



Housing support for Ukrainian refugees in receiving countries

27 July 2022

Key messages

- The rapid influx of Ukrainian refugees¹ to Europe in the wake of Russia's large-scale aggression against Ukraine happened in the context of significant pre-existing housing challenges, such as insufficient housing supply and rising costs, in many host countries, notably Poland, limiting available options for housing arrivals both in the short and medium-to-long term.
- Host countries in the EU and beyond have had to adapt and scale up their capacity to receive refugees. The majority of countries rely on a mix of accommodation options for new arrivals, based on the needs of the individual or family, and have supplemented existing or newly created reception centres or other emergency solutions with programmes supporting reception by private households. In non-EU countries, the level of support typically depends on whether Ukrainians enter as refugees or under a sponsorship scheme.
- Financial support for accommodation has been provided by central governments to local authorities offering housing, private accommodation providers (e.g. hotels), or directly to persons fleeing Ukraine. In some countries, including Poland and Czech Republic, households hosting Ukrainian refugees are eligible for financial compensation.
- A number of countries have developed websites to facilitate matching between hosts and beneficiaries and better co-ordinate provision of longer-term housing solutions at the municipal level. These sites often also serve as information hubs to direct Ukrainian refugees to other needed services. Alongside state-co-ordinated portals, many private and non-profit sites exist, as civil society and non-governmental organisations have played an important role in reception in some countries, such as the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.
- Several challenges have emerged related to housing support, most notably in connection to the widespread use of private hosting accommodation, from verifying liveability to minimising the risk of exploitation and gender-based violence. Countries are trying to mitigate these risks, particularly for vulnerable groups, but government services often find it difficult to regulate private housing initiatives that have been set up outside the official system.

¹ The term "refugee" is used in this brief to refer to persons, who are fleeing from Russia's war against Ukraine and have obtained some sort of international protection, including not only formal refugee status (as per the Geneva Convention) but also subsidiary and temporary protection (as in the case of most refugees from Ukraine).

Background

The historic mass outflow of people fleeing Russia's large-scale aggression against Ukraine has placed significant pressures on the reception capacities of OECD and EU countries. By mid-July, the UNHCR had recorded nearly 5.8 million individual refugees in Europe, a disproportionate share of whom remain in Ukraine's neighbouring countries. Many arrivals face a variety of settlement-related challenges. Perhaps the most pressing of these challenges is access to housing. Safe, secure, and affordable housing is essential to health and overall well-being, providing a base from which to seek employment, re-establish family relationships and make connections with the wider community.

Under the EU Temporary Protection Directive, beneficiaries of temporary protection (BTPs) in EU member states are entitled to a suitable accommodation or housing or, as an alternative, to receive means to obtain housing if necessary. Initially, many of those who had to flee Ukraine found shelter in private accommodations provided by individual households on a voluntary basis. Others were sheltered in the immediate term by national authorities who had scaled up reception facilities. However, both options are often only temporary solutions. In other OECD countries, both in and outside Europe, access to accommodation varies according to the type of protection or status granted. Several non-EU countries have enacted dedicated sponsorship schemes, through which sponsors are responsible for covering costs of accommodation for Ukrainian individuals or families for the duration of their stay.

Regardless of the short-term solutions identified, the transition to more durable accommodation is a looming challenge. In many host countries, this new demand for housing is occurring in the context of pre-existing capacity constraints and affordability challenges. Policy makers acknowledge sustainable solutions need to be found to ensure safe and appropriate housing support for residents of Ukraine who had to flee their country, but they also seek to adapt these solutions to the uncertain duration of the displacement and the prospects for return or onward movement. Continuous monitoring of the situation and of existing housing capacity is therefore needed in all OECD and EU countries.

This brief presents an overview of specific policy decisions taken regarding the short-term housing of refugees from Ukraine and challenges identified to date. It seeks to identify relevant considerations for those countries that are beginning to adapt their thinking regarding Ukrainians' prospects for longer-term stays.

Initial reception conditions

Reliance on private hosts and personal networks

At the end of 2020, according to Eurostat, 1.35 million Ukrainian citizens held a valid residence permit in an EU country, representing the third-largest group of third-country nationals in the EU after those from Morocco and Türkiye. Outside Europe, the largest migrant communities from Ukraine were registered in the United States and Israel. A large community of Ukrainian descent is also present in Canada.

Consequently, many Ukrainians arriving in OECD countries relied initially on personal networks, staying with friends and family of the Ukrainian diaspora. According to a survey conducted jointly by the OECD and the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), by 14 June, half of respondents reported either staying with local families (29%) or with family and friends (20%). Personal networks were an attractive and efficient option for initial arrivals, but it quickly became apparent that countries could not rely on such networks alone. Not only is it the case that later arrivals are less likely to have well-developed personal networks, the sheer number of new arrivals meant that broader housing solutions need to be found.

Already the early waves of arrivals at the EU-Ukraine border were sufficient to strain available publicly funded housing solutions, especially as other arrivals of asylum seekers did not diminish during the first

half of 2022. In order to house the large number of individuals fleeing Ukraine as quickly as possible, more than half of EU and other OECD countries have relied, at least initially, upon the willingness of private citizens to host these refugees in their homes. Many European citizens have opened their homes to host displaced people from Ukraine, in an unprecedented show of solidarity. Poland has relied extensively on a system of volunteers, co-ordinated through non-profits, to meet housing needs. The scale of this, however, varies between countries. Finland and Latvia estimate that the share of displaced persons in private accommodation is around two-thirds, while in Belgium and Italy it is around 85%-90%.² There is significant variation also within countries. In Germany, the share of Ukrainians in private accommodation varies from 10% to 80% across municipalities.

Several non-EU countries have chosen to implement a sponsorship-based model for receiving Ukrainians, a decision that affects housing policy in addition to serving as a migration channel. Typically, sponsorship is arranged prior to entry, and new arrivals are housed in private homes (and the costs for this housing covered by the sponsor) in the majority of cases. For example, families have been able to use sponsorship under the United States' Uniting for Ukraine policy and the UK Ukraine Family Scheme to bring family members who were unable to obtain a tourist visa. Canada and New Zealand have also pursued sponsorship programmes that foresee sponsor responsibility for housing, though arrivals may be eligible for an alternative status that provides different benefits. In the United States, refugees are eligible for housing support, and in Canada, arrivals under the newly created temporary protection status may be housed for two weeks in emergency accommodation.

Several challenges have emerged from the reliance on private hosts and personal networks for initial reception. These include the temporary nature of such accommodation arrangements, ensuring the suitability of accommodation, financial burden on hosts, and language barriers. Finland has also reported that providing reception services to those in private accommodation is more challenging than to those staying in reception centres due to accessibility. In the context of sponsorship schemes, the difficulties with matching have been a major concern. In the United Kingdom, for example, where sponsors and beneficiaries are supposed to make first contact together, often through informal channels, before applying under the Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme, reports have emerged of difficulty in successfully making matches (Box 1).

Box 1. Private sector and civil society matching has been agile but not without problems

In the early days of citizen mobilisation to support refugees from Ukraine, many potential sponsors sought to offer housing to new arrivals but lacked reliable matching systems to do so. In the absence of government-sponsored solutions, others emerged through active efforts by civil society. For example, two American college students launched the website Ukraine Take Shelter on 3 March, and by 20 March, the site had 25 000 listings. A German faith-based organisation, Churchpool, similarly developed a site called Host4Ukraine. Facebook pages sprung up for ad hoc matching, a system that has been widely used by those looking for sponsors to help them enter the United Kingdom.

Companies also developed solutions to bridge housing gaps. Several private websites (Shelter4Ukraine, Room for Ukraine) facilitate matching in the Netherlands, for instance. In Estonia, a large real estate portal, Kinnisvara 24, created a dedicated site using its existing digital infrastructure and presented an aggregated list of rental properties for which property owners had confirmed their willingness to rent to Ukrainian refugees. This platform permitted interested private hosts to reach the

² Data does not distinguish between private accommodation provided by family and friends from that provided by volunteers.

target group, and by pre-confirming landlords' openness to rent to Ukrainian refugees, also minimised possible rejections for new arrivals seeking housing.

Possibly the most visible online tool developed in the early days of the crisis was the non-profit arm of the company Airbnb, Airbnb.org, which offered free or reduced-fee housing for up to 100 000 Ukrainians fleeing to Europe. The offer was accompanied by a significant celebrity fund-raising campaign. Refugees assigned housing through the platform are promised free housing for 14 days.

However, although private matching systems, such as those created by non-profits or companies, may have been a more agile solution in the initial stages of the crisis, but they come with clear risks. While such sites have been praised for empowering refugees to find solutions that worked for their own circumstances, these efforts need to be accompanied by monitoring and vetting activities to ensure the safety and suitability of accommodations. Little oversight or legal protection raises the spectre of an enhanced risk for exploitation and trafficking. Both hosts and individuals in need of housing are required to do their own research regarding housing solutions, potentially causing misunderstandings on both sides.

In the case of Airbnb, housing solutions were never intended to last beyond the short-term. Most of the offered housing is typically made available to the tourist market, and stock is under pressure now that the tourist season is underway. Additionally, these tools can lack sufficient clarity regarding vetting and liability. Access to information regarding insurance and who to contact in case of problems has been cited as a particular concern by users – both hosts and refugees. Several refugee organisations have indicated that it would take several months to carry out the vetting they would feel was necessary to comfortably use platforms like Airbnb for their clients.

Reception centres

To manage initial reception for those individuals unable to access private housing, several countries – notably Germany, Greece, Ireland, Malta, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, and Sweden – have relied on existing centres for asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection. However, in countries that do not have substantial past experience with hosting refugees, and in countries where places in existing centres have proved insufficient in number, specific temporary reception centres have been established to house arrivals from Ukraine (see Annex Table 1.A.1). Estonia also expressed a preference for using new centres along with private accommodation as much as possible and avoiding the use of existing centres for beneficiaries of international protection to ensure there is sufficient housing available also for non-Ukrainian arrivals. In February 2022, Poland opened eight new reception centres along the border to receive Ukrainian refugees, but they were quickly overwhelmed. With the support of civil society, the Polish government has since added additional centres across Poland, including Warsaw and Krakow.

In some cases, the stay in reception centres is intended to be truly temporary. The reception centre serves as a triage point that helps to identify needs, provide information regarding services, and refer BTPs to more secure housing solutions. Croatia outlines the intent that BTPs reside in such special centres for a period of 48 hours before beginning the transition to individual housing, while in France, the “first step” emergency housing is meant to be used for only 1-2 days. Luxembourg provides 24-hour access to an emergency reception centre that provides emergency shelter for a few days. In Iceland, needs are identified at the reception centre, which then allocates refugees to housing. In the Slovak Republic, temporary overnight shelter is provided in large-capacity relief centres to displaced people who are able to prove their identity, after which BTPs may be transferred upon request to state centres, hotels, or private accommodation.

In contrast, other countries contemplate longer stays in the place of initial accommodation. The Czech Republic, for example, authorises 30-day stays in temporary accommodation. Increasingly, several

countries, including Poland and the United Kingdom, are anticipating for refugees to return to shelters and reception centres for accommodation after a period in private houses when that option is no longer available. Given existing housing pressures in receiving countries, there might be delays with moving people into permanent housing.

Hotels and hostels

In some countries where reception centres were insufficient to host Ukrainian refugees, an additional source of accommodation has been found in the forms of hotels, hostels, and even schools. Where reception centres reached maximum capacity, some countries have even turned to emergency solutions, such as cruise ships, containers, tents, or mobile sheds. In the majority of cases, these locations are intended to provide only a brief stay, raising concerns about their liveability for families as they are rarely equipped to be long-term housing solutions, and the need to compensate the businesses. Canada has entered into shorter, two-week arrangements with hotels in the event that new arrivals are unable to immediately join sponsors. The Czech Republic offers hotel stays for up to 90 days.

While some governments have co-operated with the hotel sector, this solution is still relatively rare. In a recent longitudinal survey of displaced persons, two weeks after having left Ukraine, the majority of 709 respondents were either staying in government-run shelters (34%) or with family and friends (31%). Only 15% reported living in a hotel or hostel (IMPACT, 2022^[1]). Instability of hotel capacity has been highlighted as an issue by the Estonian government. The seasonal nature of bookings and the fact that private guests may already have reserved rooms for specific periods makes it difficult to rely on hotels beyond the short-term.

Housing assistance measures

Assistance with search for accommodation

Finding individual accommodation shortly after arrival is challenging for Ukrainian refugees given their lack of familiarity with the specificities of the local housing market, the frequent lack of proper documentation and income, and in some cases, because of discriminatory behaviours and negative prejudice against foreigners by landlords. Notably, there is an information gap, as refugees need to navigate a new local market with unknown rules and regulations. Countries – such as France and Iceland, for example – have made housing information available at reception centres or on their dedicated online information portals. Spain has provided funding to BTPs who wish to hire a real estate agent to help with the housing search. Such third-party intermediaries can prove useful in mitigating these challenges.

Additionally, in some countries, refugees who arrange for independent accommodation after initial reception may be entitled to public financial support to help them bear the cost of housing. Austria, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands provide rent support and allow BTPs to decide whether to compensate private hosts where relevant. In Switzerland, cantons have authority to set the amount of housing support, which is compensated by the lump sum they receive from the federal government. In Slovenia, BTPs are entitled to monetary compensation for accommodation costs if they do not have their own means of support. In Belgium, where a BTP finds permanent personal accommodation, the public Centres for Social Welfare will provide an installation allowance that can be used to purchase furnishings, among other things. Where no other option is available, the Latvian government will assist Ukrainians in housing rentals not to exceed EUR 400 per month (including utilities). Compensation for private providers and private households.

Compensation for private providers and private households

Acknowledging the financial burden of hosting arrangements, which in the case of private households rely primarily on public goodwill, some countries have announced accommodation support for hosting households (Table 1). This support measure is currently in place in only a minority of countries, notably the Czech Republic, Denmark, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Slovak Republic, and the United Kingdom, but the feasibility of introducing such compensation is being examined in other countries. In Belgium, households are allowed to enter into modest rental agreements with BTPs once they are working or have integration income.

Some countries, including Poland and the Slovak Republic, report that the provision of compensation is increasingly becoming an important consideration for private hosts. The Slovak Republic has observed that as the need for accommodation becomes longer term and in light of tourist seasons, many private providers and households are looking to provide their facilities on a commercial rather than voluntary basis.

In countries that have relied on hotels and hostels to provide accommodation, the government frequently provides compensation to the providers. In Bulgaria, for instance, hotels that accommodate and feed Ukrainians receive BGN 40 (EUR 20) per person per day for a period of three months. Latvia finances hotel stays where necessary for a period of 90 days (at a rate of EUR 15 maximum per person per day). Romania provides a subsidy to the schools that are housing arrivals from Ukraine.

In addition to national and local measures, in March, the European Commission announced the “Safe Home” initiative to support Europeans who voluntarily hosted those fleeing the war, notably by mobilising dedicated EU funds and instruments for both initial housing solutions and long-term accommodation. As part of this initiative, in July, the Commission introduced the Safe Homes guidance, endorsed by the Solidarity Platform, advising EU countries how to provide safe and suitable accommodation for people fleeing the war in Ukraine. It outlines the key principles for supporting hosts, enabling matching and ensuring safe and suitable housing for those in need. The guidance also looks at sustainable housing solutions for the future, especially the possible role of community sponsors in welcoming newcomers.

Table 1. Average monthly financial support for private hosts per household in selected countries

| Country | Single | Adult with a child |
|-----------------|---------|--------------------|
| Croatia | EUR 199 | EUR 279 |
| Czech Republic | EUR 120 | EUR 240 |
| France | EUR 167 | EUR 213 |
| Latvia | EUR 100 | EUR 150 |
| Lithuania | EUR 150 | EUR 200 |
| Poland | EUR 259 | EUR 517 |
| Slovak Republic | EUR 210 | EUR 315 |
| Slovenia | EUR 422 | EUR 549 |
| United Kingdom | EUR 424 | EUR 424 |

Note: This is not necessarily the amount directly payable to hosts, but the estimated average monthly amount of financial support provided to private hosts by the state as of the end of April.

Source: see Annex Table 1.A.1.

Longer-term transition to individual or self-funded housing

While the response of private citizens in welcoming refugees was truly impressive, most countries have acknowledged that this hosting solution can only be temporary. It is widely understood that stays in reception centres and temporary private housing should be minimised for humanitarian migrants to increase stability and security. This view is shared by Ukrainian refugees. Moreover, several European countries such as Germany, Hungary and Estonia have observed that reception capacities in some areas are exhausted and private hosts are offering fewer places, making the timely transition to permanent housing a pressing issue.

According to one survey (IMPACT, 2022^[1]), six weeks after having left Ukraine, the proportion of refugees renting housing had markedly increased, reaching one-third of respondents as compared to 10% one month prior. For nearly nine out of ten respondents, however, rental accommodation remained either government-subsidised or provided free (or at a reduced rate) by the owners. Durable support is needed to house new arrivals in an already challenging housing environment.

The rapid influx of Ukrainian refugees into European and, to a lesser extent, other OECD countries, and the associated demand for rapid housing solutions, is occurring in a context of significant, pre-existing housing affordability challenges in receiving countries (Box 2). The Netherlands and the Slovak Republic have identified shortages as a particular challenge for hosting BTPs. The high cost of housing is expected to become an even bigger challenge, particularly given inflationary pressures and a looming cost-of-living crisis in OECD countries, once social assistance, including short-term housing subsidies, for Ukrainian refugees is exhausted. Pressures on housing can be expected to increase further as late arrivals, who typically have fewer host-country networks, increase the general demand for housing. Meanwhile, early evidence also suggests that a lack of housing is a primary motivation for refugees to return to Ukraine, in spite of safety risks.

Box 2. Access to affordable housing was already a challenge in many host countries

Housing prices in many European and OECD countries have increased over the past decades and households are dedicating a larger share of their budget to housing costs than in the past. Affordability is a challenge, particularly in job-rich urban areas, as well as among low-income households, renters in the private market, and youth. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, around one in ten people in the OECD countries reported housing insecurity and since 2020 the effects of the pandemic have further exacerbated longstanding housing challenges. For example, Poland, the main country of first reception for individuals fleeing Ukraine, has seen increases in rental prices of approximately 10% per year in recent years. The economic fallout of the pandemic, including sudden income losses for some workers, made it harder for some households to pay monthly expenses – including housing – without assistance.

The most widespread housing support measures for low-income and vulnerable households in OECD countries consist of housing allowances and social (subsidised) rental housing. All but one OECD country (Colombia) has at least one type of housing allowance in place to help households cover a portion of housing costs, though the coverage and generosity of such allowances varies considerably across countries.

Social housing is provided in the vast majority of OECD countries, but the size of the stock ranges from over 20% of the housing stock in the Netherlands, Denmark and Austria, to less than 2% in Latvia, the Slovak Republic, Luxembourg, Spain, Estonia, Lithuania, the Czech Republic and Colombia. Stock is particularly sparse in the main countries of first reception for Ukrainians, and allocation is already managed by waitlists in many countries. Tapping into social housing stock is thus not a feasible solution in most countries for addressing the short-to-medium housing needs of Ukrainian refugees.

Even more critically, in many countries, this stock of affordable housing has been declining since 2010. Over the past decades, governments have also been scaling back investment in housing development. Public investment in housing development has dropped from around 0.15% of GDP in 2009 to 0.06% of GDP in 2019 across the OECD on average. At well below 0.1% of GDP, public investment in dwellings is not high. The fall in direct public investment in housing development is one factor that has contributed to housing supply failing to keep pace with housing demand in many parts of the OECD.

As a result, the existing housing support in place in many OECD countries at the onset of Russia's war against Ukraine was insufficient to address the rapid need for emergency housing solutions and will further complicate the possibilities for timely transition towards more permanent housing arrangements. This has prompted calls for systemic action in some countries by interested parties to expand available and affordable housing stock more broadly. This could benefit not only refugees, but also the general population in the longer term.

Source: OECD (2021^[2]), "Building for a better tomorrow: Policies to make housing more affordable", <http://oe.cd/affordable-housing-2021>; OECD (2022^[3]), OECD Affordable Housing Database, <http://www.oecd.org/social/affordable-housing-database.htm>.

Housing capacity and dispersal

In many countries, including the Czech Republic, Germany, Latvia, and Poland, capacity problems are apparent, particularly in urban areas. First evidence from Germany indicates that, while all groups of protection seekers have historically preferred to take residence in bigger cities, this preference has been even more pronounced among BTPs from Ukraine. A strong preference among BTPs for accommodation in Vilnius and Klaipeda has been observed in Lithuania, owing to the presence of schools for Russian speakers and wider availability of jobs. In Poland, this has led to a rapid expansion of cities: the population of Warsaw has grown by 15% since the end of February, Kraków by 23%, Gdańsk by 34%, while the population of Rzeszów increased by 53% (Wojdat and Cywiński, 2022^[4]). France has made an effort to balance the impact of the reception effort across the country, aiming for a smooth regional distribution of accommodation, but the government has observed that a large number of offered dwellings are in rural areas that are unattractive to the target audience.

Given the significant differences in employment prospects and availability of resettlement services between urban and rural areas, it is natural that certain regions would be more attractive to arrivals. However, this has placed strain on housing stock. Additionally, as with other refugee populations, housing Ukrainian arrivals in temporary reception centres may pose challenges for future integration.

These pressures require countries to think about how best to distribute refugees throughout their territory to minimise the potential for negative reactions, especially if the war in Ukraine continues through the months to come, leading to prolonged durations of stay. Countries have made some movements in this direction. Latvia announced that when a municipality reaches its capacity for accommodation set by the Cabinet of Ministers, the state will be entitled to transfer BTPs to other municipalities.

Some countries have used their existing dispersal policies to designate refugees to specific states or regions. Dispersal policies allow countries to distribute the up-front costs related to the provision of new housing more equally. While family ties and the presence of ethnic communities are important determining factors for dispersal in many of these countries, a key consideration is how to provide new arrivals with access to employment. Findings from Sweden indicate that migrants resettled through dispersal policies that take into account labour market conditions have significantly better earnings and less welfare dependency than refugees resettled based on available housing alone (OECD, 2016^[5]). Several OECD countries, including Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, and Switzerland, have used dispersal policies to resettle asylum seekers or refugees, but little attention is typically paid to employment concerns, with some exceptions. In 2016, Norway developed a fast-track

assessment procedure to help disperse humanitarian migrants from reception facilities to towns that match their professional profile. The Netherlands also attempts to consider employment in dispersal decisions.

Attention to dispersal concerns will be important the longer refugees from Ukraine remain in host countries. Germany is using its existing dispersal system to allocate places for BTPs across Länder and plans to condition access to social assistance on the BTPs presence in their designated location. In the Netherlands, arrivals from Ukraine are directed to a municipality with reception facilities and can register with the municipality to receive benefits and services. However, arrivals who had a previous registration may return to that municipality, and those residing with friends or relatives do not participate in the allocation. Ukrainians in Norway have the right, but not the obligation, to participate in the introduction programme and its accompanying municipal dispersal, but its assessment procedure could prove useful in meeting housing needs for those who do not choose to participate, as well. An additional challenge has been managing dispersal given the large reliance on volunteer hosting and hosting with the existing, and large, Ukrainian diaspora. In Switzerland, for example, the reliance on private hosts has bypassed the traditional cantonal dispersal system, but cantons are increasingly seeking to reclaim responsibility for dispersal, so they may better understand whether municipalities are capable of meeting other resettlement needs or may become overwhelmed.

Co-ordination

Many countries have centralised systems for placing new arrivals in short-term housing or reception centres, but when it comes to co-ordinating the transition from emergency housing to longer-term accommodation, similarly to general social housing provision, responsibility for co-ordination often falls to the municipalities or regions. This is the case, for example, in Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, and Switzerland. Italy co-ordinates housing through a regional “expression of interest” system that relies on voluntary, religious and non-governmental organisations spread throughout the country. Regional commissioners co-ordinate the creation of housing places based on territorial needs. Municipalities are fully involved in the process and engaged in the covering of costs once a partnership agreement is signed with the national government. A new law came into force on 1 July 2022 in Sweden that seeks to distribute the responsibility for arranging housing better between the Swedish Migration Agency and municipalities. In France, a framework of co-ordination has been established to organise the offers and provide full visibility of available accommodation options. In Estonia, the local governments support accommodations for BTPs from Ukraine, but the national government has established information exchange platforms to ensure co-operation (Box 3). Under the direct supervision of the national government, local authorities are in charge of co-ordinating private housing initiatives and providing complementary reception offers. France has implemented a phased approach whereby state services identify available housing with support from associations so that housing may be provided for at least three months. Bulgaria has centralised co-ordination of housing for Ukrainians, with an operational co-ordination group, consisting of six working groups, charged with implementing the state response plan, including co-ordination of civil and non-governmental organisations.

Box 3. Digital solutions for information sharing on housing

Most OECD and EU countries have created online platforms on which Ukrainians can find information on their housing options and rights. Countries have taken a variety of approaches even when it comes to online platforms, although there has been increasing convergence regarding the needs to be met through digital tools.

Matching housing offers

Matching BTPs to offers of housing is an important function of these government-supported sites. Such platforms, for example in France (<https://parrainage.refugies.info/>), Lithuania (<https://stipruskartu.lt/>), Romania (<https://dopomoha.ro/ro>), and the Slovak Republic (<https://pomocpreukrajinu.sk/>), allow potential hosts to offer their available housing via the website, where Ukrainians can evaluate offerings. Spain collaborated with the Fundacion la Caixa to create a matching platform that allows for expression of willingness to host for a period of six months, after which Ukrainians can be integrated into the reception system.

Providing information on housing rights and services

Digital tools have proved to be an important way not only to match refugees to housing solutions, but also to provide them with information on their rights, whether that be to receive a housing allowance under a programme for BTPs, or to access national or state legal protections guaranteeing a habitable dwelling. Nationally or locally developed platforms have the advantage of reassuring users as to the degree of vetting of available choices and the reliability of information. Portugal for Ukraine serves as a centralised forum for BTPs to receive information on how to access housing and other support. Slovenia also provides a website with information on how to access government services.

Co-ordination systems

Digital tools have also been developed to deal with specific challenges, such as bridging co-ordination gaps, as in Estonia, or vetting housing options, as in Belgium. To allow for matching, but reduce the risk of vetting gaps, Luxembourg provides a hotline and email address to contact for residents wishing to house BTPs, rather than having them make individual listings. The Czech Ministry of Interior has launched a website, “our Ukrainians”, which provides information on large-scale housing offers processed through a central database of National Assistance Centres. Municipalities and non-profits may rely on this information to help Ukrainians seeking housing. Portugal is creating back-end linkages so that all government services will be able to co-ordinate needs, including housing allocations, for BTPs.

The non-governmental sector has been active, not only in liaising directly with refugees, but also in co-ordinating the housing offer in some countries. In Luxembourg, non-profit organisations screen new arrivals for their accommodation preferences at the National Reception office. In Slovenia, the Government Office for the Support and Integration Migrants co-ordinates rental offers, but it relies on the contacts of non-governmental organisations to identify suitable options. The Slovak Republic has both state-run programmes through the Ministry of Transport and Construction and non-profit initiatives, but the various initiatives are not interconnected.

Risks and challenges in providing adequate housing solutions

Given the initial speed of migration flows from Ukraine, most hosting countries were required to develop highly reactive policies for reception. As flows have stabilised, however, countries have turned their attention to assessing improvements in the systems and mitigation of risks, particularly for vulnerable groups. Unlike previous large migration flows, the majority of people fleeing Ukraine are women and children. This composition raises specific challenges to the provision of adequate accommodation, as available offers may not meet the needs of these individuals. What is more, there is also a need for well-trained staff who can deal with the vulnerabilities of beneficiaries, notably separated children and isolated women.

Housing for specific populations

Developing housing solutions for unaccompanied children arriving from Ukraine has become an area of particular focus, given the need to guarantee these children are remitted to safe, legal guardians. Accommodation for unaccompanied children is co-ordinated differently in different countries, owing to the need for additional oversight and the occasional involvement of the court system in declaring guardianship for separated children who may be in the care of distant relatives.

The existing EU policies and legislation require that unaccompanied minors be placed in suitable accommodation or reception centres adapted to their needs, unless adult relatives can care for them or a foster family can be provided. Taking into account the best interest of the child, accommodations options are considered in most EU member states in close consultation with the competent child protection departments and other relevant social services. In Italy, Sweden and in the Netherlands, the primary responsibility for housing unaccompanied minors lies with the municipalities. Available options in most EU countries include foster placements, safe houses and specialised centres for minors or private accommodations (of family friends or acquaintances).

Minors accompanied by adults other than their parents are referred to as separated children. They are usually housed together in dedicated reception facilities or suitable accommodations (e.g. as in the Czech Republic where food and specific assistance is provided). The same is true (in Belgium, Estonia, Germany, and Lithuania, for instance) for orphans who travelled from Ukraine in groups, accompanied by their Ukrainian guardian(s). In Poland and Germany, co-ordination units, involving competent ministries, have been set up to arrange accommodation of larger groups of unaccompanied minors and orphans, mainly in facilities of youth welfare services, youth hostels or recreation centres. Greece and Ukraine have signed a co-operation protocol on hosting and protecting unaccompanied children from Ukraine. In April 2022, first unaccompanied minors arrived in Greece and were housed in the premises of the “Home Project”, an NGO that cares for unaccompanied migrant children.

Other vulnerable groups of people, in particular those suffering from health conditions and disabilities, may receive specific housing support in OECD countries. However, despite the political will and the engagement of civil society, immediate solutions have not always been available. OECD work has shown that providing adequate, affordable housing support to people with disabilities is a major challenge (OECD, 2021^[6]). Austria reports difficulties finding adequate housing and/or nursing places for persons with physical or mental disabilities and those requiring specialised medical care (e.g. cancer patients). Germany has faced difficulties to find accommodation for the populations of entire orphanages or homes for the elderly. To better identify and address the needs of vulnerable people, Lithuania has incorporated information on disability into its statistical database used to track migrants by their resettlement location. Local volunteer and non-governmental organisations in Ireland, Luxembourg, and Poland play key role in assisting Ukrainian families with disabilities in their search for suitable accommodation or taking part in vetting processes of host families who pledged accommodation for housing refugees fleeing Ukraine. Overall, meeting the needs of these groups remains a challenge across OECD and EU countries, which have nearly all emphasised the need for greater co-ordination to create solutions.

Safety and the risk of exploitation

Initially, action to house large inflows of refugees from Ukraine was a reactive process, where speed was essential. Increasingly, however, hosting countries have been attentive to the risks that inherent in a system that relies primarily on private homeowners and informal offers of housing. For instance, the UK's Home for Ukraine scheme raised concerns as the matching tool led to increasing reports of Ukrainian women feeling at risk from their sponsors. To better co-ordinate the private housing offer and reduce the risk of exploitation, OECD and EU countries are increasingly implementing different quality controls, focusing primarily on pre-screening potential hosts and developing formal, government-supervised matching procedures, including comprehensive background checks, telephone interviews, on-site inspections and visits.

In Austria, the Federal Agency for Reception and Support Services evaluates offers of housing before providing the information on suitable options to the provinces. Germany requests that all individuals wishing to offer housing contact their local government's Ukraine Refugees Task Force or apply through the federal state. Other hosting countries have relied upon non-profit organisations to play the necessary co-ordination and supervision role. In Spain, volunteer families are vetted through the Caixa Foundation. In several countries, the Red Cross is active in matching refugees and housing, for example, by operating a national information point in Finland to compile information and provide help or by reviewing housing pledges for suitability and matching in Ireland. The Red Cross and Caritas also organise house visits in Luxembourg because of an identified risk of labour and sexual exploitation.

Trade-offs have been observed in terms of efficiency and ease of matching arrivals to homes. Belgium's centralised Housing Tool requires that private housing options offered to refugees must be verified for liveability and that the background of potential host families be verified. There has been some concern that Belgian municipalities might not always record private housing offers in the tool because of the amount of work associated with the process. In Austria, the federal government has developed a plan for clear, ongoing communication to counter the risk that the slow vetting processes, whereby local authorities conduct checks of the offered accommodation, may create the impression that the accommodation being offered is not needed or wanted. Vetting schemes may be sometimes inefficient, but they remain important to mitigate the risk of exploitation, particularly given the large numbers of women and children fleeing Ukraine.

In addition to minimising the risk of exploitation and gender-based violence, formal matching channels provide an important opportunity to inform refugees of their legal rights and available support. Hosting countries have observed with concern the risks associated with housing offers that are made outside of the co-ordinated system, through third-party platforms (Box 1). In the Netherlands, for example, numerous private reception initiatives were developed beyond the supervision of the Ministry of Justice and Security and are thus not subject to screening through its RefugeeHomeNL system. Adequate safeguards and oversight are even more essential for housing provided for an extended period, and countries must find ways to verify that the housing provided is safe and suitable, while still ensuring that refugees have rapid access to it. The Netherlands has published a Guide to Private Reception of Ukrainians, while most countries have developed dedicated websites and applications to provide information on government initiatives and contact-points in case refugees experience problems with their housing.

Additional challenges

Countries have also reported difficulties accommodating arrivals from Ukraine who were fleeing with their pets, given the need in some cases for quarantine or the unsuitability of housing options for animals. This is a particular issue in countries like Ireland, where arrivals are frequently housed initially in hotels, and it is an issue that has rarely been encountered in the past as asylum seekers have not typically travelled with animals. The European Union relaxed administrative requirements for pets arriving from Ukraine, and many countries now have a special procedure, mainly for dogs and cats (though Belgium, Denmark, Hungary, and Lithuania have specific provisions for ferrets). For BTPs not in private accommodation but arriving with animals, Finland has created a pet-friendly reception centre where animals may be quarantined for the

required 30 days and receive veterinary treatment. Generally, however, authorities across Europe are restricting the number of animals allowed to enter their territory.

Countries have also experienced difficulty in tracking onward movements, which, particularly in the case of Europe's free movement framework, can lead to challenges surrounding estimation of demand for housing in addition to the duration of the housing need. Countries such as Germany have emphasised the importance of co-ordination arrangements and open communications with partner countries – in particular with Poland and with Ukraine itself. Better data and exchange – both between and within countries – will allow them to anticipate the arrival of vulnerable groups, assess the need for accommodation and placement in schools, and manage the transition from supported to independent housing.

Outlook

While countries have used a variety of tools to meet the unprecedented housing needs of Ukrainian refugees, the goal has been broadly the same: to address their housing needs as quickly as possible and support them in their transition to independent accommodation. Since the end of February, the amount and duration of financial support has been shifting over time, making it complicated to track it with accuracy, but the trend has been to increase the amounts rather than to reduce them and to think about longer-term solutions once stopgap measures are in place. From a comparative perspective, national policy changes on housing have demonstrated a “race to the top,” but it remains to be seen if this will continue as time goes on. Strains on the existing housing stock and on the provision of financial support – both for new arrivals and for locals – will likely increase the longer that the Ukrainian refugees stay in host countries. Countries will need to take a longer view to act to reduce these pressures.

What are the key considerations for policy makers?

- **Countries must find ways to verify that the housing provided by private hosts and households is safe and suitable, while still ensuring that refugees have rapid access to it.** Many receiving countries have relied heavily on private accommodation to house new arrivals, yet verifying minimum standards and preventing exploitation remains a challenge. In cooperation with key stakeholders, governments need to establish clear protocols for vetting housing offers.
- **Finding housing solutions for Ukrainian refugees must be part of a long-term strategy to address pre-existing housing shortages in most host societies.** Pressures on housing are expected to increase further and as Ukrainians are seeking to transition more durable housing solutions and given general inflationary pressures in OECD countries.
- **Metropolitan areas may be particularly overwhelmed, requiring countries to think about the ways in which to distribute refugees throughout their territory.** Attention to dispersal concerns will be important the longer BTPs from Ukraine remain in host countries and must factor in longer-term integration needs: dispersal policies that take into account labour market conditions have significantly better earnings and less welfare dependency than refugees resettled based only on housing availability.

References

- IMPACT (2022), *Six Weeks After Leaving Ukraine: Challenges, intentions and movement trajectories of Ukrainians in Displacement*. [1]
- OECD (2022), *Affordable Housing Database - OECD*, <http://www.oecd.org/social/affordable-housing-database.htm>. [3]
- OECD (2022), *Rights and Support for Ukrainian Refugees in Receiving Countries*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/09beb886-en>. [7]
- OECD (2021), *“Building for a better tomorrow: Policies to make housing more affordable”*, OECD, Paris, <http://oe.cd/affordable-housing-2021> (accessed on 11 March 2021). [2]
- OECD (2021), *A crisis on the horizon: Ensuring affordable, accessible housing for people with disabilities*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://oe.cd/il/housing-disability-2021>. [6]
- OECD (2016), *Making Integration Work: Refugees and others in need of protection*, Making Integration Work, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264251236-en>. [5]
- Wojdat, M. and P. Cywiński (2022), *“Urban hospitality: Unprecedented growth, challenges and opportunities”*, Union of Polish Metropolises, Warsaw, https://metropolie.pl/fileadmin/user_upload/UMP_raport_Ukraina_ANG_20220429_final.pdf. [4]

Annex 1.A. Housing policies by country

Annex Table 1.A.1. Housing schemes by hosting country, OECD and EU

| | Publicly-funded Reception Housing (Type and Duration) | Compensation for private households/providers | Assistance with the housing transition (including financial support) |
|----------------|---|--|---|
| Australia | Yes, short-term housing through Humanitarian Support Program or sponsorship | – | Humanitarian Support Program access typically lasts between 6 and 18 months |
| Austria | Yes (arrival centres for short-term accommodation) | No | Where BTPs access private housing, they receive rent support of EUR 150/month (individual) or EUR 300/month (family) |
| Belgium | Yes (primarily private housing, though crisis accommodation is offered by municipalities as necessary) | No, though private households are allowed to enter into reasonable rental agreements with BTPs once they have income | If all reception structures are completely saturated, the BTPs has the right to social welfare allowance of EUR 1 093.80 per month/single adult. Belgium also provides an installation allowance to help with buying furniture for BTPs in permanent personal accommodation |
| Bulgaria | Yes (temporary accommodation options primarily hotels, volunteers) | No | Yes (a one-time social assistance in the amount of BGN 375 (EUR 192) is intended to help with housing taxes) |
| Canada | Yes (in addition to housing through sponsorship, recent partnerships with hotels for emergency accommodation up to two weeks) | No | No |
| Chile | No | No | Rental assistance in cases of high vulnerability |
| Croatia | Yes (BTP-specific reception centre for first 48 hours if necessary, then collective accommodation or private housing) | 3 600 HRK (477 euros) per month is paid to those offering individual housing to those fleeing Ukraine. Expenses will be paid in the amount of HRK 50 per day for a single person. For families, HRK 40 will be paid per day for the first family member, HRK 30 for the second, HRK 20 for the third, and HRK 10 for each member after that. Owners of housing units who provide accommodation will be reimbursed on the basis of lease agreements with the Ministry of Interior | – |
| Czech Republic | Yes (temporary shelter for 30 days and hotels for up to 90 days) | Amount received by households hosting refugees: CZK 3 000 (EUR 120) per person accommodated in a given month for more than 16 consecutive days. Maximum of CZK 12 000 (EUR 490) for 4 or more accommodated persons | Housing allowance is provided after 90 days |

| | | | |
|---------|---|--|---|
| Denmark | Yes (asylum centre or private housing) | Possibility for the municipalities to grant hosting household a support of up to DKK 500 (EUR 67) per day per refugee. Varies based on decision by the local government | Decision is made by the municipality in charge of reception |
| Estonia | Yes (Most are in temporary accommodation provided by partners such as hotels and dormitories where they may reside for one month. Private sponsorship is an option but regular BIP reception centres have been avoided where possible.) | No | One-time cash payment is available at the time of signing a rental agreement (originally 6 times the subsistence level for a family, but being revised) A municipal subsistence allowance should also partially cover housing costs |
| Finland | Yes (reception centres or private accommodation) | No | No specific allowance, but BTPs receive the same reception allowance as asylum seekers, which varies based on their situation. They do not access the national housing allowance |
| France | Yes: Step 1: emergency accommodation (1-2 nights) Step 2: transitory accommodation (hostels, gymnasium) | Provided to households: Single person/couple (400 EUR first month; EUR 200 additional months up to 4-months; EUR 125 beyond 4th month and up to 1-year; total EUR 2 000 per year) With one child (600 EUR first month; 250 EUR additional months up to 4-months; EUR 150 beyond 4th month and up to 1-year; total EUR 2 550 per year) With 2 or more children (EUR 700 first month; EUR 300 additional months up to 4-months; EUR 150 beyond 4th month and up to 1 year; total EUR 2 800 per year year) | Yes (France has a multi-step housing system. Step 3 provides access to social housing, and BTPs receive personalised housing assistance. BTPs are entitled to the Asylum Seekers Allowance. The amount of the allowance depends on the family composition. Amount of EUR 14.2/day for a single adult who does not receive accommodation from the State and EUR 6.8/day for a single adult in catered accommodation) |
| Germany | Yes (reception centres for asylum seekers and centres set up specifically for BTPs from Ukraine) | Varies based on decision by the local government | Migrants may find private housing or be accommodated by the federal states. BTPs receive asylum-seeker benefits until 1 June, from which point they will access the same support as refugees (approx. EUR 360 per individual per month), which may be used to cover rent and other housing costs. |
| Greece | Yes (short-term and long-term accommodation available) | – | Long-term accommodation is available. Relevant Ministerial Decision provides for the possibility to provide financial assistance. It will be available to beneficiaries, as soon use of EU funding is approved. |
| Hungary | Yes (reception centres and private housing) | No | There is no specific housing aid, but job seekers may access a support subsidy of HUF 22 800 = EUR 61 per month, and support subsidy for minors is HUF 13 700 = EUR 37 per month per minor. |

| | | | |
|-------------|---|---|---|
| Iceland | Yes (new reception centre, at which temporary housing is allocated) | – | Social financial assistance varies by municipality and whether a BTP has a rental agreement for housing (ranges from ISK 150 000-348 000 (EUR 1 085-2 519) per month). A BTP who finds rental housing can apply for housing benefits, a loan for insurance, and home furnishings. |
| Ireland | Yes (hotels/guest houses) | No | BTPs renting on the private market may be eligible for Housing Assistance Payments (HAP), a mainstream payment available to Irish nationals, provided they meet other eligibility criteria. |
| Israel | Non-immigrants: No. Immigrants: Yes. | No | Non-immigrants: No. Immigrants: Yes. Initial cash subsidy (NIS 6-15 000 (EUR 1 705-4263) depending on family size), standard immigrant package of monthly support for six months |
| Italy | Yes (reception centres or private households) | No | Responsibility of municipalities |
| Japan | Yes | – | Yes (YEN 2 400/day (EUR 17.53) for living expenses for one single adult) |
| Korea | Ethnic Korean Ukrainians are hosted in Gwangju Koryoin Village | – | No |
| Latvia | Yes (reception centre/private household.) | The government covers the expenses for accommodation services provided by the municipality (not more than EUR 20 per person per day) Benefits to sponsoring households of EUR 300 per month (upon application) | Yes (The transition from emergency housing is the responsibility of the municipality. A last resort lump-sum benefit is available in the case of a crisis (EUR 272 to an adult and EUR 190 per child)) Other state benefits are available based on family situation. |
| Lithuania | Yes (reception centre/private household) | Starts from second month of hosting and can last up to three months. EUR 150 per month for a hosted person and EUR 50 per month for each additional person hosted in the same place. Both natural and legal persons can claim these (owners of apartments or other premises such as hotels, sanatoriums, etc.) | Transition from emergency housing is responsibility of the municipality. A housing allowance is offered on same basis as Lithuanian nationals Monthly financial assistance for one single adult: EUR 129 if average income per person < EUR 141.90/month |
| Luxembourg | Yes (reception centre for the first couple of days, then private housing) | No | Grants or vouchers are available to cover accommodation. |
| Malta | Yes (reception centres for asylum seekers, though most arrivals are staying with family members) | No | Same per diem as asylum seekers: weekly rate of the Social Assistance for the Year 2022 is EUR 111.18 per individual, additional payment of EUR 8.15 weekly for each additional member |
| Netherlands | Yes (reception centres for asylum seekers or specific temporary reception centres for BTPs/private household) | No. BTPs may decide to contribute with their housing allowance. | Amount of the living allowance is approximatively EUR 260 per person per month. For BTPs in private reception, additional financial support specifically for housing EUR 215/month/person, EUR 55 for minors/person |
| New Zealand | No (sponsorship programme) | No (sponsors cover expenses) | No (sponsors cover expenses) |

| | | | |
|-----------------|---|--|--|
| Norway | Yes (reception centre) | – | In reception centres, Ukrainian refugees are paid a sum of NOK 859 (EUR 87)/month/adult. Additional amount for single parents up to NOK 456 (EUR 46) and NOK 939 (EUR 95) for children aged 0-17 with parent or companion. |
| Poland | Yes (reception centres set up for BTPs/private home) | Maximum 60 days with extension possible in justified cases. Provision of accommodation and meals to Ukrainian citizens set at PLN 40 per person per day. | One-time support of PLN 300 (EUR 65) to cover basic needs, including housing. |
| Portugal | Yes | – | – |
| Romania | Yes | Yes (schools housing Ukrainians receive a subsidy) | – |
| Slovak Republic | Yes (overnight stays in provisional tents, then transition to asylum centres and state accommodation facilities) | EUR 7 per person per night of accommodation to a person with temporary protection over the age of 15; EUR 3.5 for such persons under the age of 15 | Allowances may exist based on family situation, but BTPs do not have access to the housing allowance within the system of assistance in material need |
| Slovenia | Yes (the majority of BTPs are accommodated in private accommodations, the rest of the beneficiaries are accommodated in reception centres) | Rent or costs of accommodation may be covered by financial assistance to BTP | BTPs accommodated in reception centres receive allowance. Those without income and who are accommodated in private housing may apply for general financial assistance and for financial assistance for private accommodation. |
| Spain | Yes (reception centres for asylum seekers or centres set up specifically for BTPs) | No | Rental assistance: 376 /month, for one individual 489 /month, for a family of 2; Up to 780 per month, for a family of 8 or more; There is also an allowance to help with a rental deposit and real estate agency services |
| Sweden | Yes (free housing provided) | No | Asylum-seeker allowance is scaled based on whether food is included with accommodation or food is not included in accommodation (24SEK/day (EUR 2.30) versus 71SEK/day (EUR 6.90) for a single adult, 19SEK/day (versus 61SEK/day per person a couple; 12SEK/day versus 37SEK/day for children)) |
| Switzerland | Yes (federal asylum centres for the first days, then BTPs are assigned to a canton who takes care of the accommodation. Also many reside in private households) | Compensation amounts per BTP vary across cantons | Yes (Canton authorities are responsible for the accommodation. Financial support amounts per BTP vary across cantons and depending on size of the household) |
| United Kingdom | No (sponsorship programme) | GBP 350 (EUR 420) are granted to families hosting Ukrainians during one year | Access to public funds based on individual or family needs on local level |
| United States | No (sponsorship programme or TPS) Yes (refugees) | No | No (sponsorship programme or TPS) Yes (refugees are entitled to 8 months of Refugee Cash Assistance, if criteria of eligibility are met) |

Source: National data from reporting countries; OECD (2022^[7]), *Rights and Support for Ukrainian Refugees in Receiving Countries*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/09beb886-en>.

Contact

Jean-Christophe DUMONT (✉ jean-christophe.dumont@oecd.org)

Ave LAUREN (✉ ave.lauren@oecd.org)

This work is published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of the Member countries of the OECD.

This document, as well as any data and map included herein, are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area.

The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.

The use of this work, whether digital or print, is governed by the Terms and Conditions to be found at <http://www.oecd.org/termsandconditions>.