Solidarity and housing: Supporting Safe Homes

Considerations, key principles and practices

Member States, European cities and regions are responding to the largest displacement in Europe since World War II, with the corresponding need to find accommodation for millions of people swiftly.

Hundreds of thousands of Europeans have opened their homes to host, at least for a short period of time, displaced people from Ukraine. This has been an unprecedented show of solidarity, marking a new reality for EU reception and crisis management systems. Official figures are not yet available, but Member States have reported that the figures of displaced people accommodated by private hosts are between 20 per cent to 90 per cent, depending on the Member State. Policies regarding the provision of private housing to displaced people vary considerably among Member States.

Against this background, in its communication: "Welcoming those fleeing war in Ukraine - readying Europe to meet the needs", the Commission announced the "safe homes" initiative, to support those private individuals across the EU who have opened their homes to host displaced people.

As part of the initiative, this document consolidates the experience, considerations, guidance and good practices from the EU Member States, the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), regions, cities, civil society, foundations, entrepreneurs and individuals involved in these efforts. It aims at supporting Member States, regional and local authorities as well as civil society that are organising private housing initiatives, and all those who are making their homes available.

Also, as we move towards an uncertain future where new emergencies may arise or persist, we can take stock of experience gained so far and look at how good practices and lessons learnt can help define sustainable solutions for future reception needs.

Securing conditions for suitable and safe private accommodation: Addressing the main challenges

Since the first arrivals of displaced people from Ukraine, Member States, regional and local authorities, civil society and private companies have undertaken numerous initiatives to organise and/or match private accommodation to people in need. From their experience a number of challenges have been identified, notably:

A. *Lack of structures supporting hosts:* In most cases there are no structures aimed at supporting the host themselves, be it dedicated communication channels of support or opportunities for sharing of experiences and networking.

B. *Matching and vetting:* Vetting people who offer accommodation, matching hosts with hosting people, and dealing with arising issues is a multi-faceted and complex question that requires collaboration between several actors, including public authorities. A number of aspects need to be taken into account when displaced people are put up in private housing: for example, the expectations of hosts and hosted people, questions related to the duration of the stay, the rules of cohabitation (e.g. smoking, used of certain premises or not), but also specific needs that the hosted people may have.

C. *Unsuitable accommodation:* on some occasions, privately offered accommodation does not correspond to its description and does not correspond to adequate living standards.

D. *Safety concerns:* relying on private housing offers, whilst ensuring a more timely response and creating additional capacities, also comes with safety concerns, ranging from labour exploitation to human trafficking.

E. *Vulnerable groups and people travelling with pets:* persons with disabilities and persons requiring specialised medical care (e.g. cancer patients, people with wheelchairs who had to leave them behind) have difficulties to find suitable housing and/or nursing places. Accommodation for children and the elderly also raises specific challenges. It is important to develop well-thought of policies to accommodate unaccompanied children. For people travelling with pets it is also more difficult to find suitable accommodation.

Different factors can accentuate the challenge still further. This includes communication barriers and language issues, and the fatigue that hosts start to feel over time. It is also likely that the economic burden following the increase of consumer prices and energy costs will accentuate problems.

In addition, private housing is not provided in a vacuum. In many big cities - where displaced people tend to arrive in larger numbers - housing capacities and emergency accommodation were already saturated, with consequent challenges to allow refugees to move towards independent accommodation. At the same time economic pressures on individual hosts and displaced persons related to increased costs of living and inflation may lead to the inability or unwillingness to continue existing arrangements.

Furthermore, beyond the specific challenges linked to the provision of private housing, it is important to recall that measures to secure housing in general should respect the principle of non-discrimination and not lead to the segregation or marginalisation of people with a migrant background. They should also foster equal access to non-segregated accessible community-based services in the community. Specific measures, including psychological support, should be designed from the arrival, leading to reception and integration, to address the needs of particularly vulnerable groups. Among these groups are the ones at a greater risk of discrimination, sexual and labour exploitation and abuse, as well as human trafficking: unaccompanied minors, children deprived of parental care, women, LGBTIQ, Roma, persons with disabilities, older persons, racial or ethnic minorities and non-Ukrainians, including undocumented and stateless people.

a. *Introducing measures to support hosts*

Citizens who have opened their homes to welcome those fleeing the war often have many questions on practical aspects of living together with someone they have not met before, or what can be done if they need help or if they would like to further help the hosted persons. Reassuring and guiding private hosts in their solidarity efforts is as important as making sure that hosted people are well received.

Considerations and good practices:

- Some countries are building support systems and establish a questions and answers guide for hosts and guests. There, private individuals can find for example information about how to offer a shelter, what they should pay attention to and what facilities are available for displaced people from Ukraine, for example in the field of health care and education.
- Sponsors may benefit from capacity building and mentoring sessions with intermediate entities, such as civil society or faith-based organisations. Cultural mediators, diaspora representatives, social workers as well as private entrepreneurs' initiatives can also support sponsors.
- An agreement, if possible in the form of a written contract, between the parties could help provide more transparency and clarity in this context. The agreement should clearly set out the basic requirements and conditions, in particular also about the duration of the engagement and the period of notice. Setting early on the conditions of stay is important to avoid misunderstandings and fatigue.
- Clarity about the duration of the stay is important: defining a minimum accommodation period helps set the framework and make sure that people have a clear understanding in advance about their commitment. Incentives for accommodating people for a somewhat longer period can help.
- When problems arise, it is important to be able to discuss them anonymously if necessary. Some Member States have hotlines that hosts and hosted persons can contact. There should be the option for people to be accommodated otherwise if problems cannot finally be solved. When a NGO organises the matching between the hosts and the hosted persons, this organisation is often also offering support and guidance.
- Subsidies for hosts or hosted people paying 'rent': Several Member States have been providing private hosts with a small subsidy. The amounts and the conditions attached for these subsidies vary, for example depending on the duration of the housing offered to benefit from the subsidy, or the number of persons hosted. People benefitting from

temporary protection who receive social benefits in the host country may use part of the money received to contribute to the expenses of the private hosts.

- Setting up peer-to-peer exchanges and structures can help share experiences and learn at the local level. For example, setting up networks to support hosts - with the involvement of public authorities and the support of civil society - can help them discuss common issues that they are facing.
- Information on the accommodation arrangements should be provided in the language of the host Member State, in the language of the host and, to the extent possible, in a format that can be used when interacting with other service providers (e.g. banks).
- Language barriers make communication more difficult. Private actors' or public authorities' initiatives offering translation and interpretation services can help hosts and hosted persons communicate more easily.
- The public services of the host country or region should also assist displaced people who do not speak the local language (e.g. by communicating in a third common language or providing translation/interpretation services).

Examples of informing hosts and coordinating offers

In **Croatia**, a dedicated website provides useful information (reception, housing) for those citizens willing to help people from Ukraine. Support is also provided via a dedicated e-mail address and via mobile phone.

In **France**, the website 'Pour l'Ukraine' centralises the information regarding services that private citizens are offering and supports them in this process (based on a citizen accommodation programme existing since 2017). Through the website, private citizens fill in applications that are transmitted to the State services (a hotline is also available). The prefecture, in cooperation with associations in charge of coordinating the offers, matches the accommodation with the needs of displaced persons. A guide has been produced. A specialised (state-funded) association is systematically monitoring the cohabitation, assisting the displaced persons in their efforts (language training, employment etc.) and mediating in the event of conflicts.

In **Germany**, a social center provides online support, including psychological support, to both hosts and hosted people.

In **Spain**, the Department of Inclusion, Social Security and Migrations, in collaboration with "la Caixa" Foundation, has launched a program to match foster families with Ukrainian families. A website managed by "la Caixa" foundation provides information and contact details for hosts, as well as an online application.

In the **Netherlands** the central government, in collaboration with the Association of Dutch Municipalities, the Red Cross, the Dutch Council for Refugees, the Salvation Army and TakeCareBnB has provided a Guide to Private Reception of Ukrainians.

In **Luxembourg**, host families can contact a hotline managed by Caritas and the Red Cross with the support of the Ministry of Family, Integration and the Greater Region, to request information (available both via phone or email).

In **Poland**, the HumanDoc Foundation, in collaboration with the government, published an online practical guide for people who have taken in displaced people from Ukraine. It provides guidance on how to meet the needs of people fleeing the war, with a section

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dedicated to those presenting vulnerabilities.

In **Austria**, a multilingual [hotline](#) is available (24/7) to both to people fleeing the war and to people willing to offer or offering accommodation.

In **Slovakia,** the International Organisation for Migration, in partnership with Airbnb.org, cooperate in providing free accommodation. Moreover, an [online platform](#) is available to coordinate the private accommodation offers.

In **Ireland**, the Red Cross together with other NGOs, UNHCR and Amnesty International, has developed an [online platform](#) to provide information and support to hosts.

In **Lithuania**, the national volunteer support coordination centre "Strong together" operates an [online website](#) to connect hosts and hosted persons.

In **Latvia**, general information on accommodation and services available to those fleeing the invasion of Ukraine might be found in NGOs [webpages](#).

Examples on fixing the duration, including minimum duration, and conditions of the stay

In **Belgium,** private individuals indicate for how long they are willing to host the displaced persons. The Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Applicants ("Fedasil") has access to these offers and performs the matching between hosts and hosted people.

Bulgaria has made available a standard template for rental contract in Bulgarian and Ukrainian, to improve safeguards both for hosts and the hosted.

In Wallonia (**Belgium**), the host and the hosted persons may choose to sign a temporary occupation agreement that frames the use of the premises and sets some rules on living under the same roof, sharing meals and common areas.

In **France**, each Prefecture appoints intermediary associations that coordinate the accommodations offers by private hosts. After conducting checks, a tripartite agreement between the host, the beneficiaries and the referent association is signed. The agreement lays down the commitments of each actor involved.

In the Basque region (**Spain**), the duration is agreed among hosts and hosted people.

Belgium, France, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands have set a minimum duration of three months.

Spain has set a minimum duration of six months in order to provide a suitable environment for integration.

In **Czechia**, the minimum duration of accommodation is at least 16 subsequent days within the calendar month for hosts to receive financial compensation.

In **Ireland**, a minimum of six to twelve months commitment is requested for accommodation pledges.

b. *Effective matching of hosts and refugees*

Given the urgent need to host people after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, most Member States, regions and cities in the European Union came up with *ad hoc* measures to provide the reception and support needed to the displaced people from Ukraine.

After the war broke out, a number of private-driven initiatives were set up to help people fleeing Ukraine. For example, UN organisations cooperate with companies to provide support to people fleeing the invasion of Ukraine. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) provides expertise in the context of the Booking.com initiative, which waves commission fees and offers accommodation to displaced people from Ukraine for free or with reduced rates (programme "Ukraine Refugee Rate"). Similarly, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) set up a partnership with Airbnb.org that connects people fleeing from Ukraine to free, short-term housing in Poland, Moldova, Romania, Hungary and Slovakia.

Some Member States report that displaced people prefer staying in big cities (often bordering Ukraine), where they have a network of relatives, friends and acquaintances. Rural areas may face specific challenges when welcoming displaced people, for example on access to services. Nevertheless, rural areas often have a lot of potential for newcomers: labour market opportunities, welcoming hosts and more housing opportunities since they are less densely populated. In the past, rural communities have developed welcoming and inclusion practices for refugees under resettlement and community sponsorship schemes.

On 18 May 2022, the **European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA)** has presented practical recommendations on the provision of emergency placement in private accommodation for persons displaced from Ukraine. This informal guide helps relevant stakeholders (national, regional and local authorities as well as civil society organisations) match displaced persons with available private accommodation. It can help authorities planning to accommodate displaced persons with private hosts or willing to formalise the system that was created *ad hoc*. Regions and cities, civil society and faith-based organisations have also elaborated good practices to inform how to match hosts with hosted people.

Considerations and good practices:

- The offers of private housing for displaced people per Member State are often centralised in a trusted website gathering relevant information, also in terms of specific needs and preferences, in a timely, safe, effective and transparent way. In some Member States offers are coordinated through a government website, which local authorities (sometimes with help of the civil society) access when allocating accommodation to displaced people. In other Member States it is NGOs (or NGOs together with local authorities) coordinating and matching offers online. In some cases, NGOs are providing additional support and care to the displaced people.
- The EUAA recommends that matching platforms should provide a real time view on the number and profiles of individuals seeking accommodation, as well as on all available places (i.e. size, location, accessibility). Displaced persons should be able to indicate specific needs they might have, such as a preferred location, schooling of children, etc.
- Clear, up-to-date and easily accessible information needs to be provided to both hosts and hosted persons about the specific procedure and the requirements/prerequisites to be fulfilled.

- Member States can plan smartly the allocation of places by choosing to organise housing offers with a contingency plan from the beginning. For example, some Member States have first activated only half of the private offers received to have remaining capacity if hosting is required for a longer period of time.
- Resources and capacity-building support could promote hosting and welcoming of displaced people in smaller and rural communities.
- Placement and matching of displaced people should be coordinated in an effective manner, taking into account both individual preferences and key territorial variables, such as transport connections, access to health services and to the labour market. The matching should also take into account the availability of school places for families with children.
- Catering for the specific needs of vulnerable people need to be factored in already during the matching procedure: for example, people with reduced mobility and elderly people need to find accommodation in homes where accessibility is guaranteed e.g. through a lift or absence of stairs. People with other disabilities issues should be able to access the equipment they need.

Examples of central points of coordination	
Government websites	NGOs websites
- Austria - Belgium (federal level) - Flanders - Wallonia - Croatia - Czechia - France - Germany - Italy - Poland - Slovakia - Norway	- Estonia - Finland - Germany - Italy - Ireland - Latvia - Lithuania - Netherlands - Slovakia - Spain

c. Ensuring private housing is suitable

Persons enjoying temporary protection are guaranteed access to suitable accommodation. This means that their stay should take place in a safe, healthy and hazard-free environment. Unsuitable accommodation is associated with health risks, such as injury risks. Specific problems include exposure to noise, humidity, mould growth, inadequate indoor temperature, inadequate ventilation, lack of hygiene, crowding and faulty equipment with an increased likelihood of a fire starting and spreading.

Therefore, private accommodation is to be checked in advance against several criteria: it has to be suitable, fulfil certain standards and be structurally safe for the people using it. Verifying that the house in question (or the part of the house that will be made available to displaced people) is suitable for accommodation purposes is a crucial step in the process. The EUAA has developed standards for housing applicants for international protection that can be adapted to the context of private housing for displaced persons.

Considerations and good practices:

- Standardised criteria and procedures are to be used to check the safety and adequacy of housing – including to ensure privacy and secure stay of displaced people – in line with the EUAA recommendations and guidance on this point – while making sure that families are not separated. A follow-up and monitoring visit after the arrival can help ensure that the standards continue to be met.
- In its practical recommendations on the provision of private accommodation, the EUAA provides a specific checklist for housing to be suitable: there needs to be sufficient sleeping facilities, sanitary facilities, possibility to prepare meals and security of utilities. For example, a sofa in the living room is not enough; a separate room is needed. In each bedroom there should be at least one individual bed per person and one cupboard per person or family, big enough to hold personal belongings such as clothes, medication or documents. A certain level of privacy should be guaranteed (e.g. possibility to lock the door of the bedroom).
- Partnerships with specific professions (such as estate agents, architects and engineers) can help verify whether housing is suitable.
- The 'matching' between hosts and hosted people needs to be done on the basis of the number and needs of hosted people met (e.g. children going to school should have desks), if possible in a standardised manner. Family composition and its needs, size and number of beds in the accommodation, languages spoken by hosts and displaced persons, length of stay or duration of accommodation availability play a key role.
- Additional specific needs of the persons to be hosted, for example of minors, pregnant women, elderly, disabled people, people with mental health problems need to be taken into account before placing them in private homes. This requires targeted matching from authorities and/or NGOs connecting people with specific needs with appropriate initiatives.
- An adequate screening of specific needs should be done in advance and then again on a regular basis: some hosted people may suffer from trauma that is difficult to detect at arrival or that emerges later. In such cases, a transfer system should be put in place to take these specific needs into account.

> *Examples of checking whether accommodation is suitable*
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> In **Belgium**, local municipalities check the private accommodation against standards (existing checklist) to make sure that health, safety, quality and living standards conditions are met. In Flanders, people with psychiatric needs and high vulnerabilities are not accommodated in private settings.
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> In **the Netherlands**, within the framework of the initiative "RefugeeHomeNL" checks on the accommodation are been conducted (e.g. private and separated bedroom availability).
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> In **Spain**, "La Caixa Foundation" visits the accommodation prior to the matching, to ensure suitable living conditions.
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> In **Austria**, provinces, or identified organisations, check all the accommodation offers against a defined set of criteria (depending on the province).
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> **Luxembourg** is setting up a project to coordinate private housing offers. Social workers will carry out a home visit to check that the standards defined by the National Reception Office are complied with.
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> In Vienna (**Austria**), a faith-based organisation (Diakonie) examines the offers received, contacts the hosts and discusses with them the general conditions. Issues clarified include which will be the shared rooms, the duration of accommodation. Then, the offers of hosts are matched with the needs of the people to be hosted.
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> In **Ireland**, the Red Cross reviews the accommodation offered against a set of standards. Local authorities are also involved to ensure that the property meets the needs of the beneficiary.

d. Ensuring private housing is safe: vetting, monitoring, and supervision

Checks prior and post arrival are essential to ensure private housing is safe and secure. The dangers of human trafficking and (sexual or labour) exploitation are real. Offers to provide private housing need to be assessed and the hosts have to be vetted to prevent risks.

Considerations and good practices:

- Background checks of the hosts are recommended prior or as a precondition to accepting the housing offers.
- A check of criminal records should be mandatory to prevent trafficking and exploitation.
- Whenever possible, house visits could be organised, including on-site checks and visits by relevant officials (reception authority, social services, law enforcement) and/or staff of appointed civil society organisations.
- A solid mechanism of vetting, screening and monitoring of the placement is essential: it is important to match the expectations of hosts and hosted persons and to mitigate risk of conflict and abuse/sexual exploitation. Civil society organisations active in the field could help with vetting the accommodation offers.

- o Regular visits of relevant persons such as social workers, medical personnel, police officers, representatives of faith-based organisations are also recommended to make sure that the displaced people – including children and unaccompanied minors – are well settled and not exploited.
  - o Adult members of candidate hosts should be required to undergo a criminal record check through their countries designated system.
- Hosted persons should receive information on national emergency helplines that they can call in case of possible exploitation and of trafficking of human beings situations. The list of the national anti-trafficking helplines is available online: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/policies/internal-security/organised-crime-and-human-trafficking/together-against-trafficking-human-beings/national-hotlines_en. Those emergency helplines should be available in multiple languages, including Ukrainian and Russian. More information on how to prevent falling into the hands of traffickers in this context will be part of the wider European Commission communication campaign targeting people fleeing the war.

Examples of vetting and checks of whether accommodation is safe

In **the Netherlands**, applicant host families need to provide a certificate of conduct to prove they have not committed any criminal offences.

In **Czechia**, NGOs managing the small-scale accommodation initiatives are running pre-screening checks.

In **Spain**, private hosts need to provide a negative criminal background certificate.

In **Croatia**, the police authorities, social care services and the tax administration are checking the background of potential hosts.

In **France**, public authorities and associations check the criminal records, reception conditions, minimum duration, etc. Public authorities and the UNHCR are also providing a webinar for associations organised to prevent the risks of human trafficking.

In **Ireland**, NGOs are partnering up with the police. An expert is joining the volunteers and asking potential hosts whether they agree to undergo the vetting process (background checks).

In **Belgium**, each adult member of a candidate host family must either submit an extract from the criminal record or authorise the municipality to consult the criminal record directly.

From challenges to opportunities: Developing innovative partnerships

a. Involving cities and regions receiving displaced people and 'twinning' opportunities

The Action Plan on integration and inclusion 2021-2027 acknowledges that the local level plays a key role in welcoming and guiding newcomers when they first arrive in their new country. Among other stakeholders, civil society organisations, churches, religious and other philosophical communities, youth and students' organisations, diaspora organisations as well as migrants themselves are crucial to achieving an integration policy that works on the ground.

Against this background, the Commission has been consulting regional and local authorities, private foundations, migration experts and migrants themselves to seek views and identify good practices regarding accommodation in the context of the current crisis.

The Partnership of the Urban Agenda for the EU on the inclusion of migrants and refugees brings together cities, EU countries, the European Commission and civil society organisations to develop common actions to promote integration. It is one of the partnerships on twelve different topics that seeks to improve legislation, funding instruments and knowledge sharing at European level.

The Partnership has organised two special sessions on Ukraine in April and May 2022 to discuss the challenges for cities, including those in the front line of accommodating displaced persons, against the background of the invasion of Ukraine. The Partnership's plenary has been enlarged to include cities and regions in the forefront of the reception of displaced people from Ukraine (such as Warsaw, Krakow, Gdansk, Prague and Vienna). This group will help three further thematic sessions, namely on funding, accommodation and data, in autumn 2022.

In a dedicated meeting of the Solidarity Platform on 15 June 2022, cities and regions provided rich input and experience in helping accommodate displaced people in private homes. The Committee of Regions has presented its [Info-Support Hub for Regions and Cities](#) that seeks to facilitate help by EU's regions and cities responding to the needs in Ukraine and in the EU's regions and cities hosting refugees, including on accommodation.

'Twinning' of cities in Member States could be another possibility to learn from good practices in accommodation of displaced people in an emergency situation. Within the European Integration Network (EIN), Member States and the European Economic Area countries are learning from each other's experience through mutual assistance projects focussing on good practices in the field of integration. In view of the acute housing challenges, the Commission will encourage, in autumn 2022, EIN participating countries to exchange on and study community sponsorship or other *ad hoc* schemes that are well-functioning and providing an integration pathway to hosted people. Cities that have welcomed an important number of displaced people will benefit from these exchanges and learn from each other's experience.

Further 'twinning' possibilities will be explored, including the possibility to link up directly local authorities active or involved in housing in this context. For example, more experienced regional and local authorities could support other authorities that wish to develop or improve their own solutions for welcoming and accommodating newcomers.

Considerations and good practices:

- National authorities should involve specialists with knowledge of the situation on the ground (e.g. social workers, local authorities etc.) in the design of housing solutions and other integration measures.
- A 'whole of society' approach is the best way to scale up good initiatives and find solutions in concrete situations: frontline Member States managing EU and national funds on the one hand and regions or cities on the other need to work together to find solutions and adapt to the evolving needs and circumstances.
- As already the case in many Member States, national authorities should actively cooperate with local actors, especially local and regional authorities, to ensure effective matching and provide information to displaced people of how to get access to basic services (health services, registration, schooling etc.).
- Efficient coordination and a clear division of roles is important: all actors should be aware of their role and to whom to turn to regarding the different aspects of the support provided.
- Depending on each national context and organisation, local authorities can help when displaced people arrive in the community and are to be matched with potential hosts. In Norway for example, it is the municipalities that approve the accommodation before the contract is signed. The Norwegian Directorate of Integration and Diversity coordinates the settlement and integration scheme together with the municipalities.
- Having an authority coordinating at local level can also provide support to hosts in case of questions, because of the geographic proximity.

b. *Exchanges between Member States, Ukrainian authorities, the private sector*

Identifying and exchanging good practices in dedicated fora is also important. The Commission has financially supported in recent years the development of relevant projects in several EU Member States specifically on community sponsorship (see Annex 1).

The Commission is also in contact with foundations that have gathered additional funding since the beginning of the war to help people fleeing the invasion of Ukraine. Foundations are sometimes co-funding EU-funded projects supporting the civil society. They are providing grants, coordinating and connecting organisations, disseminating good practices and helping match unaccompanied minors with guardians. They are also working on public/private partnerships to provide access to housing. Foundations are in favour of breaking the silos among organisations representing various sectors (migration civil society, employers, academia, diaspora).

Collaboration between public authorities in both Member States and Ukraine, the private sector and the diaspora can help provide solutions on the ground and allow safe transfer and accommodation of displaced people, including vulnerable people and unaccompanied minors.

Considerations and good practices:

- Develop holistic approaches to the reception and integration of third-country nationals in Europe that will allow them to become independent in the medium term.
- Work together with other Member States, Ukrainian authorities, the diaspora and the private sector (foundations, entrepreneurs) to provide safe homes to displaced people.

This could take the form e.g. of a coordination body where national, regional and local level can coordinate with public and private stakeholders involved.
- Build on successful experiences of relevant EU funded projects and scale up civil society/local communities-driven projects that help third-country nationals integrate in the host society and become independent.

Example of a multi-layer cooperation helping displaced people find safe homes

Greece and Ukraine have signed a cooperation protocol on hosting and protecting unaccompanied children from Ukraine. In April 2022, the first unaccompanied minors arrived in Greece and found a new home in the premises of the "Home Project", an NGO that cares for unaccompanied migrant children. The operation succeeded thanks to the fruitful cooperation between the Greek authorities (Ministry for Migration and Asylum and the police), private entrepreneurs, NGOs (International Organisation for Migration, UNHCR) on the one side and Ukrainian authorities (Minister for Social Policy, Special Secretary for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors, Social Service of Ukraine and the Embassy of Ukraine in Athens) on the other side, which worked closely together.

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c. *Partnering with architects, designers and urban planners: the experience of the New European Bauhaus*

The New European Bauhaus initiative brings together architects, designers and urban planners working together on responding to accommodation needs that are at the time functional, sustainable and cost-effective. In fluid and changing situations such as the situation following the invasion of Ukraine, it can assist authorities find solutions that can be adapted to changing user needs, using sustainable material with low carbon footprint.

The Bauhaus group of specialists looks not only at the material and the cost-benefit factor but also at the needs, the profile of the people to be hosted and the duration (that can be uncertain from the outset) to come up with design of accommodation adaptable to different circumstances. Though challenges are inherent in this exercise (e.g. the change of use of a premise means change of the safety rules), their intelligent vision can help on the ground in emergency situations.

Example of a Bauhaus solution for temporary accommodation

For example, temporary partitions have been used to offer immediate help in hosting displaced people from Ukraine in temporary or modular shelters set up in Polish cities: Pritzker Prize laureate architect Shigeru Ban, working together with colleagues and students in Warsaw and Wrocław (and with the support of local authorities and donors), built and installed the Japanese designer's paper partition system in 'shelters' in the Wrocław main railway station and a building previously hosting a supermarket in Chełm, a city across the Ukrainian border. This provided a solution for people staying for a few days before moving to other parts of the country. These 'shelters' are equipped with toilets, showers, kitchens, and children's play areas and separated spaces guaranteeing some privacy.

Furthermore, and since certain people who have fled the war are going back to Ukraine, the Bauhaus group of specialists has started work on guidance, support and inspiration for the

reconstruction of Ukraine. In this context, they have started working on issues related to accommodation of displaced people within Ukraine. They are not only looking at the technical solutions (temporary or modular shelters) but also aspects of reuse of existing spaces or infrastructure needed for specific groups of displaced people (e.g. women with children) or the social fabric of specific neighbourhoods (e.g. old buildings from the Soviet era).

Considerations and good practices:

- The diverse profiles and needs of displaced people as well as the diversity of local contexts need to be taken fully into account.
- New European Bauhaus experts working together with experts who know the context in EU Member States hosting the bulk of the displaced persons can find smart solutions.
- Local and regional authorities in neighbouring countries could be involved in testing the 'products'.
- The private sector could be involved at a voluntary basis providing the material.
- New European Bauhaus experts can also be consulted when planning reception and shelter offers and in the context of contingency planning or in the development of shelter capacity under rescEU. The work of the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) on the design of recommendations for private accommodation and discussions with the national reception authorities can feed into this discussion.

d. *Partnerships at the grassroots level: From individual hosts to community engagement*

Building on the solidarity of individuals and communities and looking towards sustainable solutions that would empower people arriving in the EU, the Commission has encouraged Member States to promote so-called 'community sponsorship' programmes or schemes. In its Recommendation on "legal pathways to protection in the EU: promoting resettlement, humanitarian admission and other complementary pathways", the Commission has stressed that *"[c]ommunity sponsorship programmes are adapted to different circumstances and traditions of host societies and are therefore taking different forms. They are based on a partnership between the state, civil society and private individuals (or sponsors). The goal is to facilitate integration and, in some cases, also the admission of people arriving in the host society"*.

In the framework of these programmes, sponsors are actively engaged in welcoming newcomers to their societies. Sponsor groups can support the newcomers regarding housing but also in activities, such as language trainings, administrative steps, psychological and emotional support, and access to services, such as education, employment and health care. To maintain a high level of engagement of all the stakeholders involved (institutional actors, civil societies and faith-based organisations, citizens), flexibility is key.

Overall, community sponsorship schemes are difficult to set up. An important time investment as well as coordination up-front efforts are needed. However, in order to ensure a complementary, yet rapid response to the current crisis, flexible programmes that share some of the core elements of 'community sponsorship' have been set up. For example, in some of these newly set up programmes, sponsors are helping with accommodation and integration of

displaced people, but the duration and the responsibilities of the sponsors have been reduced.

Such schemes could help reduce the burden of private hosting initiatives, while not overloading the ordinary reception system. Moving from stand-alone accommodation offers to more organised programmes at community level can help make such offers more sustainable: it can create a solid framework, help hosts, reduce the fatigue that they are experiencing over time, eliminate risks, help build capacities and create solid structures that can be re-activated if need be.

Considerations and good practices:

- Sponsors need to be identified and their role clearly defined to manage expectations and avoid misunderstandings among the actors involved.
- As part of their application process, sponsor groups can draw up a support plan, where the group details the areas of intervention and their capabilities in supporting the beneficiaries' integration efforts.
- In the plan, sponsor groups may assess their overall engagement towards the beneficiaries' integration and commit to a sustainable timeframe.
- Determining the timeframe depends, on the one hand, on the realistic needs of the newcomers, who may suffer from cultural shocks and language barriers, and, on the other hand, the sustainability of these partnerships from the sponsors' perspective.
- Sponsor groups may benefit from capacity building and mentoring sessions with intermediate entities, such as civil society or faith-based organisations. Cultural mediators, diaspora representatives or social workers can also support sponsors.
- Beneficiaries and sponsors should have a safe space to express doubts or lack of willingness to continue in the project. Specialised professionals can help with this.
- Involving beneficiaries in the early stage of the design of new programmes could further enhance their positive outcome. This was difficult in the immediate aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, where rapid responses were needed. Nevertheless, displaced people should be involved in the ongoing processes of monitoring and evaluation of pilot projects in which they are participating.

Example of a welcoming programme based on community engagement

In response to the current crisis, HIAS Europe has launched the "Welcome Circle Programme for Ukrainians". HIAS assists Jewish communities in Western and Eastern Europe in identifying, creating, and certifying "Welcome Circles", i.e., group of 5-8 citizens. The "Welcome Circles" will need to go through a background check via a third party and present a Welcome Plan committing to supporting displaced people over a six-month period. "Welcome Circles" orientate new arrivals and help them find safe housing, access schools, the labour market and services. Via National Community Integration Officers in charge of coordinating and supporting the Circles, HIAS Europe will guide and monitor the communities involved.

Sustainable solutions for the future

Some Member States are in the process of phasing out their programmes that provided financial assistance to hosts. This could pose an immediate challenge when considering alternative reception and accommodation opportunities.
It is therefore crucial, if countries begin phasing out their schemes, to make sure that there is no abrupt disruption that could have detrimental consequences on the displaced people. Allowing for a transition period, pointing to alternative solutions (e.g. social housing), securing continued care for vulnerable people, providing hosts and hosted people with transparent information on the procedure to be followed and continuing to supporting connections are crucial to avoid further emergencies or having people on the street.

Even as the private hosting schemes are phased out it is important to reflect how the experience acquired will impact the future of EU and Member States' reception and integration policies. The use of private solutions can be part of contingency planning for future arrivals, which should factor-in tools developed in the current context such as matching and vetting platforms, partnerships with regional/local authorities or private stakeholders such as those in the hospitality sector, etc. that could be reactivated at short notice.

The experience acquired should also help community sponsorship schemes to gain further traction across the EU, building on the safe homes experience. In the European context, as mentioned in the [Commission recommendation](#) on "legal pathways to protection in the EU: promoting resettlement, humanitarian admission and other complementary pathways", community sponsorship schemes allow individuals to directly engage in settlement and integration efforts. They can therefore underpin resettlement, humanitarian admission and other complementary pathways.

The lessons learned and the solutions found to welcome displaced persons from Ukraine can contribute to setting up more efficient future reception systems. Building on the basis of community sponsorship schemes, governments and communities can develop ideas to provide a more structured, sustainable and effective support to people in need, also beyond the current crisis. Such schemes secure a better screening, preparation, training and support of the hosts. They also help newcomers to actively participate in a quicker and more effective way in the local community.

Such schemes can also expand opportunities for resettlement and complementary pathways under community sponsorship programs. Building on this cooperation between the state, civil society and private individuals, additional places could be made available to those in need of protection. Therefore, developing and spreading knowledge about such schemes can also help respond to future emergency situations: it can help ensure that more people in need of international protection are well received and have a path to integration in the host society.

Funding

EU funding can help make providing accommodation for displaced people, including through supporting private housing solutions, more sustainable.

The European Social Fund (ESF) can invest in the education of both children and adults, employment and training, including work placements, traineeships, apprenticeships, and social inclusion measures allowing people to take up work, such as early education childhood and care, care for vulnerable people (e.g. elderly, persons with disabilities) and help with access to services. The ESF can also help with social inclusion through housing assistance programmes and social services that support access to housing. It can help upskill service providers, fund programmes supporting users in their access to housing, as well as accompanying programmes to relocate vulnerable people, including people with a migrant background.

Cash transfers or any types of income support (e.g. rent subsidies) are not eligible for support, unless they are tightly linked to a wider set of measures or individual integration pathway. This is for example the case with the Housing First programmes. Provided that these conditions are met, support could include rent subsidies, accommodation in host families, hotels, tourist guest houses or municipal facilities such as schools, gyms, etc. and related costs.

With regards to housing, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) supports refurbishing, building and purchasing of non-segregated individual social housing in the mainstream community. Within this scope, families or individuals could get access to individual apartments accompanied by complementary measures to facilitate access to mainstream services in education, employment, health care and social care. Accessible social housing adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities, older persons etc. can also be funded.

Against this background, cohesion policy funding can support access to accommodation in the host Member State. Support should be provided in the community, outside institutional settings. Any EU-funded measures should respect the principles of independent living and living in dignity, including through family and foster families for children and other vulnerable individuals. Support for providing and financing accommodation, including financial incentives to those hosting people in their homes, could be covered, depending on the specificities of each fund.

Without changing the scope of the funds, the CARE regulation and subsequent amendments have provided greater flexibility to Member States that are making use of existing 2014-2020 funds. This includes increased pre-financing, enabling the interchangeable use of ESF and ERDF, and a retroactive eligibility date.

Member States can also use the new unit cost introduced by Common Provisions Regulation (Article 68c) to declare costs for basic needs and support, including regarding accommodation. This can help with the costs of basic needs and support of displaced persons who have been granted temporary protection or other adequate protection under national law in the context of the current crisis, for a maximum of thirteen weeks from the arrival of these persons in the European Union. In addition to this unit cost, Member States may declare

further costs for other measures beyond basic needs and support, such as integration measures (e.g. education, training and employment).

Aware of the urgent needs of additional funding, the Commission, working closely with Member States, has made available an additional 400 million euros through Emergency Assistance. This amount will support the Member States most affected in terms of border management and first reception needs. It will be released through the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and the Border Management and Visa Instrument (BMVI).

This additional funding will be provided in two steps, initially, through a redeployment of funding included under the current Thematic Facility worth 248 million euros. Under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), these additional funds can be used to provide first assistance, including temporary accommodation, to those fleeing the invasion of Ukraine. For the second step, Commission requested 152 million euros as targeted reinforcement of the AMIF Thematic Facility budget, which was agreed by the European Parliament and the Council.

Civil society organisations and local and regional authorities are key to attaining the objectives of the emergency assistance operations. Therefore, for the final release of 30% of the first Emergency Assistance contribution under AMIF to take place, Member States need to channel support to regional and local authorities and/or civil society organisations. Regional and local authorities and/or civil society should be involved in how this immediate assistance will be provided to displaced persons from Ukraine.

The bulk of funding opportunities for the Member States is available in the 2021–2027 national programmes, currently under adoption, managed by the Member States. Under the Home Affairs Funds, some 11 billion euros have been made available for these programmes. The Commission has invited the Member States to consider the needs related to assisting displaced people from Ukraine when finalising their Home Affairs Funds programming.

The European Investment Bank (EIB) has recently approved a programme loan (Ukraine solidarity package) to fund mostly social infrastructure in EU Member States to adequately respond to the crisis following the invasion of Ukraine. In addition, the EIB is about to launch an advisory platform (EMBRACE) to support the Member States who have received most displaced persons from Ukraine.

Considerations and good practices:

- Maximise use of relevant EU funding to support hosts, hosted persons and regional/local authorities along with civil society that are responding to housing and inclusion needs.
- Build on project networks where local and regional authorities and NGOs work together and further use the good practices developed, including through AMIF transnational projects on integration.
- Use EU funds to combine non-segregated accommodation with other important aspects of the integration pathway (access to education, employment, health – and social care) that will help displaced people become independent and well integrated in the host society.

Annex 1 – Examples of relevant AMIF projects

Several AMIF-funded projects in the area of community sponsorships can help with integration of displaced people building on Europeans' solidarity. They can serve as source of inspiration and good practice that can be replicated and/or scaled up.
Some of these projects are the following:

- The project **CAPS-EU** (Building Capacity for Private Sponsorship in the European Union) seeks to develop practical tools and knowledge for policymakers, civil society actors that manage sponsorship relationships and sponsors helping out refugees in private sponsorship situations. It will help build stakeholders' capacity to design, implement, sustain and scale up private sponsorship. Looking at existing practices, it will strive to promote best practice and develop a cross-Europe monitoring and evaluation framework, capacity building and peer learning across borders, for new and existing intermediary organisations and sponsor groups and their members. In the context of the current crisis, partners are looking at expanding the scope of the project to incorporate the lessons learned inspired by the response to the situation in Ukraine.

- The project **RaCIP** (Raising Capacity for Including People engaged in private sponsorship) will work, through training courses for different categories of supporters, towards building informal support networks around migrants, managed by citizens. Families that host and/or support migrants, workers and employers who introduce the migrants to the local working culture, university students who support young migrants in their studies, and civil society will be involved in these networks.

- The project **EMBRACIN** (Enhancing Migrants' Bottom-up, Responsive and Citizen-led Integration in Europe) was awarded with the European Citizen's Prize in 2018. It brings together a European network of cities interested in exchanging, adapting and reusing the award winning "6+6×6 scheme". This scheme looks at hosting 6 migrants/refugees every 5,000 inhabitants with a personalised approach: six professionals support the migrants in different areas (housing, health, language teaching, job counselling, psychological support, legal support for asylum applications) –a complete path towards social and economic integration with a duration of 24 months. The project builds on a couple's experience who opened its home to six young migrants who had risked their life in the Mediterranean in April 2015. The family did not simply host the refugees; it also helped them find their way into the Italian society. At the end of the two years, all six newcomers had a job and were integrated into the local community.

- The project **COMP4SEE** (Complementary pathways for Southeast Europe) is looking at good practices of private sponsorship schemes implemented so far, analysing the legal and practical context on establishing private sponsorships. Organisations with experience in conducting family reunification and sponsorship programs will exchange knowledge and explore new models of private sponsorships schemes tailored to certain Member States. The project will also look at promoting and strengthening support at the local and national level for introducing complementary pathways and expanding current channels, which can lead to newly developed models and improved family reunification systems.

- The project **COMET** (COMplementary pathways nETwork) is looking at developing a pilot blueprint on the idea of community sponsorship with shared resources and learning, to which several countries and programmes can contribute. The goal is to help participants maximise their potential and eventual contribution to a host society, also in geographical terms. It will facilitate safe and legal family reunification, expand humanitarian admission, support new and existing community sponsorship programmes and help migrants enrol in EU universities and schools.

- The **SAFE project** intends to facilitate the exchange of experiences, expertise and practices among organizations involved in the implementation of private sponsorship schemes and resettlement programs and to strengthen a European dynamic. The project aims at identifying the capacity building needs in private sponsorship schemes, through exchanges of practices meetings, webinars to find operational and concrete responses to the difficulties faced in the implementation of complementary pathways and private sponsorship schemes. An online platform will be created to provide an open and trusted learning environment to discuss technical, operational and conceptual issues and to collect specific data on complementary pathways and methodologies implemented on a global scale.

- The project **HUMCORE** (Humanitarian Corridors Integration pathways) is looking at developing and scaling up community sponsorships in several Member States based on the experience of partners involved in humanitarian corridors. Research, training and capacity building for sponsors as well as peer learning can make integration of people in need for protection more effective on the ground.

- The project **Vitality & Engagement - Developing Communities** (VE) will support community sponsorship schemes at pilot phase and at early implementation phase. The goal is to help these schemes grow into fully-fledged programmes in each partner country and across EU Member States. Country-tailored training and transnational interaction opportunities will support several civil society stakeholders involved in such programmes.

- The project **Share QSN** (Quality Sponsorship Network) supports sponsorship initiatives to develop into larger, sustainable and community-driven programmes. It provides a platform for mutual exchange and learning amongst regional and local actors to foster welcome, inclusion, and integration of newly arrived migrants and refugees in Europe. Activities include EU best practice exchange and peer learning, capacity building, information sharing to raise awareness about sponsorship, and local activities with grassroots sponsors and refugees.