) implemented a comprehensive hosting assistance programme. A key component of the SRC's strategy was a robust case management system, facilitated through Humanitarian Service Points (HSPs). The programme, originally focusing on shelter, evolved into a multifunctional tool assisting people displaced from Ukraine to access employment and education, as well as to help address any special needs or vulnerabilities.

Operational across selected SRC branches, the programme included cash assistance, psychosocial support, and information about the services available at the state and local levels. As well as direct support to people who had been displaced from Ukraine, including those living in rental accommodations, financial support to hosts, and to vulnerable Slovak families. This comprehensive approach was implemented to help support social cohesion and the integration of people displaced from Ukraine into their new local communities.

During implementation, the programme faced several challenges, not least host fatigue and uncertainty regarding the duration of support. Seeking to address some of these uncertainties and ensure sustainability, a government-led housing working group was formed. At the same time, the SRC planned to transform its HSPs into integration and community centres continuing to provide assistance to both displaced people and locals.

BACKGROUND

Neighbouring Ukraine, Slovakia has welcomed over 110,000 people seeking safety from the escalating conflict. At Vyšné Nemecké border crossing, immediate medical and psychological assistance was provided, while information and shuttle services to major cities was also offered, supporting people displaced from Ukraine to remain in Slovakia or continue on to other countries.

Emergency, temporary accommodation was arranged in government and other facilities; including access to essential services such as food and healthcare. Beyond emergency accommodation, in Slovakia people displaced from Ukraine were offered three housing options:

(1) short-term stays in adapted hotels, hostels or similar venues;

(2) longer-term accommodation provided by hosts, apartment owners, or in large-capacity collective centres

(3) government-operated collective housing facilities for asylum-seekers located in Humenne, Opatovska Nova Ves, and Gabcikovo.

Both government and non-governmental organisations assisted with finding longer-term housing solutions. Everyone displaced from Ukraine due to the conflict was granted temporary protection in Slovakia and issued with a temporary protection status certificate, enabling access to the labour market, education and healthcare, as well as social benefits and allowances.

> *The house is quite big and I did not want to be alone. I was sad, now I am happy I have them, we all meet, drink tea, talk, and we are good I am happy that they are here.*
>
> — *A host, a widow that provided accommodation to seven older women from Ukraine.*

In March 2022, the Slovak Ministry of the Interior introduced an accommodation allowance for people who had available accommodation to host people from Ukraine [4].Under this initiative, participating hosts received a fixed amount per night for each person[5] they hosted, up to a maximum 1,800 euros per month . To be eligible for this allowance, hosts were required to sign an official agreement with guests, and to receive the allowance, had to make monthly visits to their respective municipality to report the number of nights they had accommodated guests.

In the wake of the conflict, support for people arriving from Ukraine came from state and local authorities, non-governmental organisations, businesses and ordinary citizens. Rapid legislative changes were made to streamline entry into the country and ensure access to emergency assistance at the border and, later, to all the basic services.

Over the course of a year, public sentiment toward assisting people displaced from Ukraine changed. In March 2022, an online survey in Slovakia revealed overwhelming support, with nearly 75% of respondents supporting the idea of assisting and welcoming people from Ukraine. By February 2023, however, this sentiment had shifted dramatically, with a subsequent survey indicating that 52% of Slovaks now held negative views about accepting and assisting people displaced from Ukraine.[7]

4 - There were two schemes in place: one for private hosting in apartments and family houses, and another for non-business accommodation facilities. According to the revised legislation as of September 2022, accommodations not intended for business received 12 euros for adult per day and 6 euros per child under 15 per day. To prevent overcrowding and ensure appropriateness, the legislation established maximum allowances per room, ranging from 710 to 1,790 euros per month based on the number of rooms.

5 - This governmental allowance underwent multiple revisions. In 2023, it was reduced to 10 euros for adults or children older than 15 years and 5 euros for children under 15.

6 - In October 2022, the monthly financial support available for providing free accommodation to people displaced from Ukraine increased from 500 – 1,250 euros to 710 – 1,790 euros.

7 - Sources: https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/news/slovakia-survey-finds-majority-willing-welcome-ukrainian-refugees_en and https://www.sav.sk/?lang=en&doc=services-news&source_no=20&news_no=11059#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20results%20of,viewed%20Ukrainian%20refugees%20most%20negatively.

ABOUT THE PROGRAMME

Alongside smaller local initiatives, there were two main accommodation assistance schemes through which housing was provided to people displaced from Ukraine. Both included several arrangements such as collective facilities (reception centres, hotels, and guesthouses), and rental assistance, as well as accommodation offered by private individuals.

The Ministry of Transport and Construction set up a dedicated online platform for accommodation offers and requests (https://pomocpreukrajinu.sk/), facilitating both searches for suitable housing, and the registration of pledges from hosts. The other main initiative, #KtoPomozeUkrajine, created by a group of non-governmental organisations, is a similar platform where citizens could offer free accommodation, including rooms in hotels or shelters, and people displaced from Ukraine in need of housing can browse for available options.

Both platforms collated data from potential hosts and guests, requesting people to fill out an online questionnaire and provide various information about their situation. For example, prospective hosts were asked about location and accessibility, how many people their property could host, and available transport options.

No general vetting mechanisms were in place for hosts, guests, or the accommodation pledged. Some non-governmental organisations involved in hosting assistance conducted accommodation checks; however, there was no comprehensive, systematic assessment of accommodation being offered to ensure basic safety or living standards. Similarly, only limited safeguarding mechanisms were in place to protect against potential abuse or harassment.Some cases of hosts expecting people they were hosting to provide additional in-kind contributions, work, or other services were reported.

At the beginning of the emergency response, the #KtoPomozeUkrajine initiative prepared a list of guidelines to help match hosts with guests, which was distributed at information points around the country. Upon arrival, individuals seeking assistance were actively contacted by volunteers working for the organisations involved. The list included:

→ Information provided by potential hosts was analysed to identify the most suitable potential guests for the accommodation being offered.

→ A verification call was made to the host to confirm availability and duration of the offer. During this call, details were clarified, and agreement reached, including setting the move-in date.

→ Potential hosts were sensitised to the housing needs of people displaced from Ukraine, including people originally from other third countries who had resided Ukraine and fled the country due to the conflict.

→ Transport arrangements were made for guests to reach their new accommodation.

→ Support was offered for hosts to conduct some minor adaptation of their accommodation. Additionally, they were provided with essential items needed for the guests such as toiletries, kitchen appliances, etc.

→ Hosts were encouraged to welcome their guests with kindness and empathy, and to be considerate of their needs and requirements. Hosts were also asked to introduce guests to the accommodation and discuss daily routines.

→ Preference was initially given to hosts offering free accommodation; however, they were informed about available subsidies.

→ Hosts were requested to keep in touchwith #KtoPomozeUkrajine to share any challenges they were facing during the hosting and provide feedback after the arrangement had concluded.

Complementary to the accommodation assistance schemes, the Slovak Red Cross was the only non-governmental organisation implementing a comprehensive programme supporting hosts. SRC's hosting assistance programme was operational across five branches [8] and looked at the social and economic situations of hosts, guests and their local communities.

The programme included three main components:

• Rental assistance for guests. From six to fifteen months of rental support was provided to people displaced from Ukraine who had temporary protection status and were identified as being particularly vulnerable, this included single women, single mothers, families with children, households headed by older people, and people with disabilities.

• Support for hosts. This included top-up support, supplementing housing allowance provided by the Slovak government. Additionally, a one-off payment was provided to hosts to help cover household items, basic privacy improvements, and increased utility bills. Hosts were monitored and vetted through visits and calls by SRC staff.

• Rental contributions to vulnerable Slovak families. Seeking to support social cohesion and integration, children, women with children, older people, and people with health problems were prioritised for this assistance.

The case management system was key to SRC's hosting assistance programme, with SRC Humanitarian Service Points (HSPs) relying on the system to monitor processes and progress, and to provide essential services supporting integration and access to employment. Support offered included CV preparation, assistance finding job vacancies, linking displaced people with potential employers, reimbursement for vocational courses, caregiver courses, and Slovak language courses at basic, intermediate, and advanced levels. HSPs also offered assistance with document translation and qualification recognition and certification.

I HSPs were also engaged in providing material assistance, collaborating closely with hosts, to ensure the provision of essential items that met the needs of guests; for example, orthopaedic mattresses and disability-friendly products, such as kitchenware, and household appliances. Guests were also offered information and counselling, both legal and psychosocial, assistance with school registration, and access to medical and social services. If necessary, referrals were also made to other service providers or municipalities.

In certain instances, HSP staff helped worked with people to develop individual plans, personalised roadmaps outlining specific short- and long-term goals and strategies to achieve them. For example, for adults seeking employment, plans included active job research and CV preparation, but also extended more broadly to consider language skills, education, childcare, and health. Each plan was a unique, flexible, living-document, which could be reviewed and adapted as needed. Regular discussions on outcomes allowed for adjustments and the addition of new objectives, fostering ongoing personal development and a sense

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8 - In Banska Bystrica, Nitra/Topoľčany, Košice, Žilina, and Poprad.

A "Humanitarian Service Point" is an important place where people can find some confidence and certainty, and sort things out for the future. We are with them, supporting them. People wan to be independent, but know that it is difficult process so they ask for help. And that is what we offer.

— *An SRC social worker on the role of the HSPs.*

An ordinary day at a Humanitarian Service Point. HSPs, operational across Slovakia, provided information, psychological first aid, material assistance and, if needed, referred to other service providers. HSPs were key to the proper implementation of the hosting assistance programme and case management approach. - © Slovak Red Cross

of empowerment. Success of these plans heavily relied on the continued motivation, commitment, and proactive engagement of the people involved.

The Slovak Red Cross adopted a strong case management approach from the initial stages of the response. In the beginning, it was developed for the Shelter Programme but evolved into a multifunctional initiative used across multiple sectors, promoting efficiency, accuracy, and robust monitoring. The EspoCRM system was adopted for structured and streamlined registration, enrolment, and monitoring. HSPs played a crucial role as the interface where individuals actively sought support, with HSP staff providing assistance, referrals, and actively engaging with

people displaced from Ukraine to address their specific needs and challenges. The support offered extended beyond traditional case management to areas like assisting people to access employment and education, and while this expansion was not always formally integrated into the system, there is no doubt that overall, the system helped SRC better consider and respond to people's diverse and evolving needs.

Part of the effectiveness of the case management system was that it supported regular visits and calls to hosts and guests by HSP staff. Monthly communication and occasional unscheduled visits played an important role in addressing ongoing challenges and reducing risks

Zuzana Legenová hosts 3 ukrainian women in Košice. - © Slovak Red Cross

The implementation of the hosting assistance programme by the SRC was based on five main steps:

1. REGISTRATION

— A comprehensive registration process for hosts was developed. Hosts (usually heads of households) visited the SRC to register where they were asked to fill out a registration form, including eligibility questions. The EspoCRM system assisted in analysing, tracking and automatically determining eligibility based on people's responses. Messages were then sent to potential hosts, informing them whether they had been accepted or not.

2. HOUSING ADEQUACY CHECK

— Accommodations were visited by HSP staff to verify if they met suitable standards in terms of habitability, security, and accessibility. If they did, hosts were informed about the next steps for the hosting assistance programme.

— A dashboard tracker was used to monitor actions and follow-ups such as scheduling monitoring visits, executing payments and sending reminders to hosts.

3. IMPLEMENTATION

— A tripartite agreement ("hospitality agreement") was signed between the Slovak Red Cross, guests, and hosts to govern the relations of all parties involved. It stipulated that the host owned the accommodation concerned and it would be provided to the guest free of charge, defined the duration of the hosting arrangement, and listed allowances the host was eligible to receive. In addition, hosts and guests agreed to SRC monitoring visits. SRC accommodation allowances were not transferred unless the agreement was signed by all three parties.

— Subsidies offered by the SRC for eligible hosts and guests were processed through HSPs.

a. Hosts could receive minimum six and maximum twelve months of accommodation support. Priority was given to those hosts who were vulnerable or who hosted vulnerable people such as single-headed households, single parent-headed households with children, households headed by older people, and people with certain medical conditions or disabilities.

b. In addition to subsidies provided by the Slovak government, hosts involved in the programme[9] received top up financial assistance from the SRC to cover household expenses over a six-month period. Hosts also received a one-time payment to purchase household essentials[10], and an extra winterization grant to cover utility costs[11].

— All the registered households received financial support and other services through the HSPs.

4. MONITORING

— Before each payment, SRC conducted visits (primarily in the first month) or calls/video sessions with hosts and guests to assess people's living situations. This proactive approach not only deepened the understanding of challenges people faced, but also served to help identify and mediate conflicts. Payments were processed only after confirming that guests were continuing to live in the pledged accommodation.

5. EXIT EVALUATION

— Short questionnaire filled out by HSP staff when hosts left the programme. This was part of an internal process aimed at refining future services. A comprehensive evaluation was conducted comparing the situations at the start and end of the programme, assessing the integration process, and factors such as employability, health, and access to education.

The SRC programme included initiatives taking into account the needs of people with disabilities. Accommodation was checked to make sure it met accessibility requirements of people with impaired mobility. An additional allowance of 500 euros was offered to hosts to adjust their accommodation to the needs of guest with disabilities, including buying essential items and health or medical aids. As not all hosts were keen on making structural changes to accommodation, it was often most practical to purchase equipment that could be used by guests with disabilities, and taken with them if they relocated.

The programme also prioritised assistance based on where in Ukraine people had been displaced from, giving priority to those from oblasts directly affected by the conflict. This criterion was mainly employed during the extension of support – which was only available to people from the six most-affected oblasts in Ukraine – not during the initial registration. However, the list of most affected oblasts was not systematically reviewed, potentially overlooking changes in the situation over time.

Some guests reported occasional instances of hosts requesting additional charges for utility bills or internet usage, or expressing concerns about guests using too much water during showers etc.

In other cases, guests reported hosts dedicating a portion of the subsidies received from the Slovak government to improving the accommodation. In a few cases guests reported willingly sharing financial assistance they received with their hosts.

An important element of SRC's hosting assistance programme concerned promoting social cohesion and facilitating the integration of people displaced from Ukraine. A comprehensive approach was adopted, not only encompassing support for people who had been displaced population but also providing assistance to vulnerable people already living in the local communities they arrived into. This included rental support up to 350 euros per month, depending on family size and the number of rooms in the household. The duration of this assistance was six months, with the potential for extensions in cases of extreme vulnerability, as well as provision of a winterization grant, ensuring sustained aid to those most in need.[12]

As a social worker, it was definitely a new situation that I was put in when the conflict started. For me, it is simply about helping human beings. My main task is to be a human being.

— *A SRC social worker on their experience with the programme* ❞

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9 - As mentioned in the background section, hosts were also eligible for allowances paid by the authorities. To receive accommodation allowance, hosts were required to provide monthly reports, also signed by guests, to municipal authorities on the number of guests being hosted and the corresponding nights stayed. Only then the accommodation allowance was paid. However, there was no system in place to check the number of guests, as well as whether the accommodation was indeed used or already vacated.

10- This was 400 euros for necessary accommodation improvements (painting, minor repairs, or item purchase).

11- This fixed allowance, amounting to 300 euros, was integrated as a component of one of the payments. Its value was set based on information from key informants, such as hosts already participating in the programme, and also took factors like high rates of inflation into account.

12- This was due to the extended duration these families had already been residing in rental accommodations.

IMPACT OF THE PROJECT

The hosting assistance programme provided significant opportunities for integration, enabling access to services and fostering familiarity with Slovak systems and culture. We saw incredible examples of hosting families caring for older people, and people who were unwell, including accompanying them to hospital. Hosts supported children to enrol in school, and used their personal networks to help find job opportunities, all this was infused with genuine love and affection. There were a few instances where people saw the programme as an opportunity simply to receive financial support without seeking to establishing a relationship with the people they were hosting, but such cases were few. The main challenge lay in ensuring the programme could wcontinue after government support ended.

— *The Slovak Red Cross on the impact of the hosting assistance programme*
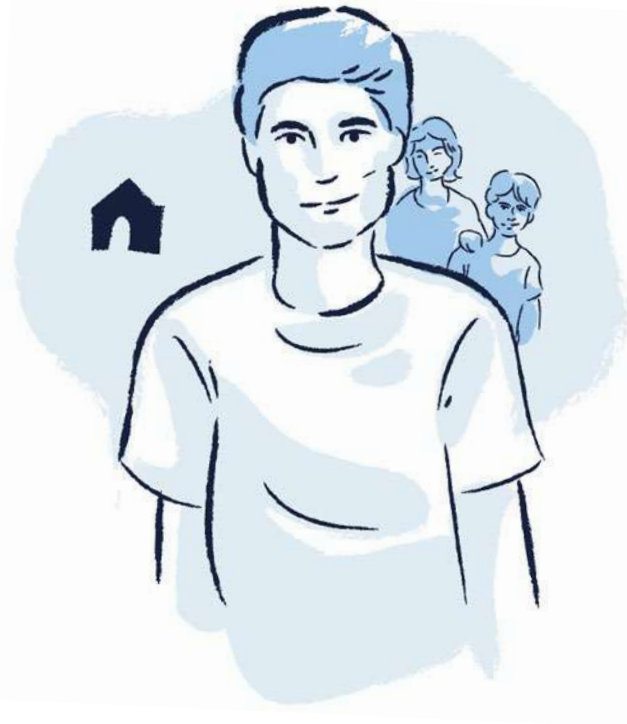
BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

- A combination of fatigue and the reduction in financial assistance available to support hosts, meant many hosts were reluctant to extend support to their guests beyond the initial agreed period.

- Potential hosts were hesitant to accommodate individuals with children and pets, while landlords renting out apartments were unwilling to lease for periods shorter than a year.

- Increasing negative public and political sentiment towards the provision of assistance to people displaced from Ukraine. Some argued the needs of local people and communities were being overlooked.

- Slovak Red Cross' Humanitarian Service Points faced challenges scheduling meetings between hosts and guests, especially outside working hours. They also lacked resources to translate documents into the multiple necessary languages.

- Some guests had unrealistic expectations, envisaging exceptional accommodation with new furniture and household appliances.

- The duration of the government's hosting assistance scheme was uncertain, leading to unpredictability as to when it might end. This ambiguity undermined relations between hosts and guests, especially in the later stages when hosting assistance became a more long-term solution. The uncertainty was also responsible for reducing potential host's interest in pledging accommodation.

- There were limited options for sustained and long-term accommodation for people displaced from Ukraine. When government assistance and other support finished, there was uncertainty about where and how people were supposed to find housing next.

- Coordination of the hosting assistance programme lacked a clear structure, with only the Slovak Red Cross actively involved. Discussions regarding housing and accommodation were split between the Inclusion sub-Working Group, chaired by the Ministry of Interior and co-chaired by UNHCR, and the Steering Committee, consisting of UN agencies, IFRC/Slovak Red Cross, and the Migration department. At the municipal level, branches coordinated directly with municipal offices.

- Coordination challenges between engaged stakeholders emerged in different locations related to the availability of the housing solutions for people displaced from Ukraine.

- The lack of an exit or sustainability strategy for the hosting assistance programme, particularly following the planned end of temporary protection status in February 2023 and 2024.

After working with families for a year, we were suddenly back to square one again; they are scared about what will happen with their housing, what will happen to their families. These are vulnerable people, they cannot go back to Ukraine, they need some stability.

— *A SRC social worker on uncertainty associated with the duration of the programme*

LESSONS LEARNED

1. **Access to data.** Utilising data on recipients of state housing subsidies collated by municipalities helps prevent duplication and manage risks.

2. **Needs-tailored assistance.** Implementing targeted support based on household vulnerability extends government allowances and provides long-term assistance to the most vulnerable households.

3. **Matching system.** Establishing a mechanism for matching hosts and guests helps maximise the use of available resources, ensuring as many people as possible have access to safe housing.

4. **Collaboration and exchange.** Regular meetings, lessons learned-sharing and constant communication between Slovak Red Cross' Humanitarian Service Points contributes to smooth programme implementation.

5. **Diverse channels of communication.** Utilising social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp groups, and distributing leaflets at municipalities significantly enhances programme visibility and increases registration rates.

6. **Raising awareness on energy efficiency measures.** The energy-saving information in the leaflet, sensitisation, and the agreements with guests to reduce energy usage, helps minimise conflicts, and improves cohabitation and social cohesion.

The HSP in Poprad was the pilot HSP in Slovakia to provide help with accomodation for displaced people. - © Slovak Red Cross

NEXT STEPS

Experience gained from the hosting assistance programme enabled the Slovak Red Cross to extend its services to both vulnerable Slovak families and displaced people, including those from Ukraine.

The SRC plans to:

• Transform the Humanitarian Service Points into integration or community centres, providing support to people displaced from Ukraine who opt to stay in Slovakia long-term, as well as the broader community

• Conduct campaigns to raise awareness and foster acceptance of people from outside Slovakia, prioritising schools and workplaces, and addressing issues such as bullying.

• Facilitate mediation sessions for members of both Slovak and displaced communities to promote understanding and harmony.

• Explore avenues to sustain housing and accommodation initiatives for Slovak families and incorporate support for individuals at risk of eviction.

• Expand language courses, offering instruction in languages such as Ukrainian, Russian, and English, ensuring continuity and broader accessibility. Provide ongoing support for translation and document recognition services.

• Establish a comprehensive database documenting people's skills and interests to facilitate effective job matching.

RECOMMENDATIONS

• The government should shift from a blanket approach to a more targeted strategy, focusing on the specific needs of vulnerable individuals and households. This will ensure that support is directed where it is most needed, potentially improving the effectiveness and impact of the assistance programme.

• A monitoring mechanism should be established to help verify that hosts are being reimbursed correctly. Such a mechanism would enhance accountability and transparency within the programme.

• Develop a comprehensive sustainability strategy for guests participating in the hosting assistance programme, specifically addressing the period following the planned end of temporary protection status.

• It is essential to address special needs of people with disabilities and older people, both Slovak and foreigners.

• Advocacy initiatives, awareness-raising activities, and sensitisation campaigns should be developed and implemented. Mobilising resources to support specific groups and fostering a shift in societal mindset are crucial for creating lasting positive change.

• The Slovak Red Cross must continue aiding vulnerable Slovak families and those at risk of eviction, but also extend support to people who have been displaced and build those activities based on the lessons learned from the implementation of the hosting assistance programme.

Some of the HSPs are about to transform into community centres. © Slovak Red Cross

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