

SAFE HOMES

KEY LESSONS FROM HOSTING
PEOPLE DISPLACED FROM
UKRAINE IN PRIVATE HOMES

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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GLOSSARY

Hosting or **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 or **private accommodation scheme** refers to organised programmes, by authorities, civil society organisations (CSOs) or groups of individuals, that provide accommodation, either in a shared or vacant space, and other support to hosts and guests. Recently digital platforms have been set up to connect guests with hosts. These schemes may or may not foresee monetary contributions or other incentives such as tax benefits for hosts as a contribution towards food or utilities, for example. This is sometimes called 'pledge' 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.

Host is the household that accommodates the guests and may provide additional support too. Hosts are often family members, friends or friends of friends. But they may also be strangers who have connected through a hosting scheme, social media platform or spontaneous encounter.

Guests or **hosted people** are people temporarily accommodated in a hosted arrangement by a host.

Solidarity household describes the household in which the host and the guest live together in the same home.

Social workers or **case workers** are the people employed to care for the solidarity households through **social follow ups**. They are central to building and maintaining relationships of trust with and between hosts and guests.

Host community or **local community** is the community (including hosts) that temporarily hosts and shares private and public resources with displaced people. It includes people in vulnerable situations and excluded groups.

Community welcoming initiatives are schemes through which people can support newcomers integrate into the local community such as community sponsorship.

Preparedness or **contingency planning** means preparing public authorities, CSOs and other organisations to be ready to respond effectively in an emergency.

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

Homelessness affects people experiencing diverse living situations from sleeping rough to living in temporary shelter or insecure or inadequate housing.¹

Reception centres or **accommodation facilities** are spaces set up by public authorities to collectively house displaced people. The size, infrastructure, and way of governing these spaces vary across countries.

BACKGROUND

The public response to the escalation in the international armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine has brought to the fore practices of hosting displaced populations within local communities.

Across Europe, thousands of people have opened their homes or offered vacant properties to welcome displaced persons and families. This wave of solidarity was especially prominent between February and summer 2022, when citizen-led initiatives emerged to support the needs of people who had been displaced, including finding accommodation. Several National Red Cross Societies across the EU became active in the private hosting space, registering thousands of offers to host. In the Netherlands, 3,458 guests were placed in 1,726 host families. The Irish Red Cross secured 11,300 suitable pledges housing 21,966 people in either shared accommodation or vacant properties. In Luxembourg, 401 displaced families were hosted with the support of Caritas and the Luxembourg Red Cross and 162 vacant properties were offered to the Red Cross to house people at no cost. In Slovakia, 241 local families hosted people who had fled Ukraine.² While most people first stayed within their own networks of family and friends, or in state-provided accommodation, 19% stayed with a local family they had never met before.³ In Poland,, 3% of the population in the biggest cities invited people into their homes, while a further 10% of citizens helped find suitable accommodation.⁴ Research in Germany, Belgium and the UK shows that for many hosts, this was the first time being involved in refugee-welcoming initiatives.⁵

Numerous private hosting initiatives emerged across Europe: from spontaneous and self-organised citizen-led initiatives to more formal hosting schemes led by civil society organisations (CSOs) or national and local governments. The notion of ‘home’ took on various meanings in these hosting scenarios. For some people, hosting entailed a deep immersion into a new household, sharing the space with a local family, getting used to each other’s routines and behaviours. Meanwhile other families were accommodated in vacant properties, such as privately owned second residences or gifted properties from commercial landlords and religious institutions, providing a stronger sense of independent living. In other cases, accommodation resembled collective centres when, for instance, student residences, holiday villages or entire hotels fell under government-led private hosting schemes. Therefore, the notion of *private hosting* carries different meanings across the EU. Importantly, a significant number of people found accommodation informally, outside recognised schemes and without using any official hosting platform.⁶

In Ukraine, hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people were offered shelter by a fellow citizen. The Ukrainian Red Cross Society provided financial support to up to 100,000 hosts (and 300,000 displaced people) in 2023, while creating connections and a sense of community and mutual aid amid the devastating consequences of the armed conflict.⁷

Hosting practices have existed for centuries around the world. In the face of conflict, disaster or climate-related displacement, neighbours have long mobilised to host people who have lost their homes. Examples of such practices can be found in Sri Lanka, Haiti, the Gambia, Pakistan and Lebanon.⁸ In Europe, the Irish Red Cross first launched its Registry of Pledges in 2015 to support people who had fled to Ireland because of the armed conflict in Syria.⁹ In Belgium and France, networks of hosts have been supporting people in need through initiatives such as *Hébergement citoyen* and *Comme à la Maison*.¹⁰ In the UK, Housing Justice¹¹ has been matching hosts with migrants at risk of homelessness since 2015, much like in the Netherlands where in 2015 Takecarebnb started connecting asylum seekers awaiting state-provided accommodation with hosts. In some countries the culture of hosting extends beyond responding to displacement to welcoming



Marie (host) and Liubov (guest) taking a walk in Collooney, Ireland. © Irish Red Cross

travellers, students and fellow citizens into private homes.¹² Hosting is thus part of the social fabric, with a breadth of expertise and experiences in Europe that precede the escalation of the armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine in 2022.

Pre-existing hosting schemes, practices and networks of solidarity were an essential basis for building the response to the displacement from Ukraine.

Private hosting expanded the range of solutions for temporary accommodation. It mobilised underused accommodation stock. European governments capitalised on citizens' widespread readiness to receive people in their own homes. Through public campaigns such as the *#PlekVrij*/*#PlaceDispo* in Belgium and *Familia necesita familia* in Spain, EU Member States relied on the hospitality of private individuals. Some states launched hosting schemes that offered financial support to hosts and incentivised local communities to participate. Examples include the 50/20 programme in Romania,¹³ the 40+ in Poland,¹⁴ housing allowances in Slovakia and Czech Republic, financial aid for hosts in France,¹⁵ and the Accommodation Recognition Payment in Ireland.¹⁶ The European Commission (EC) and the EU's Asylum Agency supported this approach by issuing guidance and

practical recommendations on the safe provision of emergency private accommodation. In particular, the Commission launched the Safe Homes initiative¹⁷ in March 2022 to support these private initiatives and those organising and running them. In July 2022, it published the Safe Homes guidance¹⁸ consolidating good practices from Member States, regional and local authorities and civil society involved in setting up private hosting schemes.

Private homes became an important source of housing that, temporarily, relieved pressure on reception systems and rental markets.

Two years on, the prolonged reliance on such private response has exposed the limits of refugee reception infrastructure across the EU and, more generally, longstanding structural problems affecting all citizens. State authorities and civil society actors are compelled to engage in a desperate quest to source accommodation for people displaced from Ukraine: from hotels, holiday villages, modular housing, tents, former nursing homes to vacant properties and private homes. Many hosts continue to make their homes available. Many guests face a significant obstacle – the struggle to find suitable and affordable longer-term accommodation.

HOSTING AS A RECEPTION TOOL?



Maintaining a hospitable civil society space is essential, as acts of solidarity spontaneously arise in emergencies

Whether it is offering food, clothing, transport, shelter, or creating communal spaces, people come together during emergencies, with communities stepping up to help. Public authorities should promote and enable a conducive environment for humanitarian support for people in need, regardless of their status. Welcoming sentiments foster more resilient and inclusive societies against division and polarisation.

When done well, hosting can provide integration opportunities and has many strengths for the wider community

Hosting can offer a favourable environment and valuable connections that enable guests to move on with their lives. Yet, it relies on trust and human interaction, which can be complex and unpredictable, particularly in prolonged hosting relationships. Successful hosting schemes require sufficient public resources to offer social support, prevent exploitative arrangements and address potential protection risks. A crucial aspect of preparedness is having the operational capacity in local authorities and support organisations, including sufficient and trained case workers as well as robust technology and information management infrastructure.



Successful hosting schemes must plan for the future

Before launching a hosting scheme, public authorities must address critical questions: How will guests transition to a more permanent solution? What measures need to be in place to facilitate a transition towards autonomy? Without an exit plan, prolonged hosting arrangements risk straining the guest-host relationship and eroding confidence in public institutions.



Access to rights and services is a pre-condition for integration and social inclusion

The swift response to displacement from Ukraine confirmed the benefits of granting newcomers rapid access to education, healthcare, social services, the labour market and freedom of movement. It also served as a stark reminder of the crucial need to strengthen and invest in public housing and health infrastructures as indispensable elements of fostering inclusion and integration, regardless of migration status. Such investments are paramount to avoid anti-migration sentiments and perceived competition for resources.



Hosting can only be an *interim* measure to address homelessness and housing exclusion

Like other short-term accommodation options and emergency shelters, hosting can only temporarily fill a gap, be part of a journey, while authorities work on finding long-lasting solutions. Everyone, from case workers to guests and hosts, agrees on the urgent need for public authorities to prioritise investment in innovative housing policies and solutions to address the housing market crisis towards ending homelessness and housing exclusion. Public authorities must step up to this enormous challenge with the kind of leadership that will ultimately help close socioeconomic divides.



Hosting is a versatile option to accommodate people who have lost their homes

People lose their homes for many reasons, from fires and floods to eviction, migration and war. Hosting is a versatile response option, alongside shelters or reception facilities, but might not meet the needs of everyone. So, it is important to consider the suitability and understand the needs of displaced households when designing such schemes. In the future, EU and national budgets should enable a needs-based approach to interim accommodation arrangements, such as hosting, which guarantee adequate options for all regardless of migration or other status.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED

1

Hosting schemes must be designed with clear exit strategies, set up from the start, which enable guests to transition from hosting arrangements

6

Hosting is a finite resource: it should prioritise the most suitable households, and adapt to a changing environment

11

Clear and updated guidance and awareness raising for interested hosts and guests is key to an informed engagement, because hosting is not for everyone

2

A lack of exit strategies can undermine the trust of hosts, stopping them from engaging in hosting in the future

7

Financial incentives for hosts can be helpful but need to be carefully designed to ensure sustainability and avoid distorting the housing market

12

A written agreement outlining the commitments of hosts, guests and supporting organisations can avoid potential issues and address the lack of formal tenancy rights

3

The organisation of hosting requires a multi-stakeholder and cross-sectoral approach, with actors working together to optimise expertise and resources

8

Organisations should invest in information management systems to process the large amounts of data associated with hosting, while ensuring compliance with data protection laws

13

Hosts provide essential support, but cannot replace the role of social workers and public authorities

4

Local authorities and hosting organisations should be provided with additional funding and resources proportional to the demands of receiving newcomers, while also recognising and actively seeking input from established local expertise

9

Experienced hosts should be involved in recruiting, guiding and developing support networks for new hosts

14

Hosting can offer a favourable environment and valuable connections that can enable guests to move on with their lives, while positively affecting the wider community

5

Hosting requires robust social support to guarantee a safe hosting relationship, resolve issues as they arise and prevent hosting fatigue

10

Nurturing existing hosting relationships is as important as facilitating new matches, for the ongoing cohabitation as well as for future engagement of hosts and their networks

15

Housing allocation should be aligned with people's preferences and availability and access to public services and employment opportunities

INTRODUCTION

The **Safe Homes programme** began in February 2023 with a two-fold aim: to offer suitable and safe accommodation to people displaced from Ukraine while collecting lessons learned to inform future practices and policies. It was implemented by nine National Red Cross Societies from Belgium, France, Ireland, Hungary, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania and Slovakia, and the Red Cross EU Office. The programme was funded by AMIF as part of the European Commission's Safe Homes initiative and managed by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) Secretariat. It offered an opportunity for collective reflection on the use of hosting as a tool to accommodate people who have lost their homes.

This report is primarily **aimed at public authorities** to inform and inspire their work and future actions. It reflects the strengths and fault lines of hosting, as observed through the firsthand experiences of National Red Cross Societies and their partners while implementing the Safe Homes programme. It highlights some vital aspects of the long-term institutional preparedness that public authorities should put in place to make hosting a potential option for the future. It presents examples from relevant cases and initiatives implemented in different Member States, including experiences from community sponsorship projects.

The report outlines **15 key lessons** for authorities venturing into hosting, serving as a guide for ensuring the safety, dignity and well-being of hosts and guests. The lessons presented are the result of a collective effort. Research for this report was carried out from March to December 2023 by National Red Cross Societies in Belgium, France, Ireland, Hungary, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. Methodologies varied across countries: some adopted mixed methods with surveys and focus groups, while others used only qualitative data. The Red Cross EU Office collected and analysed cross-country findings and conducted additional research through expert interviews. Numerous national workshops with public authorities, CSOs, hosts and guests, as well as a regional lessons learned workshop were held to facilitate cross-border learning, while providing opportunities for peer discussion and exchange.

NOTE TO THE READER WHAT DO THE ICONS IN THIS REPORT MEAN?



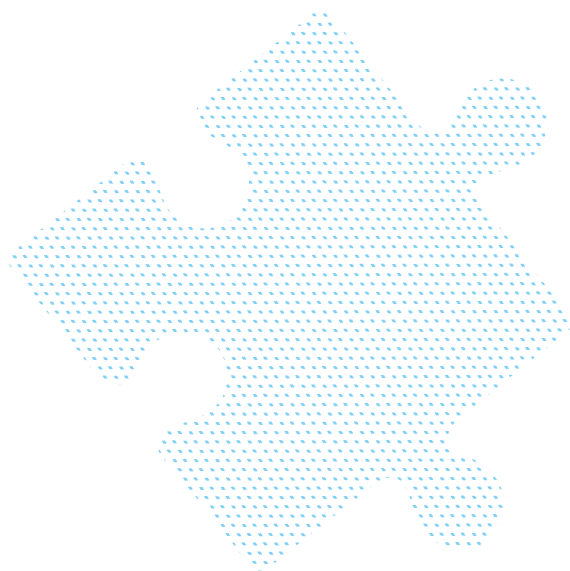
Key considerations

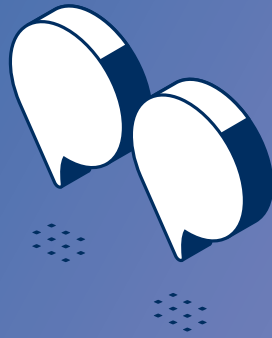


Good practice examples

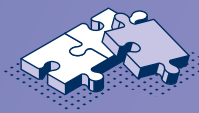


Interesting insights

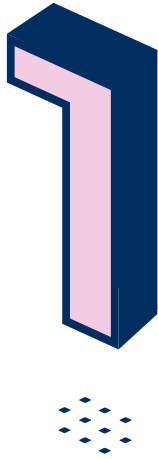




“Everything starts with accommodation. We heard that all the time from the refugees. Unless they know where they are going to stay, they can't focus on something else like enrolling kids to school, find a job, and so on.”



Social worker, Slovak Red Cross



Hosting schemes must be designed with clear exit strategies, set up from the start, which enable guests to transition from hosting arrangements

Findings from the Safe Homes programme highlight the need to devise 'exit strategies' from the outset when considering private hosting as an option to accommodate people who have lost their homes. Questions on how guests will transition to a more permanent solution, and the policies, investments and services that can facilitate this transition are paramount.¹⁹ The available options and support needed to move on from hosted arrangements will determine, for instance, the possibilities to use hosting on a large scale.

In the context of forced migration, people's migratory projects might be very different: some might only need accommodation for a few weeks while in transit, others might decide to stay. This report focuses on the exit strategy for people who want to stay, as they cannot go back to their country of origin for multiple reasons.

An important point for reflection is the perception of the *temporary nature* of the displacement from Ukraine. Long-term planning, including integration and inclusion strategies were lacking since it was uncertain when people would be able to return. Although the length of people's stay is difficult to predict, conflict-related displacement is rarely short term. According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), at the end of 2022, 67% of refugees in Europe had been displaced for five or more years,²² indicating the likelihood of longer-term stays. Research from Ireland suggests that more people entered the work force in 2023 due in part, to their acceptance that the Russia-Ukraine international armed conflict is unlikely to end soon.²³ This acceptance can also be seen in the increasing proportion of people who are planning to stay in Ireland long term: the initial desire to stay (41%²⁴) increased to 53% after a year.²⁵



An exit strategy should bring the housing, integration and inclusion dimensions together.

This approach recognises the interconnected nature of life by addressing vital aspects such as securing stable housing, finding employment, fostering participation in community and social life as well as accessing education and healthcare.²⁰ It aims to support people towards autonomy, while recognising their circumstances and needs. Some may require extra time and support to rebuild their lives in the host community and achieve socioeconomic inclusion. Also, post-migration stress caused by conflict and displacement further complicates the path toward self-sufficiency requiring that all actors involved, from policymakers to practitioners, adopt trauma and healing-centred approaches.²¹



Galway, August 2023. Picture taken by the author.



“At the very beginning, people thought they were going to be here for a short period of time. Everybody was in this temporary mode. Most people were sitting on their suitcases waiting for the day to go back home. But now, you can see the changes in people’s way of thinking. They finally started to realise that it is not going to happen anytime soon.”

Ukrainian case worker, Irish Red Cross

Despite the initially perceived temporary nature of people’s stay, not everyone will return to their home country in the short term. In fact, a significant number of people will stay. The lack of plans for permanent solutions posed major consequences to the cohabitation itself, increasing dependency on the host home and, thereby, the power asymmetry between hosts and guests. In Poland, focus group discussions with guests revealed that the uncertainty of legal status prevented them from making long-term decisions or accessing integration and inclusion services.

Access to adequate housing is central to people’s well-being, enabling integration and inclusion. But the scarcity of affordable rental and social housing²⁶ and the underused vacant stock,²⁷ coupled with landlords’ reluctance to offer short-term leases and discrimination, have made securing long-term housing options extremely difficult across Europe. Newcomers face additional hurdles because of administrative obstacles, their limited social network and understanding of the language, surroundings and system.²⁸ Research from Hungary shows how newcomers, especially Roma communities, faced discrimination in accessing the rental market even if they spoke Hungarian. People displaced from Ukraine were asked to pay higher rents than local residents and, in Poland, they struggled to secure rental contracts as landlords were often reluctant to rent to them.²⁹



Anastasiia and Dmytro walking their dog Phoebe in Sligo, Ireland. They found accommodation through the Irish Red Cross in a property offered by a host © Irish Red Cross.

The problem of affordable and adequate housing affects everyone. So addressing the housing market crisis will benefit not just newcomers but the host community, especially low-income households. This could include changes in legislation to limit the commodification of housing, housing policy interventions such as social housing, activating vacant stock and land, mobilising private rental stock for social purposes, and making use of innovative legal and financial schemes to improve the ability of households experiencing vulnerability to access and stay in the rental market.³⁰

The role of adequate housing in fulfilling other rights is becoming a priority for several organisations across the EU. In their work, they opt for person-centred, community and housing-led approaches for people affected by or at risk of homelessness, including migrants and refugees.³² Furthermore, the EC Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027 promotes models of autonomous rather than collective housing, recognising the central role of having a place of residence to get a job and access education, healthcare and social services.³³ It is critical that much needed housing interventions should be focused on accommodating a mix of people to encourage integration rather than a focus on people with specific nationalities or migration statuses.



With the aim of “inspiring more courage and creativity in housing policy”, **FEANTSA’s 50 out-of-the-box housing solutions to homelessness and housing exclusion** across the EU present concrete ideas of how to provide decent and affordable housing to people most in need.³¹



In **Poland**, local authorities tried to accelerate all housing programmes planned for the next few years, such as the Social Rental Agency statutory model: a housing-led model of social services, combining rental housing support, employment services and social work in a single institutional framework.



A lack of exit strategies can undermine the trust of hosts, stopping them from hosting in the future

Hosted arrangements generally extended beyond the foreseen short-term standard commitment of three to six months. For instance, in Germany and Belgium, about 50% of hosts hosted for a longer period than anticipated.³⁴ The average duration of hosting in Belgium and the Netherlands was eight months, and in France seven.³⁵ In Ireland, 53% of hosts reported being willing to extend their arrangement for a year or more.³⁶ Although this uncertainty primarily impacted the daily life of the solidarity household, Red Cross staff and volunteers also had to navigate a situation that risked pushing guests into destitution.³⁷

Participating in a solidarity household involves a significant emotional investment. So the way the hosting relationship ends is critical, as it can lead to conflicts and disappointments. The unintended consequences of a prolonged hosting arrangement without prospect of transition to a long-lasting solution are substantial for three key reasons. First, the lack of options to move out can betray the trust of the hosts, preventing them from engaging in hosting again. Some hosts felt trapped, as they saw few opportunities for their guests to find alternative accommodation, all while grappling with the emotional guilt associated with agreeing to their guests relocating to medium and large-scale collective shelters. Second, relying on private individuals for prolonged periods of time results in an unequal distribution of responsibility between public authorities and private individuals. Third, it places guests at risk of exploitative arrangements, and of becoming homeless, as their housing security relies on the goodwill of hosts. But, importantly, in countries with substantial financial support packages for hosts like Ireland, the burden of hosting is somewhat alleviated, thus enabling the hosting period to extend.³⁸



Rematching, brokering and other creative ad hoc solutions to fill the gap in structural housing options

'Rematching' or 'relocating' entails moving guests from one host family to another. This is a complex process that requires extensive work by case workers to find suitable arrangements, ideally in the same location to avoid impacting people's livelihoods. In **France**, the CSO SINGA reassured guests that if they could not find alternative housing, they would be accommodated in SINGA's hosting community for a year. In **Spain**, the initial arrangements, whereby hosts did not receive financial compensation, could be converted into a 'cohabitation agreement' for a fee. In the **Netherlands**, an Airbnb that was initially hosting several households at no cost was transformed into municipal accommodation where the municipality paid for the expenses. In **Poland**, most guests found new arrangements through their networks of friends and colleagues. Generally, the role played by hosts and case workers was crucial to negotiating ad hoc solutions at the local level by engaging in conversations with municipalities or landlords. There was immense willingness to help and find solutions despite structural constraints. Yet these ad hoc solutions often relied on local connections and public goodwill.



Prioritising access to autonomous housing by using existing systems at an unprecedented scale

Rental intermediation³⁹ is a French public housing assistance scheme that facilitates access to the rental market for low-income households. A certified organisation such as the French Red Cross absorbs housing units from the private rental market to then sublet with an affordable rent.⁴⁰

In the context of displacement from Ukraine, housing units could be absorbed from private and social stock. This instruction departed from usual practice, which involves absorbing stock from the private market. In 2022, 27,000 people displaced from Ukraine benefited from independent housing through the scheme.⁴¹ The scale of use and the great engagement of landlords was unprecedented – the result of a strong mobilisation of public authorities and civil society to ensure access to independent housing along with social support for people fleeing Ukraine.

Yet this endeavour was not without its challenges, such as the predominant availability of accommodation in rural or remote areas, resulting in limited access to services. And as leases approached their end, people encountered few alternative options, leading some households to return to their initial private hosts.



“One of the biggest challenges has been the lack of housing, and this is particularly frustrating for social workers because they have no influence on this issue. Many guests feel deeply frustrated because they do not want to return to reception facilities, but they do not have access to social housing either. This situation leaves them perplexed.”

Social worker, Luxembourg Red Cross



Solidarity is not bottomless – it is important to avoid reaching a tipping point

National Red Cross Societies have observed that in times of emergency, people show remarkable solidarity – a strong desire to help and offer mutual aid. But if authorities fail to provide a lasting solution, public support can shift. There comes a tipping point where the public becomes unwilling to support the implementation of governments' duties. The risk is not only people's disengagement but also a loss of confidence in public institutions. Public authorities need to avoid reaching this tipping point. In this context, it is a protracted situation where hosting extends over time leading to exhaustion and potential burnout.

While most agree that hosting assistance is valuable in creating additional and humane reception capacity, the increasing unaffordability of housing frustrates many exit plans especially for low-income and vulnerable displaced people in Europe. The shortage of available options for moving out has major consequences for cohabitation, increasing the dependence on the host. This raises the question of how extensively private households can get involved in taking on the state's role in providing reception accommodation when there is no clear vision and strategy for long-term housing solutions.⁴² Still, hosting does give public authorities extra time to work on other medium-term accommodation options as a precursor to longer-term housing solutions.

The problem with housing requires fundamental and structural change. Yet there are examples of initiatives to ease the transition to medium and long-term housing solutions by providing social and financial support.⁴³ This can include mediation with landlords, rental guarantees, additional deposit protection, grants for deposits, provision of household items and/or moving costs, and rental payments. This type of support could be invested in hosting schemes, while pursuing partnerships with housing support organisations for referrals.



Housing as a strategic priority

In **Luxembourg**, the Red Cross seeks to respond to the housing needs of people by helping to implement innovative, collaborative solutions, favouring social diversity.⁴⁴ It conducts research and development of innovative concepts for affordable and social housing projects in collaboration with other associations and public or private actors, at local and national levels.

The Luxembourg Red Cross operates two systems to aid local residents and newcomers in accessing the rental market: the *Garantie Croix-Rouge* (rental guarantee by the Red Cross) and the *Garantie Locative Sociale* (the governmental social rental programme supported by CSOs).⁴⁵

The *Garantie Locative Sociale* is similar to the rental intermediation model in France. Property owners are required to rent at rates lower than those in the private rental market. Owners are given incentives such as a reduced tax rate (90% tax exemption on rental income), assured property maintenance, guaranteed rent and the potential for longer-lease agreements or a rapid liberation of the apartment in case of personal need. With the *Garantie Croix-Rouge*, the Red Cross acts as a guarantor for the first year of the lease. In contrast to social rental management, the rental contract is signed between the owner and the tenants, who pay the rent themselves. Income management counselling is available if tenants miss rent payments. On average, of 50–60

households receiving this type of rental assistance each year, only two need income management support. Prospective tenants must have a permanent job and sufficient savings to cover three months' rent. The rent must be maximum 30% of the family's budget.

In the context of Ukraine, temporary protection holders found it difficult to access both options. The first is designed for tenants with a residence permit and permanent working contract, while the validity of people's temporary protection initially lasted for one year only. The second option also requires a fixed-term employment contract and the challenge of securing affordable accommodation which, as in many other EU countries, proved to be very difficult. In Luxembourg, social housing accounts for only 2% of the available stock.

During the first months of the escalation of the armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine in 2022, the Luxembourg Red Cross was provided with 162 houses and apartments, offered for free to accommodate displaced persons. Some properties were spacious enough to house multiple families, while others were suitable for flat sharing for individuals. Utility costs were covered by the Red Cross. Due to the limitations in accessing the existing systems, these donations proved to be the most effective means for people to access independent housing.





From hosting to rental subsidies: Adapting to a changing environment in the local community

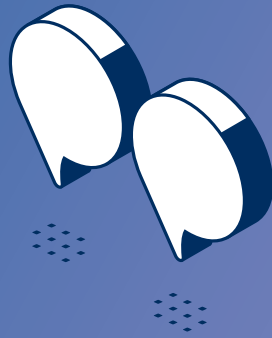
By July 2022, there was a notable decline in hosting offers in **Hungary**. The From Street to Home Association and Habitat for Humanity opted to redesign their hosting programmes, based on solidarity and without financial incentives for hosts, into a rental subsidy programme, covering up to 50% of guests' rent for 3 to 6 months. The subsidised period gave households time to find employment and become economically stronger. Single earner and single parent households found transitioning out of the subsidised programme particularly challenging.⁴⁶ The organisations' ability to be attuned to the needs of newcomers and the local community was essential in preventing hosting fatigue and enabling guests to secure more autonomous housing. Other organisations such as Caritas, the Evangelical Lutheran Diakonia and the Jesuit Refugee Service set up an informal network to support covering the rental costs for longer periods of time.



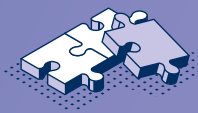
Having 'guides' to navigate the rental market

In **Germany**, the Hamburg-based initiative *Wohnbruecke* supports refugees to move out from reception centres or hosting arrangements into their own apartments. Each household connects with a *Wohnungs-Lotsen*,⁴⁷ a volunteer who will help search for housing, mediate with landlords and guide the newcomers into the neighbourhood. Many hosts have become *Wohnungs-Lotsen*, supporting guests to move out. Volunteers, including hosts, are trained in property/tenancy law, social security rights, important aspects of the local housing market and general advice. Refugees receive individual counselling to prepare them for the flat search. Navigating the rental market together, refugees and volunteers form networks of support while dismantling landlords' potential fears and assumptions. Such initiatives point to the importance of empowering communities through knowledge and to the central roles that organisations can play as brokers, and volunteers as bridges.

Wohnbruecke opened in 2015, when Hamburg was overwhelmed by newcomers, as brokers between refugees and landlords who wanted to offer their vacant properties.



“We should practice working together. How are we going to be prepared to work together in the next emergency? How are we going to stay connected? We were surprised by each other’s strengths and how powerful we are together.”



Staff member, Netherlands Red Cross



The organisation of hosting requires a multi-stakeholder and cross-sectoral approach, with actors working together to optimise expertise and resources

During the early months of the escalation in the Russia-Ukraine international armed conflict in 2022, there was a remarkable display of solidarity in Europe, where spontaneous citizen-led initiatives emerged to address urgent needs. Many groups and organisations actively engaged in hosting – some newly formed and others with experience of community sponsorship and supporting people on the move. At the same time, several government-led schemes emerged that used and invested in private hosting.⁴⁸

experienced a similar situation where most hosting arrangements were concluded informally.⁵¹

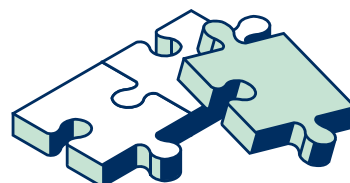
This led to a reflection about the role that organisations like the Red Cross could play in the future. Instead of setting up hosting schemes, there is an important ‘facilitating role’ in supporting spontaneous matching or citizen-led initiatives by, for example, offering guidance on protection and safeguarding, which raises the question: How can informal arrangements that might need support be made visible?

One option to engage with citizen groups is through formal partnerships. For example, the **Irish Red Cross**, initially overwhelmed by the number of hosting offers, observed that the citizen-led initiative Helping Irish Hosts had great reach, a track record in matching hosts and guests, and a willingness to help. The Irish Red Cross decided to engage with and fund the organisation which later became a consortium partner.



Working with citizen-led initiatives

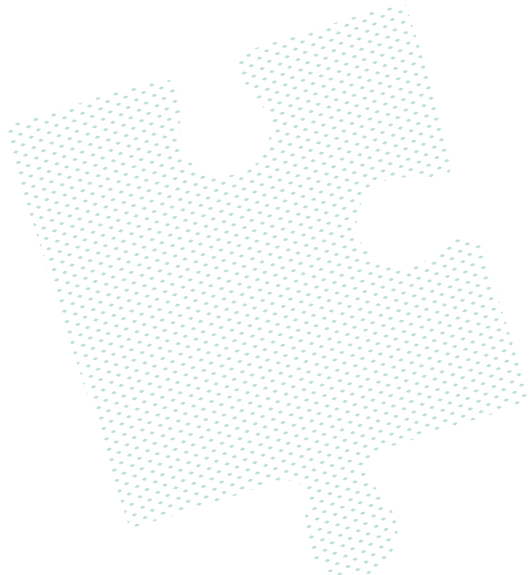
“We need to become much better at reading our external environment”, emphasised a partner from the **RefugeeHomeNL** consortium⁴⁹ during a Safe Homes lessons learned workshop. Established in April 2023 at the request of the Dutch government, RefugeeHomeNL was tasked with setting up and organising the housing of displaced persons from Ukraine in private homes. During the evaluation of the scheme, the **Netherlands Red Cross** highlighted that most⁵⁰ hosting relationships were formed spontaneously through friends or family or with the support of citizen-led initiatives. Other countries like France and Poland



Public authorities should strive for engagement, coordination, financing and, when needed, rapid capacity building of citizen-led organisations, groups and individuals that emerge to support people in need, often filling a gap left by overwhelmed systems. Authorities should promote and enable a conducive environment for hosting and other humanitarian support.⁵² Meanwhile, an open institutional environment is key to ensure dialogue and optimise expertise, methods and tools from organisations already engaged in hosting and other community welcoming initiatives.⁵³

Response to future challenges will depend on how well people, organisations and public authorities collaborate. One single actor can rarely tackle all aspects of welcoming people to a new place. All participants in the Safe Homes programme recognised the pivotal role of collaborations. Citizen-led initiatives that emerge in times of emergency are often flexible and extremely adaptable. More established organisations such as the Red Cross can complement these by leveraging its trust-based relationships with people in need to foster a sense of protection and well-being, while making links with public services. Local authorities can offer local knowledge and a framework for realising rights and accessing services.

Looking forward, questions include: how can we best support citizen-led initiatives and upscale existing local practices? Which government partner shares a similar approach to supporting people in need? How do we mobilise and engage with different actors, developing inclusive and equitable partnerships? And how can we encourage 'evolving partnerships' given that needs change over time?⁵⁴



GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR BUILDING LASTING PARTNERSHIPS⁵⁵

- Ensure **cross-sectoral composition** involving national, regional and local authorities, private sector and CSOs.

- Acknowledge and rely on **each other's strengths** when deciding on a **programmatic framework** that defines common interests and shared values as well as clear roles and responsibilities.

- Find an **equilibrium** between building standards and respecting the diversity in approaches.

- Discuss **data-sharing protocols and agreements** from the start, as they often take time to conclude yet are important to ensure data protection and smooth implementation.

- Opt for **co-production** by involving local authorities, civil society, local and diaspora communities in design and decision-making.

- Have each organisation's **leadership onboard** to allow for more effective decision-making that enables agility.

- Shift away from hierarchical structures to a **consensual and collaborative model**.

- Create **shared vision, values** and the ability to maintain a **strong sense of purpose** under pressure.

- Have **full-time dedicated teams** composed of people from the different organisations from the start.

- Establish regular forums for frank and **open communication**.

- Strive for the **right balance** between formality and informality.

- Adopt **flexibility** in approach and readiness to adapt to changes in context.

- **Trust** new stakeholders whose expertise has been proven.



Co-production in practice: Involving diaspora communities in decision-making

In March 2022, the regional Brussels government set up working groups on individual accommodation, collective accommodation, employment, education, access to health and social rights and communication, each with a focal point from the refugee-led organisation Ukrainian Voices.⁵⁶ The aim was for affected communities to shape decision-making by passing on information about needs and barriers to accessing services to the authorities. Being part of the working groups also kept the community informed about policy changes and new integration and inclusion activities. The political and financial support of the regional government enabled the organisation to grow and become a key player in representing the Ukrainian community in Brussels.

This example highlights the significance of including people with lived experience at different levels of decision-making. There are now ten refugee-run committees in Brussels,⁵⁷ representing communities from Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Burundi, Eritrea, Somalia, Ukraine and LGBTQIA+⁵⁸ refugees.



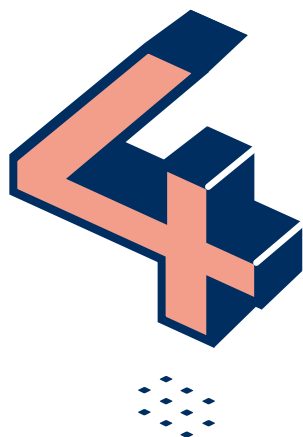
Between formality and informality: The Lublin Social Committee to Aid Ukraine

In response to the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, local authorities and local organisations⁵⁹ established a cross-sectoral committee defining themselves as “an informal social movement, without a stamp, headquarters or office, supporting the public assistance system”.⁶⁰ This mobilised thousands of volunteers through an enrolment platform, dividing labour, establishing duty schedules and offering training and psychosocial support to volunteers.⁶¹ Such solidarity networks dated back to 2021 and were first formed to respond to humanitarian needs at the Poland-Belarus border.⁶² Pre-existing connections between authorities and CSOs were essential to this emergency response.



The ‘one-stop-shop’ approach for beneficiaries of temporary protection in France: a good practice with benefits for other groups too

Across France, several cities adopted the ‘one-stop-shop’ approach used by UNHCR in several reception points for refugees and asylum seekers worldwide. Cities established these hubs, with relevant administrations of the *préfecture* under the same roof, most notably those responsible for accommodation, living allowances⁶³ and health insurance services.⁶⁴ This multi-stakeholder approach has made it easier and faster for people to access their rights such as housing, healthcare and education. Based on this successful practice, the French Red Cross is advocating to extend this one-stop-shop approach to all groups.



Local authorities and hosting organisations should be provided with additional funding and resources proportional to the demands of receiving newcomers, while also recognising and actively seeking input from established local expertise

Government-led initiatives often struggled to meaningfully engage both local authorities and local hosting initiatives, leading to tensions in implementing hosting schemes. Despite the unprecedented commitment to welcome people fleeing Ukraine at all levels, in many cases there was a noticeable lack of coordination.

2022 was the first time that governments in Europe resorted to private individuals to host displaced populations on such a large scale.⁶⁵ This often meant that hosting was not officially recognised at the local level as part of a city's reception and integration systems. This lack of recognition could be attributed to the absence of an official framework and clear procedures, insufficient allocation of funding and a lack of awareness about private hosting. Hence, some solidarity households fell under the radar of authorities and organisations.



“The agreements between the central government and the regions regarding accommodation of temporary protection holders did not consider people that were staying in private homes, nor did it yet have a pay system that would enable municipalities to deal with the demands of those in hosted arrangements. So, in the beginning we thought we were doing a service to municipalities. But it was perceived very differently by the local authorities: you are bringing new people that I have to take care of, without having the means to do it.”

Case worker, Netherlands Red Cross



Andrii, hosted in the Netherlands through RefugeeHomeNL © Netherlands Red Cross.

Findings from the Safe Homes programme show significant disparities and a high degree of discretion in the roles played by municipalities to support people staying with host families or in offered vacant properties. They organised private hosting in a highly variable way, which often became a matter of ‘personalities’ and ‘good will’, with some local authorities refusing to engage or hesitating to formally acknowledge private hosting, and others actively seeking such solutions.⁶⁶

The fragmented response led to a lack of clarity and predictability about resources and support available to hosts and guests as well as a lack of systematic vetting and monitoring. In France and Belgium, for example, the extent and quality of follow-up services provided to the solidarity households depended on the location, motivation of individual social workers and available resources. Municipalities encountered further challenges with people’s integration, including around schooling and education, employment, local economy and social cohesion.⁶⁷ In Poland, there was noticeable inconsistency in how in the 40+ financial benefits for hosts were understood, especially for persons with disabilities and the documentation needed to support their eligibility. Similarly, in France,

the requirements to apply for financial benefits were understood differently by local authorities and CSOs. The ambiguity in formulating legal provisions coupled with lack of communication about how to interpret the law led to discretion at local level.



“The state has relied almost entirely on the solidarity of its citizens. It’s a problem because there was no prospect of a long-term solution. Host families were stretched to the limit. Then the pressure fell on local authorities, which had to find solutions.”

Local authority representative, Belgium



Bold leadership at the local level

“Municipalities did not have a choice. They had to do it”, explained a Red Cross staff member in Belgium, about the responsibility of local authorities to care for newcomers. “Some responded quicker than others. They had different motivations and resources. But the fact that there wasn’t any preparedness complicated the implementation.”

Despite lacking a clear framework and resources, some cities and municipalities across the EU rose to the occasion to manage private hosting, often perceived as messy and too complex. In **Belgium**, some municipalities proactively defined roles, assigned social workers and took over the matching process to ensure the needs and vulnerabilities of hosts and guests were considered. Some further solidified their efforts by partnering with experienced citizen-led initiatives in private hosting, streamlining the monitoring of cohabitation and mediation. In the **Netherlands**, the G4 forum, comprising four major cities, and the Red Cross focused on policy interventions and future challenges like tax reductions for hosts and exit strategies for guests to transition to more sustainable housing.

In county Kerry, **Ireland**, the close working relationships between local CSOs like St. Vincent de Paul Society, Killarney Immigrant Support Centre and Tralee International Resource Centre, state-run organisations, volunteers and the local authority facilitated effective partnerships to welcome people displaced from Ukraine.⁶⁸ The pre-existing hospitable civil society space was pivotal in shaping the response. The shared vision among partners, led by the local authority, emphasised the integration and inclusion of newcomers. Together, these organisations provided support to help displaced people settle into Irish life. Kerry County Council represents a model for other counties in how to leverage the trust and dedication of CSOs working on the ground.

Across the EU, thousands of municipalities are at the forefront of welcoming and providing support to displaced people. In the context of Ukraine, for example, 900 French municipalities were involved in reception and private accommodation. In Ireland, local authorities ran the ‘Offer a Home’ programme to locally source vacant properties.⁶⁹ Most municipalities across the EU lacked experience and expertise in the processes, risks, and limitations of private hosting. They approached this task with varying levels of resources and commitment, leading to an inevitably fragmented response. That said responses were significantly improved when there was cooperation between municipalities and hosting organisations as experienced in Ireland.

The key question is how central and local authorities, along with civil society organisations such as the Red Cross, can orchestrate an environment (time, resources, shared vision, partnerships, etc.) that fosters bold and innovative leadership among local actors in addressing future challenges.



A collective commitment to welcoming migrants despite holding different positions on private hosting: the case of Lille and Nord prefecture

Lille, a French metropolis situated in the Nord prefecture between Belgium and the North Sea, has a rich history of migration due to its proximity to England. Twinned with Kharkiv since 1978, Lille was among the first French municipalities to organise humanitarian corridors from Ukraine to France. In February 2022, it urged its residents to open their homes to displaced people from Ukraine. Between 2022 and 2023, 655 people found refuge in 216 local homes, facilitated by local councillors who mapped hosting offers and matched hosts with guests. This commitment reflects Lille’s longstanding engagement: fundraising and solidarity actions date back to 2010, initially for Syria, Libya and Afghanistan. Despite the city’s efforts in matching households, the Nord regional authority expressed reservations about private hosting as a reception tool, citing concerns about trafficking and abuse. It opted to fund an organisation to vet and monitor cohabitations in the region, including in Lille.



Hosting requires robust social support to guarantee a safe hosting relationship, resolve issues as they arise and prevent hosting fatigue



Through regular interactions with hosts and guests, **case workers** can promptly identify concerns or conflicts, and provide essential mediation support. Maintaining regular contact also enables case workers to sense situations that may raise protection concerns.

In private hosting, where isolation can feel more pronounced, case workers serve as a vital link to services, and act as a crucial additional layer of protection. They are an important safeguard that can mitigate the risk of abuse. The case worker's role in caring for the hosting relationships entails constant attention, sensitivity and collaboration. Involving case workers and organisations can make a significant difference for newcomers, as noted by a Red Cross case worker in Slovakia: "The host feels trust if they know there are committed people behind. Our regular contact with hosts helped to prevent difficult situations."

Furthermore, case workers play a crucial role as mediators, facilitating agreements and communication with hosts and landlords, fostering trust between all actors. They are pivotal in addressing the inherent unequal power relationship between hosts and guests and are crucial for promoting a safe hosting environment. The roles taken on by hosts varied significantly, from being a 'flatmate' to essentially a 'landlord'. At times, guests and hosts developed close friendships, at others they remained strangers. The spectrum of relationships was infinite, with hosts often becoming deeply invested in supporting their guests, taking on more expansive roles that included dealing with administrative procedures and helping with job and flat searches. Yet the lack of adequately resourced teams can lead to situations where hosts and guests do not have sufficient access to support and are left to navigate complex bureaucratic systems alone. In France, CSOs have faced difficulties in recruitment due, in part, to short-term contracts with public authorities and high staff turnover.⁷⁰

A survey by the Belgian Red Cross found that 65% of interviewed host families did not know who to contact in the event of conflict with their guests. And 74% of the guest families felt their primary source for answers to their questions was their host family. In Ireland, 34% of host survey respondents reported being unaware of or did not need informational supports for hosting. Almost half (46%) of guests reported that their hosts were their biggest sources of support, followed by their network and friends (24%), social media sites or Telegram groups (11%) and a local authority or consortium organisation (9%). The remainder reported being either fully self-sufficient or felt 'totally alone'.

Hosting schemes must be paired with robust social support from the start to ensure the safety, dignity and well-being of hosts and guests, particularly the most vulnerable. However, the challenge emerges when responding on a large scale, as seen in the context of Ukraine: how can a balance be struck between swift action and ensuring a safe hosting environment?



Lucia, a Slovak Red Cross social worker visiting Júlia, who is hosting seven women displaced from Ukraine in Poprad © Slovak Red Cross.



The **Irish Red Cross** partnered with Mediation Ireland to support case workers in conflict resolution and provide tailored training in areas such as stress management and spotting domestic violence. Training sessions are held regularly and help ensure that case workers are constantly upskilling in response to the evolving nature of their role. Caseworkers can also contact Mediation Ireland to help resolve serious conflicts that emerge in hosted accommodation and are beyond their remit to resolve. Such training can strengthen the preparedness of any organisation looking to undertake hosting in the future.



Guests' perspective: seeking privacy and tranquillity

During focus groups in **Belgium**, some guests shared how, although they felt safe and warmly welcomed by the host family, they did not want to disturb their daily lives. One guest explained that she regularly went to public places to give her hosts a break while others stayed in their rooms out of fear of disturbing their hosts. Sharing the kitchen was also problematic for some families: after trying eating together, many decided to prepare their own food at different times because of different schedules or tastes.

In **Ireland**, survey results show that guests' priorities when moving into private accommodation were proximity to schools and employment, access to cooking facilities, clean toilets/household sanitation, and lastly, concerns about noise and atmosphere. In focus group discussions, just as observed in Belgium, many guests did not want to interfere with hosts' daily lives, and some felt obliged to be social even when they didn't want to because of hosts' expectations of companionship.



Hosting is a finite resource: it should prioritise the most suitable households, and adapt to a changing environment

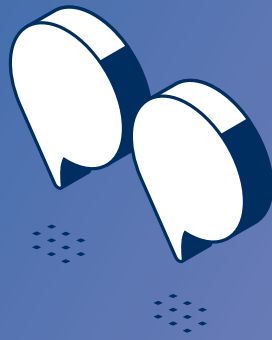
The availability of private accommodation for people who have lost their home is limited and may change over time. The duration and number of hosts offering shared spaces or vacant properties depends on factors such as the nature of the emergency, governmental support, economic conditions, personal circumstances and the perception of viable exit strategies. The profiles of people who might need and want to be hosted can also change. Given these limitations and the fact that hosting may not be a suitable option for everyone,⁷¹ it is crucial to identify the most suitable households for hosting when designing a hosting scheme, while remaining flexible to adjust to changing circumstances. In the context of Ukraine, hosting was open to a wide-ranging group of people who were eligible for temporary protection without specific prioritisation based on their financial means, specific needs or suitability. If any criteria for access existed, they were typically set by the hosts, who often had specific preferences about the people they were willing to host. This led to challenges for certain groups such as large families, people of non-Ukrainian origin and Roma communities in accessing hosted accommodation due to host preferences. In Poland, some hosts rejected men as default due to a perception that men are more likely to act in an aggressive way and abuse substances.

The ability to prioritise based on people's financial means, specific needs or suitability was compromised by the emergency context in which the Red Cross and other actors were operating. In various locations, private hosting followed a 'bed-led model', where accommodation was provided according to the availability of supply rather than by matching people with their best-suited location.



RefugeeHomeNL in the **Netherlands** initially supported anyone arriving directly from Ukraine or other European countries where they had obtained temporary protection. But in January 2023, it started prioritising cases due to a lack of sufficient hosting offers. RefugeeHomeNL required people to be present and already registered in the Netherlands. In contrast, in Spain, the hosting programme *Familia necesita familia* began with a restricted target group, outlining an 'ideal profile' for guests: a mother with one or two children, preferably without pets, non-smokers and without specific vulnerabilities. Soon after, the profile was extended as the programme was unable to attract enough guests who met these criteria. In **France** and **Luxembourg**, xenophobic or discriminatory requests targeting specific profiles were rejected.

While this approach provided immediate shelter, it risked hindering access to socioeconomic rights and integration and did not always provide the accommodation that best met people's needs and well-being. That said, given the emergency environment, it is understandable that such urgent placements took place in many countries.



“Once the government started to pay, the profile of hosts started to change. It became a source of income.

If you are doing it for the money, the placement is very tricky. On the other hand, the introduction of the Accommodation Recognition Payment enables hosts to host for a longer period of time.”



Case worker, Irish Red Cross



Financial incentives for hosts can be helpful need to be carefully designed to ensure sustainability and avoid distorting the housing market

Providing financial assistance to hosts stood out as a significant characteristic of several private hosting schemes across Europe. The 50/20 programme in Romania and 40+ in Poland initially granted hosts with 50 RON (€10) and 40 PLN (€8.5) per day, per person hosted. In Ireland, the Accommodation Recognition Payment (ARP) offered €800 per month, per household hosting. While financial incentives may complicate the idea of solidarity, blurring the distinction with rental, they recognise the challenges of the cost-of-living crisis and increased expenses for hosts. Moreover, when hosting becomes overstretched in duration, financial incentives may function as a way to foster greater participation while alleviating potential hosting fatigue. For instance, in France, several months after February 2022, financial support to hosts was introduced to avoid a potential wave of evictions. Similarly, in Ireland, the tax-free ARP was introduced in March 2022 – in the peak of the displacement. This started at €400 and later rose to €800.



In **Ireland**, the swiftness in response was hindered by the fact the ARP for hosts was quite a blunt policy instrument which has had important downstream impacts on motivation, particularly in the areas where €800 is above market rents for a room in a house. On the other hand, such financial support to hosts can spare guests from contributing to household costs. Indeed, 81% of guests reported not being asked to contribute to the household financially by their hosts.⁷² In **Poland**, the lack of communication and information campaigns around the 40+ programme together with unclear legal provisions led to misinterpretation, particularly about 'special cases' which could qualify for extension, and misinformation, leading to a perception that guests could receive the benefit directly.

The European Commission's Safe Homes guidance document already indicates that if Member States are phasing out their programmes that provided financial assistance to hosts, it is crucial to communicate policy changes in advance, ensuring there is no abrupt disruption that could have detrimental consequences for displaced people.⁷³ It is critical that such policy changes take into consideration the needs on the ground. Above all, they must avoid putting people at risk of homelessness or increase the precariousness of people's situations.⁷⁴



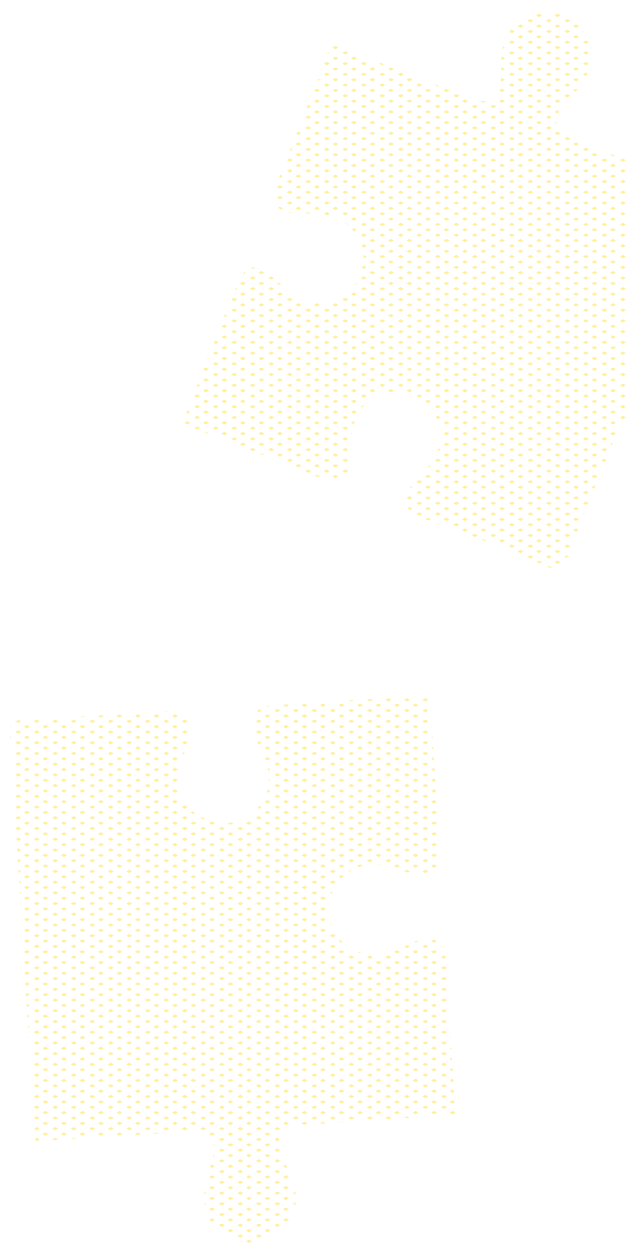
Financial incentives are useful and can help extend the duration of hosting arrangements but may have unintended consequences.

The box below shows the risks identified while implementing the Safe Homes programme, that should be considered when designing financial incentives for hosting schemes:

RISKS TO CONSIDER WHEN DESIGNING FINANCIAL INCENTIVES FOR HOSTING SCHEMES

- Risk of distorting the rental market by property owners switching from rental to hosting to collect subsidy. This would, therefore, worsen the housing market crisis for people who rely on the availability of rental properties in the host community.
- Risk of having one payment amount set nationwide without considering the geographical variations in the rental market.
- Risk of prioritising support for certain nationalities when the financial assistance only targets a group with a specific legal status.
- The design of incentives could promote overcrowding, when payments are made per person, or accepting only one person, when there is a unified payment per household regardless of composition.
- Risk of sustainability of hosting for ongoing schemes (How long can governments and/or organisations maintain payments to hosts?) and for future schemes (Will the current amount set a precedent and host expectations for future schemes?).
- Risk of funding situations of overcrowding, inadequate conditions, and/or unvetted hosts that are not connected to a framework of support offering social follow ups.
- Risk of overemphasising housing provision at the expense of ensuring adequate social support to guarantee safe hosting relationships and integration.

The IFRC's *Step-by-Step Guide: For Hosting Assistance to People Affected by Crisis* gives further considerations when introducing financial incentives into the design of a scheme. Financial compensation could also be paid to guests with the idea of them contributing to household costs. In such cases, local authorities and support organisations can play a crucial role in explaining and mediating to minimise tensions over 'who pays for what'. There are other incentives such as housing upgrades and tax benefits or discounts which proved to be the preferred option for many hosts in France and Luxembourg.





Organisations should invest in information management systems to process the large amounts of data associated with hosting, while ensuring compliance with data protection laws

Data management systems and infrastructures are pivotal for the success of hosting schemes. Such schemes require digital platforms capable of scaling and handling vast amounts of data, striking a balance between automated functions and human input. Data management tools must also cater to partnership models while ensuring accountability and compliance with data protection laws.

In the context of Ukraine, implementing hosting assistance proved challenging due to the absence of standardised information management (IM) processes and technical tools. This often resulted in a burdensome and time-consuming process, relying heavily on Excel and manual steps. This was particularly relevant for several National Red Cross Societies in the EU, including in Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Slovakia, who were engaging in private hosting assistance for the first time, but also for the Irish Red Cross, who had not dealt with hosting at such a scale. These organisations, like many local authorities, undertook the challenge of quickly setting up processes for registering hosts and guests, assessing eligibility, facilitating suitable matchings, and organising regular check-ins with solidarity households and referrals.

Despite the urgency of the emergency, significant attention was and should be given to protecting sensitive data, ensuring strict need-to-know access for a limited number of people.



“It was a crisis situation. We had to create a new system and get it up and running. We had to take decisions very quickly, make changes very quickly and adapt to different situations very quickly.”

Social worker, Luxembourg Red Cross

The improvised creation of IM processes was remarkable considering the constraints of limited resources, a tight timeframe, pressures from hosts, and the scale of the response. It prompts reflection on the necessary IM systems and infrastructure required for future emergencies. Insights gained from the Safe Homes programme have enabled the 510 team⁷⁵ – the data and digital initiative of the Netherlands Red Cross – to design a standard IM process and tool. The tool combines the software EspoCRM and Kobo Toolbox, offering a cost-effective solution that is easy to set up. The 510 team identified common steps across the hosting programmes of the countries participating in Safe Homes, streamlining the technical tool’s main functionalities.

510 TEMPLATE IM SYSTEM: A STANDARDISED TOOL TO BE USED IN THE FUTURE

DATA COLLECTION

- A question library for data collection, mostly composed of closed questions instead of text boxes. Organisations can pick questions that fit the needs of the programme and the local and national context.

- Online registration form to optimise standardisation of data collection. Example registration forms will be available too.

DATA STORAGE

- Integrated registration form with database.

- Automatised duplication and eligibility checks.

MATCHING

- Automatised initial filtering for matching based on predefined criteria such as location, household number, whether there are pets, whether there are smokers

CASE WORK AND COMMUNICATION

- Activity tracker for case workers to keep track of upcoming home visits, ending hosting arrangements, etc.

- The functionality to share updates about clients and tag colleagues to follow up.

- Ability to set roles and permissions for users and two-factor authentication for data security.

- Automatised mass communication to share updates and information via SMS/WhatsApp.

MONITORING

- Real-time dashboards for monitoring, including data about the programme, number of registrations, children etc.

Programme findings illustrate that, while it helps to have some level of automated case/data management, a human component is paramount. For instance, having a helpdesk or call centre to support affected households during the registration and case workers present during the matching process are concrete steps to prevent digital exclusion.



In **Ireland**, the 2015 Irish Red Cross 'Register of Pledges' played a crucial role in the 2022 response to the displacement from Ukraine, serving as the organisation's primary IT infrastructure. This had been created to support displacement from Syria and designed to manage offers of transitional accommodation for resettled and family reunification refugees. It proved indispensable during 2022, although it initially struggled to cope with the volume of registrations to support people displaced from Ukraine. A key lesson is the need for well resourced, scalable and maintained IT infrastructure,⁷⁶ emphasising its central role in enhancing the operational capacity of authorities and organisations to provide effective responses in the future.

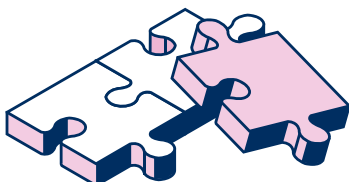




Experienced hosts should be involved in recruiting, guiding, and developing support networks for new hosts

What is it like to open your home to strangers, to displaced individuals or families who have faced many challenges on their migratory route that can lead to post-migration stress? Those considering hosting often come forward with a range of expectations, sometimes without fully considering the implications and practical aspects of hosting. In the context of Ukraine, the desire to help has occasionally led to rushed decisions that were not fully informed.

A key insight from the Safe Homes programme is that experienced hosts are best placed to support the initial engagement and manage the expectations of prospective hosts, helping them to reach informed decisions. While written guides and information are crucial, gaining insights from others' experiences and being able to ask specific questions, as well as hearing from peers, serves to instil confidence in hosts about the task ahead. It also helps build more lasting host-guest relationships. The significance of preparing and managing expectations aligns with other community welcoming initiatives, such as community sponsorship.⁷⁷



Helping Irish Hosts Roadshows: Building welcoming networks across communities through tales of hosting

The Irish Red Cross consortium member Helping Irish Hosts holds informational events around the country showcasing hosts' experiences. These 'Roadshows' are open to current and potential hosts. Experienced hosts share what it's like to host and other tips and insights about the practicalities of hosting. Anyone interested in hosting can find out "what it's all about and get some honest answers".

The Safe Homes programme has shown that it is often more reassuring for hosts to hear from peers. Public authorities and organisations can play an important role in facilitating connections, spaces and infrastructure for peer support, mentoring and engagement. For instance, some hosting schemes have found it extremely useful to offer prospective hosts a call from an experienced host. Another example of this type of support can be seen in the Irish Red Cross-led Consortium of Partners, which provides WhatsApp groups for hosts, holds support clinics, online drop-in sessions and masterclasses and sends out an e-newsletter.



Peer support at the Red Cross kitchen in Luxembourg

The kitchen of the Red Cross premises in Luxembourg serves as the place where host families regularly gather to exchange information and insights and share their experiences of hosting. While the space is facilitated by the Red Cross, the 'Talking groups' are led by the hosts themselves.

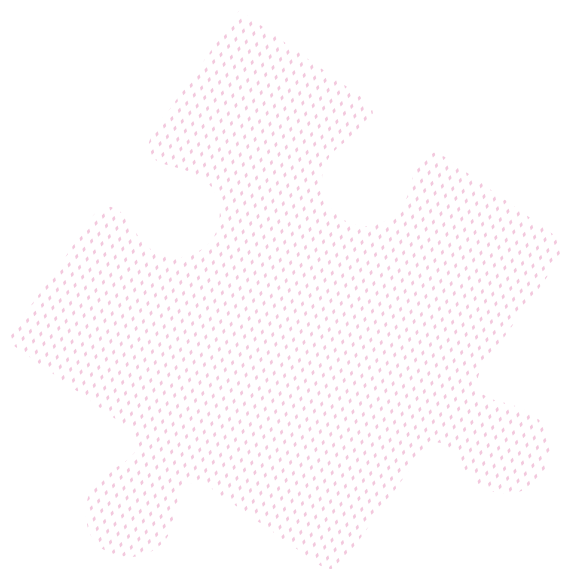
“Some host families are there nearly every time. Some others come if they have a question that bothers them. I see it as a kind of solidarity. Families really supporting each other. We come together, and it kind of starts very naturally. We meet at our office kitchen. We sit around the table, so people don’t feel they have a formal appointment.”

Case worker, Luxembourg Red Cross

The space is open to any host family, regardless of whether they are hosting through the Red Cross, Caritas or a spontaneous citizen-led initiative. If further support is needed, the Red Cross worker directs the family to a case worker. The groups are an example of mutual support, cultivating a stronger sense of community among hosts. They offer a chance to connect with others, share stories and offer support in an informal setting. Moreover, they provide a platform for generating solutions to practical challenges of cohabitation, as well as offering recommendations to hosting organisations and public authorities on improving their practices and public policies.



Romanian Red Cross volunteer, Romeo, blows bubbles for kids in Siret, a town on the border between Romania and Ukraine
© Romanian Red Cross.





“Drop and go’
will not work. Hosting
is about building trust
and a lasting relationship.
And about supporting
orientation of guests.”



Case worker, Irish Red Cross



Nurturing existing hosting relationships is as important as facilitating new matches, for the ongoing cohabitation as well as for future engagement of hosts and their networks

A key lesson learned is that sufficient time and resources must be allocated to caring for *existing* hosting relationships. Initially, there was a strong focus on quickly matching hosts with new arrivals to secure accommodation and prevent situations of homelessness. While rapid scaling up of matching capacity was needed at the start, resources to follow up with hosts and guests, including psychosocial support and mediation, may need to increase over time. This is particularly important considering that many hosting arrangements may extend beyond the initial short-term commitment due to the challenges in transitioning to more permanent housing.

Thinking of hosting as a valuable support option for the future, it is key for public authorities and other stakeholders involved in hosting to recognise the importance of this nurturing. The aim is to prevent hosting fatigue, alienation for future engagement, relationship breakdowns and even potential evictions.

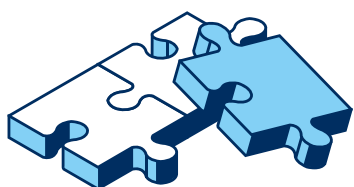


“A bad experience equals a forever lost host and their acquaintances. Bad experiences are ‘poisonous’, especially in the current political context. Private hosting needs to be positive for both hosts and guests”, participants in the Safe Homes national lessons learned workshop in **France** concluded. Drawing on previous experiences, the Jesuit Refugee Service raised caution about the high risk of host community disengagement if hosting relationships are not cared for or nurtured. Similarly, in **Belgium**, local authorities pointed out that when hosting goes wrong, they lose not just a host, but their social circle too. Therefore, it is key for authorities and other organisations involved to take private hosting seriously, improving host and guest support structures to not lose future engagement. Bad individual experiences can also shape wider attitudes on migration and other societal issues.



Vera (on the left) from Kharkiv staying with Veronika in Kosice, Slovakia © Slovak Red Cross.

Hosting is one example of volunteerism – a concrete expression of solidarity, humanitarianism and active involvement in the local community. It is just one avenue of ‘helping’, yet a very intimate one, as people often share the private space of their homes. Looking beyond hosting, the broader question is how do authorities and organisations foster and sustain people’s engagement, whether in hosting or other humanitarian activities? The response to the outpouring of solidarity with the displacement from Ukraine was, in many ways, unprecedented. Public authorities across the EU promoted a conducive environment for such humanitarian activities with and for displaced people.



Looking ahead: A network of committed hosts for future emergencies

The citizens’ response to the displacement from Ukraine offered a glimpse of how people come together during emergencies, and how communities step up to help. The absence of criminalisation of citizen-led solidarity initiatives, the positive discourse from public authorities about Ukrainians, the geopolitical vicinity of the conflict as well as the racial and ethnic background might have contributed to such unprecedented displays of solidarity. In the future, public authorities should acknowledge hosting as an important way for citizens to provide support to displaced populations. Public authorities’ support can be an important confidence-building factor for individuals to become involved in welcoming.⁷⁸



Clear and updated guidance and awareness raising for interested hosts and guests is key to an informed engagement, because hosting is not for everyone

A key lesson learned through the Safe Homes programme is that hosting in shared accommodation might not be the right choice for everyone. In Ireland, for example, 40% of hosts reported feeling 'quite' or 'very anxious' before their guests moved in.⁷⁹ It is important not to rush into a hosting relationship and rather spend time explaining and reflecting on what it means to host and be hosted. In other words, declining to host is a better option than an ill-informed engagement as this might negatively affect the living arrangement.

Like in other community welcoming initiatives,⁸⁰ Red Cross case workers have observed the crucial importance of preparing host families before receiving displaced persons. Investing efforts in guidance at the start, including reflection periods,⁸¹ lays a solid foundation for hosting. But this has not always been the case. In Belgium it was reported that half of hosts did not receive information on reception/hosting before the displaced persons arrived and 84% did not know where to find it.⁸² In Poland, focus groups showed that hosts were not always aware of the additional responsibilities that came with hosting, including supporting their guests with legal paperwork, transport and integration. Several countries implementing the Safe Homes programme have also observed a lack of clear, regularly updated and centralised official information relevant to hosts and guests, such as on allowances, financial incentives and changes in legal status.



Hosting is not for everyone... *but* there are other ways to support

There are many other ways of helping too. In **Belgium's** German-speaking community, a municipality met prospective hosts before matching to better understand their motivations, expectations, availability and suitability for hosting. Some, unable to host for more than a few weeks, were redirected towards alternative forms of help, such as accompaniment or community sponsorship. This preventive measure, which the municipality says has avoided many problems, used its experience of hosting displaced persons in 2015.

Providing information is crucial for identifying suitable hosts and ensuring the voluntariness of the engagement from both sides. In addition to the formal screening of the houses and vetting of hosts,⁸³ it is key to make sure hosts are mentally prepared for the responsibilities of hosting. This involves understanding their support networks, personal resilience and financial capacities. Alongside written resources like guides and FAQs for hosts and guests, it is vital

to offer direct counselling and peer support to ensure they have a comprehensive understanding of their roles and responsibilities as well as the mechanisms in case of relationship breakdown or abuse. The EU Asylum Agency guidelines on the EU approach to community sponsorship contain a repository of good practice examples and resources to support the management of expectations and training of volunteers.⁸⁴



Living with trauma

Many hosts were unprepared to welcome families that had been through the trauma of conflict and displacement. They did not always have the information on where to refer their guests to and municipalities often struggled with resources to provide psychosocial support.

Findings from French Red Cross research show how because most matchings happened in an emergency, it was difficult to check medical backgrounds for hosts and guests. Several of the hosts interviewed mentioned psychological problems as one of the biggest issues for living together. In France and Poland, hosts did not feel equipped to deal with decompensations, panic attacks and trauma experienced by their guests. Similarly, in Belgium and Ireland, focus groups with hosts revealed how common it was for hosts to struggle with guests who were anti-social or who spent long periods of time in their rooms, many experiencing depression or post-traumatic stress disorder.

“Psychologically, at first, I was as they said, like a zombie for six months. Then I allowed myself to live. Even the people who helped me said I had changed a lot. Now, I’m actually a different person.”

Guest, Poland



This reality underscores the importance of schemes incorporating an understanding of trauma, its consequences and how to enhance healing in all their aspects, from everyday case work to offering specialised training and awareness-raising tools for case workers, hosts and volunteers. Such **trauma-informed approaches** also involve restoring agency to people who have been exposed to trauma.

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, notably through its Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support,⁸⁵ has developed a body of knowledge and expertise in this area. For instance, several National Red Cross Societies across the EU offer ‘psychological first aid’ (PFA)⁸⁶ to help people cope with adversities. PFA is a tool to equip anyone with basic mechanisms to use when they encounter a person in distress who needs emotional and practical support. Learning PFA skills and understanding reactions to crises can empower hosts and volunteers to help others, while applying the same skills to their own lives. PFA is a basic tool that should be complemented with other more complex psychosocial activities during the period of hosting.



Hosting with children

Many host and guest families have children. To help parents explain “why a stranger is coming to live in their home”,⁸⁷ the NGO Housing Justice put together *A kids’ guide to hosting*.⁸⁸ Hosting with children adds an additional layer of complexity, especially when there are two sets of children in the household. When interacting with potential hosts and guests, it is crucial to work towards decisions that involve all family members, including children, and guides like this are useful for facilitating such discussions.



A written agreement outlining the commitments of hosts, guests and supporting organisations can avoid potential issues and address the lack of formal tenancy rights

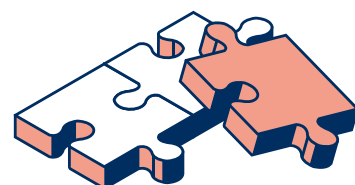
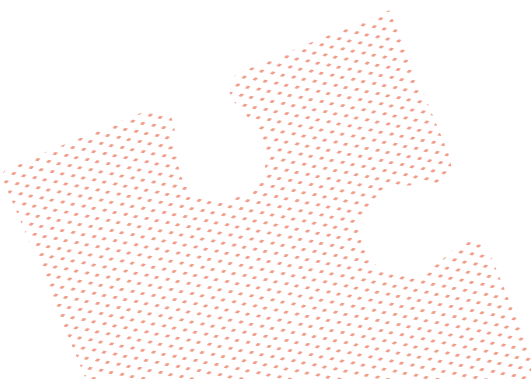
Private hosting agreements are more flexible than rental agreements, with fewer rights and obligations for both parties. This flexibility may have made it easier for hosts to offer rooms or properties that might not have been available or suitable for the traditional rental market, potentially increasing the vulnerability of guests. A key insight from implementing the Safe Homes programme is that setting rules and boundaries from the start is vital to structure the relationship between hosts and guests, giving a sense of protection and security especially in terms of duration and termination of the agreement. Most people involved in hosting do this through a written agreement,⁸⁹ either standardised or ad hoc, providing a minimum framework for the cohabitation

Written agreements cover key aspects such as defining roles and responsibilities, hosting duration, providing fair notice of termination, specifying utility costs payments, and including references to dispute resolution. In some cases, guests and hosts may even sign a code of conduct or rules of conviviality, which could be informally drafted between both parties..



Guest perspective

In **Poland**, most respondents did not sign a formal agreement such as a contract or code of conduct, because most hosting relationships were informal and spontaneous in the context of an emergency response. In some cases, the lack of agreement worked in favour of hosts and guests, who could leave whenever they wanted or change the hosting arrangements when needed. In **Ireland**, 53% reported signing a written license agreement and 49% of this group reported that their hosts attached a set of house rules to this. Focus groups discussions revealed that the agreement often provides certainty to guests on their short-term future and is a valued document.





In March 2022, Hungarian Red Cross has been operating a 24/7 humanitarian service point at the Keleti railway station to welcome people arriving from Ukraine by train in Budapest © Hungarian Red Cross.



Naming and vocalising expectations: Learning to have difficult conversations and confront cultural prejudices

A significant challenge, particularly in shared hosting arrangements, is aligning the expectations of hosts and guests. In Ireland, 34% of host survey respondents reported that language barriers and cultural differences were the most significant challenge.⁹⁰ While written agreements can play a crucial role in this process, case workers are key for facilitating discussions where households can name and vocalise expectations to avoid hosts and guests taking too great a burden

on themselves while deconstructing cultural prejudices. This involves engaging in sometimes difficult conversations about topics like how to take care of the house, who covers the utilities, division of household chores, heating use, and sharing information about daily routines and schedules for work, meals or school. Intercultural orientation training for hosts and guests is needed to show how lifestyle habits and expectations about behaviours are deeply rooted in culture.





“The response from the public is a fine gesture, but too much has been put on the shoulders of the host. I don’t think the host families fully comprehended the extent to which they would be called upon at every level, financially or administratively. Above all, [it is a burden] not to be able to give them an end date for this accommodation.”



Local authority representative, Belgium



Hosts provide essential support, but cannot replace the role of social workers and public authorities

A key lesson learned through the Safe Homes programme is that hosting schemes need the support of appropriate social or case workers to succeed.

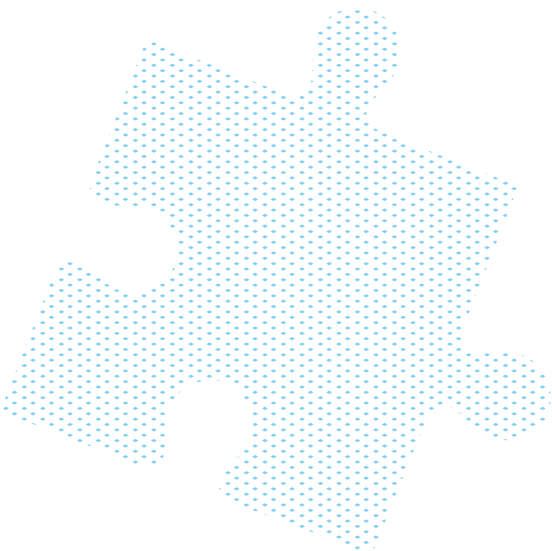
Private hosting can serve as a 'soft landing' into the community, providing a breathing space for guests to secure sustainable and longer-term accommodation and navigate the various systems of education, social welfare, health, employment as well as the social and cultural sphere. But to work, it requires a dedicated, trained and adequately resourced team of social or case workers, including people who share the language of the guests, rather than mainly relying on private individuals, whether hosts or volunteers.



A key component of the hosting schemes run by the Slovak Red Cross, Irish Red Cross and Luxembourg Red Cross involves **case management**. In this model, each guest household is assigned a case worker who continuously engages with them, whether they are in a vacant property or a shared home environment. Through case work, the Slovak and Luxembourg Red Cross develop an individual plan for rebuilding guests' lives in the local community, considering guests' needs, intentions, expectations, skills and aspirations. This is collaboratively created with guests, and their meaningful participation is sought and encouraged.

“The social worker must provide support while putting in place tools that encourage the involvement and autonomy of the person.”

Social worker, Luxembourg Red Cross





Social follow up meeting with the Luxembourg Red Cross. © Luxembourg Red Cross.

When establishing a hosting scheme in **Slovakia**, it was important to think of concrete ways to support newcomers in their integration into society. Through its regional branches and dedicated humanitarian service points⁹¹ and community centres, the Slovak Red Cross offers language courses, accompanies people for medical checks, and facilitates access to the labour market. In **Hungary**, the Red Cross ran a refugee support programme focused on housing, livelihood support and integration. Operating through eight local branches, it provided individualised services like searching for accommodation, accompaniment to medical appointments, labour market counselling, and language and skills development. Cultural activities were also occasionally organised, such as handcrafting and gastronomical gatherings.



“We came to France with no plans. We were in our sixties and had health problems. In France, we were diagnosed with illnesses of which we were unaware. [...] Work isn’t on the agenda”

Guest, France

Strengthening the integration and inclusion of newcomers should be at the heart of public policies and resource allocation,⁹² while recognising that people have different circumstances and needs. The EU's response to displacement from Ukraine highlighted the benefits of granting newcomers rapid access to rights such as education, healthcare, work, social services and freedom of movement. It also showed how the temporality of administrative status can hinder people's ability to fully integrate into their new community, and exposed bureaucratic barriers that hinder access to rights, most notably the complex and lengthy accreditation of skills and qualifications.

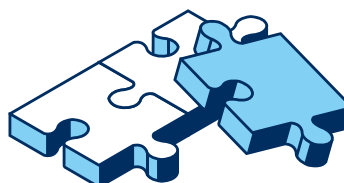


Bridging the network of humanitarian support through social workers

In August 2022, the **Romanian Red Cross** established a 'Humanity Concept Store' to provide basic material aid for a decent life including perishable goods, personal hygiene products and cleaning products. This aimed to complement a similar initiative of the local authorities in Bucharest to attend to the needs of the many people arriving there. When the emergency phase passed and people began to settle, store staff started to be confronted with questions that exceeded their capacities. There was a need for information and guidance concerning services for integration such as access to accommodation. The Romanian Red Cross addressed this by placing a social worker permanently at the store. They played a key role in alleviating stress, fostering relationships of trust with displaced persons and, crucially, serving as a 'bridge' to guide people towards relevant services, organisations and community spaces such as the Red Cross Multicultural Center, or the Red Cross Health Center. The social worker explained: "the Multicultural Center is an integral part of the same support network as the Humanity Concept Store. People coming to the store are also going to the center. The services offered at the center were designed to combine the 'useful' with the 'enjoyable' so, for instance, while the parents are taking language courses, the kids can do different activities designed for them. Both the store and the multicultural center are part of the same beautifully developed community".



Hungarian Red Crosser Kateryna plays with children from Ukraine in a child friendly space in Szeged, Hungary © Hungarian Red Cross





Hosting can offer a favourable environment and valuable connections that enable guests to move on with their lives, while positively affecting the wider community

A key insight from implementing the Safe Homes programme is the pivotal role of hosting in fostering integration and inclusion, especially through language immersion, understanding social and cultural norms, enabling social connections, and, more broadly, facilitating socioeconomic and cultural integration and inclusion and a shared sense of belonging. Furthermore, through hosting, many citizens across Europe gained awareness and firsthand understanding of the realities associated with seeking 'sanctuary'. Red Cross case workers observed that many hosts went through a process of dispelling prejudices and stereotypes they may have held about displaced people. Despite the inherent power asymmetry between hosts and guests, case workers have observed reciprocal relationships emerging, characterised by mutual aid and cooperation. In some cases, hosting families share their entire social and professional networks with their guests and "a real ecosystem is shaped around hosts and guests" as stated by a French NGO worker during a Safe Homes workshop.



"I wasn't alone... sometimes she cooked dinner, sometimes we went shopping together or one bought a thing or two for the other, we shared things, etc. Together we supported and helped each other."

Host, Poland

"She [the host] has done a lot for me. For example, I found a job with her help... And somehow, we slowly became a family... And we started taking care of each other."

Guest, Hungary



In situations where few exit options are available, relationships between hosts and guests may crystallise over time around feelings of gratitude. Vulnerabilities and a lack of support or supervision of cohabitations can exacerbate existing **power imbalances**, potentially leading to unintended **exploitation**. Guests may sometimes feel indebted to their hosts for providing free accommodation, feeling compelled to reciprocate by assisting with tasks like cleaning or childcare. In some countries, guests reported hosts' expectations to provide free household work. This dynamic becomes problematic when guests feel pressured to comply with the 'favours' requested by the host. Such requests may adhere to gendered norms associating women and men with certain tasks. This highlights the critical role of supporting organisations in preventing such situations and managing expectations, ensuring that any labour undertaken is the result of a consensual agreement.



“Hosting is not only about accommodation but about building connections, making friends, a network.”

Case worker, Irish Red Cross



Forming welcome communities

The concept of welcome communities envisions an extended network of support beyond the solidarity household. It aims to prevent hosts from becoming isolated and to amplify their social connections for the benefit of the guests. This model is central to other community welcoming initiatives, like community sponsorship.

Many organisations across Europe rely on volunteer networks to provide this kind of support, which, importantly, must be complemented by professional support from public authorities. For instance, HIAS connects newcomers with groups of volunteers, forming a 'welcome circle' around households.⁹⁵ A notable initiative pioneered in Poland introduces the idea of a 'partner family' to support hosts and mitigate the risk of hosting fatigue. Each host family is paired with a partner family that could not engage in hosting but is willing to help in other ways.⁹⁶ National Red Cross Societies are well-acquainted with this model, for instance through the 'buddy programmes' run in Denmark, Germany and Belgium where volunteers support newcomers navigating the different systems in the community.⁹⁷

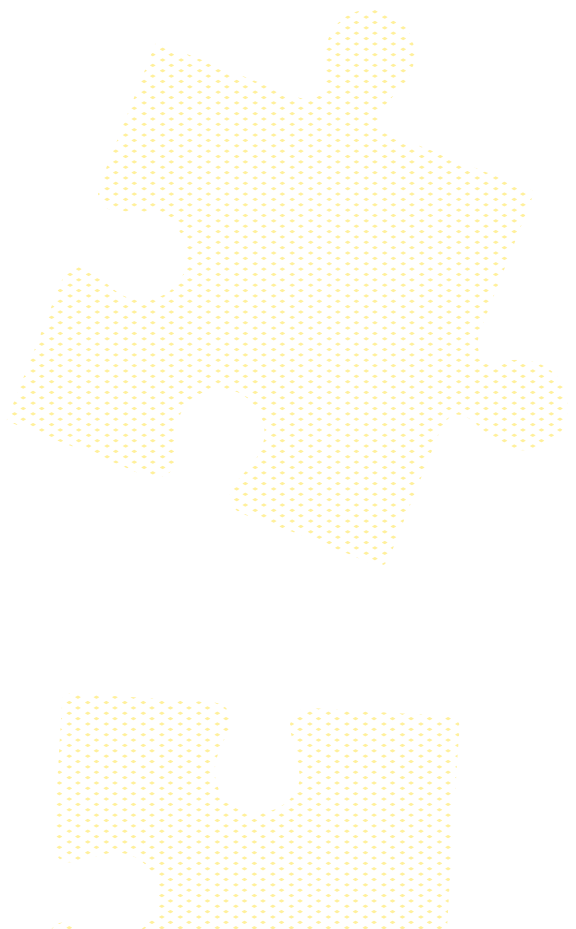
Much like in other community welcoming initiatives, the relationships built between hosts and guests can play a 'transformative function' in cultivating positive attitudes towards migrants and refugees while addressing prejudices and polarisation.⁹³ In France, hosts reported that this experience helped them to better understand the Ukrainian situation and the concrete consequences of the armed conflict on the daily lives of their guests' relatives in Ukraine. In Ireland, guest experiences with local integration have been largely positive with 77% of survey respondents reporting that they feel welcome locally and 52% reporting that their hosts helped them integrate.⁹⁴ Importantly, the transformative impact extends beyond the host to encompass their wider social circle.





Anton lent a complex of apartments to host people like Vera, who fled from Odessa to Romania during the first months of the escalation of the conflict © Romanian Red Cross.

While hosting can offer a favourable environment and valuable connections to facilitate processes of integration and inclusion, public authorities must ensure hosts are not isolated and foresee adequate support as an integral component of the hosting scheme. Relying mostly on the host is problematic for several reasons. First, the effectiveness of their guiding role is not always guaranteed and depends on factors such as the quality of conviviality, personal affinities with guests, their pre-existing social network, available resources, and the motivation and needs of guests to form connections. Second, not all hosts share the same socioeconomic situation, time or energy to devote to their guests. This prompts the questions: What can be reasonably expected from hosts, and how can they be prevented from feeling pressure to fulfil certain roles? Essentially, how can public authorities harness the benefits of hosting without imposing tasks that are the responsibility of the state?





Housing allocation should align with people's preferences and availability and access to public services and employment opportunities

An important lesson from implementing the Safe Homes programme is that public authorities and other organisations involved in hosting, but also more generally in reception, need to avoid a 'bed-led model'. In practical terms, a bed-led model directs people in need of accommodation to locations where beds are available without considering the availability of essential elements of social inclusion like schools, employment and healthcare or addressing people's specific vulnerabilities and preferences. Hence, it prioritises finding a physical place to stay above all else. While these models may offer expedient solutions in emergencies, they overlook people's broader and holistic experiences in the long term.

While a bed-led approach can work during a high peak of displacement in an emergency or for people in transit needing accommodation for a few weeks, a more thoughtful approach is needed for those planning to stay longer. The work required to receive newcomers needs to be acknowledged with sufficient funding and resources for local authorities and designated organisations. At the same time, strengthening and investing in basic rights such as housing and health infrastructures in paramount to avoid anti-migration sentiments and perceived competition for resources.

While implementing the Safe Homes programme, National Red Cross Societies observed several flaws in matching guests to place of living. Matching was generally conducted at the central level, often relying on documents rather than in-depth interactions with guests to understand skills, motivations, preferences and available services in the chosen municipality. Special needs were not identified, such as situations



“What has happened on a number of occasions is people have been dropped in a location and the support agencies are gone. The first we'd hear about it is when someone at the local education board responsible for school placements would ring me and say: 'do you know anything about a family that's out in X town looking for a place in school?' And I'd say, no...”

Local authority representative, Ireland

of reduced mobility or pregnancy, as well as less visible vulnerabilities, such as those related to mental health. People's different circumstances were not fully considered when seeking the most suitable accommodation arrangement, including placing people in host families. Furthermore, authorities and organisations involved noticed a mismatch between hosting offers and guests' desires; the latter often prioritised urban areas where accommodation was scarce.



“We took time. We interviewed the hosting families for two hours. After the interview, some of them said ‘no, it’s not for me’. It took time to meet all host families. We ask them to go back to their house and think about it for 24h and then tell us: do you want to continue?”

Social worker, Luxembourg Red Cross



At the core of hosting are **interpersonal relationships**.

Matching is about ensuring guests are placed in a safe environment (physically and emotionally) but also about finding the best arrangements that will enable people to thrive.



In **France**, guests interviewed unanimously reported having no time to consider being matched with suitable hosts and whether hosting was something for them. Their immediate need for shelter took precedence in their decision-making.⁹⁸

Looking ahead, we propose an approach that seeks to align housing allocation with an environment where people can thrive and integrate effectively while considering the available resources and opportunities at the local level. Such an approach should also factor in people’s preferences. The vicinity of extended family, acquaintances or other members of the language community can be key resources for social support, mental well-being and enablers of integration. Allowing freedom of movement within the EU, as done with temporary protection holders, represents a positive step forward.



Finding suitable matches takes time and works best when done locally

In the **Netherlands**, after an initial online video meeting with a Red Cross case worker, guests were given the opportunity to meet and see their potential new household in real life before making a final decision. Case workers would then facilitate an in-depth conversation about lifestyle, habits, schedules and routines, financial situations, expectations, do’s and don’ts and how to resolve conflict. In **Poland**, focus groups indicate that where guests had direct contact with hosts, they were more likely to be satisfied with the match, suggesting that they may have felt more in control of their destiny, or that they were better matched because they were using the already established network of acquaintances.

Matching takes time and works best when conducted at the local level. In **Belgium**, local authorities eventually took charge of matching as they generally had a better understanding of the situation on the ground. This shift from centralised to localised matching significantly improved the way needs and vulnerabilities were considered. In **France**, public authorities and CSOs had to de facto adapt their matching and vetting processes to the location. In the Paris region, vetting pledges came along with checking the accessibility to public transportation. In rural or semi-rural areas, local authorities chose first and foremost pledges of autonomous or semi-autonomous houses to ensure autonomy and family unity.⁹⁹ In the **Netherlands**, RefugeeHomeNL shifted from a national to a regional work structure, aiming to enable case workers to become familiar with the specificities of each locality to better support the matching and inclusion of guests.

CONCLUSION

Across Europe, a concerning number of people live in inadequate housing or lack access to a place they can call home.¹⁰⁰ This particularly affects low-income families, persons with disabilities, older persons, single parents and ethnic minorities, especially migrant communities.

Access to adequate and affordable housing, as recognised in international and EU instruments,¹⁰¹ is core to “the exercise of, and access to, other fundamental rights and for a life in conditions of human dignity”.¹⁰² In their work with people displaced from Ukraine, National Red Cross Societies have observed firsthand the crucial role that stable housing plays in people’s physical and mental well-being. Most of the people they work with emphasise that securing accommodation is a priority for them. It is not just about having a place to stay but the reassurance they will not lose it. The temporality of their status contributes to a feeling of anxiety about the uncertainty of the future. Having a stable home means feeling finally safe and belonging somewhere, which is essential for trauma recovery. It is the foundation for building trust with the local community and institutions and enables people to consider other vital aspects for inclusion into their new societies, while imagining a better future.

Hosting is a vital interim accommodation option for people who have been displaced, offering benefits for hosts and guests. But hosting is not a one-size-fits-all solution; without appropriate exit strategies, it is not sustainable in the long term, and can be difficult to implement. Instead, as this report has shown, hosting should be seen as part of a journey towards finding more permanent housing.

Legal recognition of the right to housing must be accompanied with action. Bold leadership, with a willingness to embrace change and propose structural solutions, is needed. National Red Cross Societies have observed such leadership at local level, where adequately resourced local authorities can drive significant change. They have also witnessed social workers, volunteers and affected people creatively seeking solutions amid the challenges posed by struggling welfare systems and the long-standing housing crisis in many EU Member States.

Member States response to the displacement from Ukraine shows the benefits of a collective commitment to protect people in need and the tangible ways to do it. Lessons from this response should inspire public authorities to strengthen reception and integration systems for people in need, regardless of where they come from.

This report has highlighted some vital aspects of the long-term preparedness that public authorities should put in place to make hosting a potential and positive option for the future. Its lessons can also inform other welcoming initiatives, like community sponsorship, and help public authorities seeking to enhance the reception and accommodation of newcomers.



NOTES

1. FEANTSA. [ETHOS: European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion](#)
2. Figures provided by Ireland, Netherlands, Luxembourg and Slovak Red Cross as of March 2024.
3. European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) (2023) [Surveys with arriving migrants from Ukraine: Life in the host country – Registration and reception](#), Issue 1.
4. Unia Metropolii Polskich (2022) [Neighbourly Help, Residents of the 12 Largest Polish Cities on Helping Refugees from Ukraine, a Survey Report](#)
5. DeZIM (2022) [New platforms for engagement: Private accommodation of forced migrants from Ukraine](#), Working paper #05; More in Common (2023) [Welcoming Ukrainians: The hosts' perspective](#)
6. Migration Policy Institute (2023) [From Safe Homes to Sponsors: Lessons from the Ukraine hosting response for refugee sponsorship programmes](#)
7. Figures provided by the Ukrainian Red Cross.
8. Forced Migration Review 55 (2017) [Hosting the Displaced – and being hosted](#)
9. Red Cross EU Office. [Activities. A new home in Ireland](#)
10. France24 (2015) [France : l'association Singa forme réfugiés et familles d'accueil à leurs différences culturelles](#)
11. Housing Justice is a member of [NACCOM](#) (The No Accommodation Network), which includes 31 hosting projects in the UK.
12. The Guardian (2025) [The Belgian town where families take in people with psychiatric conditions](#)
13. Under this programme, hosts received 50 RON (around €10) per day/per accommodated person and guests received 20 RON (around €4) per day/per person for living expenses. See IFRC (2024) [Romania: Financial incentives for hosts, cash support to guests, and a hosting assistance programme](#).
14. Under this programme, hosts received 40 PLN (around €8.5) per day/per person hosted up to 120 days. For more details see: The Polish School of Assistance (2023) [Reception and integration of refugees from Ukraine in Poland in 2022](#)
15. French authorities received 9,000 requests, out of which 8,000 were eligible to receive financial support. For more details see: [Préfet de la Meuse. Exceptional measure to support citizen hosts of displaced persons from Ukraine](#)
16. The [ARP](#) is a monthly payment of €800 available to hosts of people fleeing Ukraine.
17. The initiative was part of EC (2022) [EC communication: Welcoming those fleeing war in Ukraine – readying Europe to meet the needs](#); and EC (2022) [10-Point Plan: For stronger European coordination on welcoming people fleeing the war from Ukraine](#)
18. EC (2012) [Solidarity and housing: Supporting Safe Homes. Considerations, key principles and practices](#)
19. Similarly, findings from the evaluation of community sponsorship schemes across the EU show the need to develop activities to ensure people have access to long-term housing. See Share Network (2023) [Policy Recommendations for enhancing Community Sponsorship Programmes in Europe](#) See also EUAA (forthcoming) [Guidelines on the EU approach to community sponsorship](#)
20. EC (2020) [Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027](#)
21. For a more detailed understanding of trauma and healing-centred approaches, see PS Centre (2023) [MHPSS EU Network Forum 2023: Scientific Overview to trauma informed approaches On the way to a healing centered approach](#). See also the [FOCUS Approach to Dynamic Integration](#), a practical framework to strengthen existing integration practices and support the development of new ones. At its core is the idea of fostering social bonds, connections and bridges among arriving and receiving communities.
22. UNHCR (2023) [Global Trends Report 2022](#)
23. Irish Red Cross (2024) [Pledging your home: a spotlight on Irish hospitality for those displaced from Ukraine](#)
24. Ukrainian Action (2023) [Largest survey to date of Ukrainians in Ireland who found protection from war. Subject – “Integration”](#)
25. Ukrainian Action (2024) [Largest survey of Ukrainians in Ireland who found protection from war. Subject – “Employment”](#)
26. Social housing stock ranges from over 20% in the Netherlands, Denmark and Austria, to less than 2% in Latvia, the Slovak Republic, Luxembourg, Spain, Estonia, Lithuania and the Czech Republic. See OECD (2022) [Housing support for Ukrainian refugees in receiving countries](#)
27. FEANTSA (2023) [Urban Challenges, Housing Solutions: Understanding Cities' Vacant Housing Potential to Provide Adequate Affordable Housing Solutions](#)
28. European Migration Network (EMN) (2023) [Access to autonomous housing in the context of international protection](#)
29. INP PAN and Konsorcjum Migracyjne (2023) [At the starting point. Monitoring of collective accommodation for Ukrainian refugees in 2023 in the light of legal changes](#)
30. See FEANTSA (2019) [50 out-of-the-box housing solutions to homelessness and housing exclusion](#). See also OECD (2021) [Building for a better tomorrow: Policies to make housing more affordable](#), Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Policy Briefs.
31. FEANTSA is the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless. FEANTSA (2019) *Ibid*. See also Habitat for Humanity (2023) [Long-term housing solutions for Ukrainian refugees in Poland, Germany, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia: A Policy Brief](#)
32. See FEANTSA. [The Housing Solutions Platform](#); Red Cross EU Office (2022) [Positions: Red Cross Approach: Combatting Homelessness in Europe](#).
33. EC (2020) [Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021–2027](#). See also EMN (2024) [EMN Inform: Access to autonomous housing in the context of international protection](#)
34. Results from a survey conducted by the Belgium Red Cross; DeZIM (2023) [New platforms for engagement. Private accommodation of forced migrants from Ukraine](#)
35. Belgium Red Cross survey, RefugeeHomeNL data and French Red Cross interview respondents.
36. Survey conducted by Helping Irish Hosts/Irish Red Cross with hosts: 1,412 respondents.
37. Ukrainian refugees struggling to find accommodation after leaving UK sponsors [The Guardian](#) (March 2023) [Ukrainian refugees struggling to find accommodation after leaving UK sponsors](#); UNHCR Ireland (2023) [UNHCR calls for urgent action to avoid large numbers of asylum-seekers being left homeless and destitute](#)
38. Irish Red Cross (2024) [Pledging your home: a spotlight on Irish hospitality for those displaced from Ukraine](#)

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39. Ministry of Ecological Transition and Territorial Cohesion (2024) [Les dispositifs d'intermédiation locative](#)
 40. The leases are renewable for up to three years. The organisations provide social support to the new tenants focusing on housing assistance (e.g. supporting households in paying rent and maintaining the property to prevent evictions).
 41. According to la Cour des Comptes, February 2023.
 42. See also Odisee (2022) [#FreeSpot: Private accommodation of Ukrainian refugees in Belgium](#). The study highlights the urgent need for supporting housing policies, emphasising that "there is no perspective for host families, nor for guests, if a sustainable housing solution cannot be considered" and OECD (2022) [Housing support for Ukrainian refugees in receiving countries](#)
 43. See also EMN (2023) [Access to autonomous housing in the context of international protection](#) and Habitat for Humanity International (2023) [Housing of Ukrainian Refugees in Europe Options for Long-Term Solutions](#)
 44. Luxembourg Red Cross. [Strategy 2030](#)
 45. Luxembourg Red Cross. Brochure: [A home for those who need it most](#)
 46. From Street to Home Association and Habitat for Humanity (2023) [The possibilities and limits of a mid and long-term housing programme for refugees arriving from Ukraine to Hungary](#). See also IFRC (2024) [Community-driven hosting assistance initiatives: Case Study Hungary](#)
 47. *Wohnung* means apartment in German. *Lotsen* are the small boats that guide big container ships arriving to the port of Hamburg. *Wohnung-Lotsen* are, therefore, the housing guides or pilot ships.
 48. Some government-led initiatives opted for an approach that involved collaborations between the public, private and nonprofit sectors. Notable examples are the pledge programme in Ireland, *Helfendewaende* in Germany, RefugeeHomeNL in the Netherlands and *Familia necesita familia* in Spain.
 49. RefugeeHomeNL was implemented by a consortium comprising the Netherlands Red Cross, the Salvation Army, the Dutch Council for Refugees and TakecareBnB.
 50. Around 83% of private accommodation in the Netherlands occurred outside the scope of RefugeeHomeNL. Information provided by Netherlands Red Cross.
 51. In France, authorities estimated that 15,000 hosting arrangements were supervised while about 50,000 displaced people were staying in citizen-led or spontaneous arrangements. French Red Cross (2024) [L'hébergement citoyen des personnes déplacées d'Ukraine en France](#)
 52. Red Cross EU Office (2021) Positions. [Protecting the humanitarian space to access and support migrants](#)
 53. See EUAA (forthcoming) [Guidelines on the EU approach to community sponsorship](#)
 54. Some of these questions were discussed in Poland at the Forum for Cooperation and Integration (Konsorcjum Migracyjne [2023] [Time for partnerships - the first Forum for Cooperation and Integration is behind us](#)) as well as reflected in an open letter to international donors and partners calling for an equal approach to the idea of partnership (Konsorcjum Migracyjne [2022] [Open letter to international donors and organizations that want to help Ukrainian refugees in Poland](#)).
 55. See the IFRC (forthcoming) [Step-by-Step Guide: For Hosting Assistance to People Affected](#) for more detail on successful partnerships. See also EC (2014) [The European code of conduct on partnership in the framework of the European structural and investment funds](#)
 56. [Ukrainian Voices RC](#) (Facebook page)
 57. UNHCR (2023) [Meet the Refugee Committees making their voices heard in Brussels](#)
 58. Rainbow House [Rainbow Refugee Committee](#)
 59. Organisations included Homo Faber Association, *Fundacja Kultury Duchowej Pogranicza*, the Rule of Law Institute Foundation, the Polish Red Cross, the Polish Scouting and Guiding Association, the National Scout Organisation of Ukraine, the Foundation for the Development of Central and Easter Europe, the Centre for Crisis intervention, and the District Bar association.
 60. The Polish School of Assistance (2023) [Reception and integration of refugees from Ukraine in Poland in 2022](#)
 61. See Homo Faber's [development programme for volunteers](#)
 62. The Polish School of Assistance (2023) [Reception and integration of refugees from Ukraine in Poland in 2022](#)
 63. French Office for Immigration and Integration.
 64. Primary health insurance fund (*Caisse primaire d'assurance maladie*)
 65. In 2017, the French government launched a call for projects 'Citizen accommodation for refugees' to test this type of accommodation. See Dihal (2018) [Hébergement Citoyen: Pourquoi et comment ça marche?](#) In 2016, the Irish government in partnership with the Irish Red Cross launched a Registry of Pledges to support people who had fled to Ireland because of the armed conflict in Syria. See Red Cross EU Office. [Activities. A new home in Ireland](#) and link to the Registry: [Red Cross Register of Pledges](#)
 66. In France, disparities in implementation were due the different dynamics of local reception and authorities' mobilisation, the (dis)connect between local and central authorities, the varied network of associations, as well as the historical links between French and Ukrainian territories and the availability of resources. French Red Cross (2024) [L'hébergement citoyen des personnes déplacées d'Ukraine en France](#)
 67. For a detailed discussion on challenges faced by local authorities see [Fleeing Ukraine: Implementing temporary protection at local levels](#)
 68. Kerry Public Participation Network [Ukrainian Community Response](#)
 69. Local Government Ireland [Offer a Home](#)
 70. French Red Cross (2024) [L'hébergement citoyen des personnes déplacées d'Ukraine en France](#)
 71. For a detailed discussion on suitability see IFRC (forthcoming) [Step-by-Step Guide: For Hosting Assistance to People Affected](#).
 72. Survey conducted by the Irish Red Cross with people displaced from Ukraine staying in pledge accommodation in the context of the Safe Homes programme: 430 respondents.
 73. EC (2022) [Solidarity and housing: Supporting Safe Homes. Considerations, key principles and practices](#)
 74. Red Cross EU Office (2022) Positions: [Red Cross Approach: Combatting Homelessness in Europe](#).

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75. 510. [Home](#)
76. See also EUAA (2022) [Practical recommendations on the provision of emergency placement in private accommodation for persons displaced from Ukraine](#)
77. EUAA (forthcoming) [Guidelines on the EU approach to community sponsorship](#)
78. UNCHR (2024) [Hébergement Citoyen - Des Réfugiés Ukrainiens](#)
79. Survey conducted by Helping Irish Hosts/Irish Red Cross with hosts: 1,412 respondents.
80. Share Network (2023) [Policy Recommendations for enhancing Community Sponsorship Programmes in Europe](#)
81. For example, the Spanish hosting scheme, *Familia necesita familia*, includes a 'reflection period' of 7 days after hosts and guests move into the hosting arrangement. Both parties may decide whether they wish to continue living together or not.
82. Survey conducted by the Belgium Red Cross.
83. For practical tips on house screening and vetting see IFRC (forthcoming) [Step-by-Step Guide: For Hosting Assistance to People Affected](#) and EUAA (2022) [Practical recommendations on the provision of emergency placement in private accommodation for persons displaced from Ukraine](#)
84. EUAA (forthcoming) [Guidelines on the EU approach to community sponsorship](#)
85. IFRC [PS Centre](#)
86. PS Centre. [A Guide to Psychological First Aid](#); PS Centre. [Psychological First Aid: Module 1](#); PS Centre. [Remote Psychological First Aid](#). Find more resources related to PFA at PS Centre
87. NACCOM (2022) [Hosting Good Practice Guide: Key considerations for hosts and hosting organisations](#)
88. NACCOM (2022) [NACCOM's Hosting Good Practice Guide: Part 2. Appendix 6: Kids' Guide to Hosting](#).
89. See IFRC (forthcoming) [Step-by-Step Guide: For Hosting Assistance to People Affected by Crisis](#) for examples of written agreements.
90. Survey conducted by Helping Irish Hosts/Irish Red Cross with hosts: 1,412 respondents
91. See for instance [the work of the Slovak Red Cross in the humanitarian service point at Poprad](#)
92. Red Cross EU Office. Positions. [Moving forward together - Red Cross approach to social inclusion of migrants](#)
93. University of Ottawa Refugee Hub (2022) [The Effects of Sponsorship on Public Attitudes and Social Connection](#)
94. Survey conducted by the Irish Red Cross with people displaced from Ukraine staying in pledge accommodation in the context of the Safe Homes programme: 430 respondents.
95. See HIAS (2023) [Welcome Circles in Europe for People Fleeing Ukraine](#)
96. The Polish School of Assistance (2023) [Reception and integration of refugees from Ukraine in Poland in 2022](#)
97. Red Cross EU Office. Activities. [Friends pave the way](#)
98. French Red Cross (2024) [L'hébergement citoyen des personnes déplacées d'Ukraine en France](#)
99. The research undertaken by the French Red Cross in the context of the Safe Homes programme focused on eight local departments in France. Ibid.
100. According to FEANTSA and the Abbé Pierre Foundation, 34.1 million households are living in overcrowded conditions, 8.4 million are facing severe housing deprivation, 29.0 million are living in damp conditions and the minimum estimate of people experiencing homelessness is 895,000. See FEANTSA (2023) [8th overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe 2023](#)
101. Article 34 (3) of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU protects the right to social housing and housing assistance. See also FEANTSA and Housing Rights Watch (2020) [Binding obligations related to housing from European and International case law](#); European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) (2016) [The right to housing for beneficiaries of international protection](#) and ECRE (2023) [The right to accommodation under the temporary protection directive](#)
102. EU (2021) [European Parliament resolution of 21 January 2021 on access to decent and affordable housing for all](#)
103. Kerry Public Participation Network [Ukrainian Community Response](#)

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