Belgium had prior experience in implementing hosting assistance initiatives before the Russia-Ukraine international armed conflict, primarily led by civil society. They were not formally integrated into Belgium’s official reception model. In response to the arrival of people displaced from Ukraine, the Protection and Reception of Ukrainians Task Force was established. It identified several core actions such as expanding the capacity of emergency shelters, strengthening local preparedness, establishing a registration centre, and facilitating access to information.

The engagement of local authorities in the hosting assistance mechanism proved significant. A lack of established frameworks, challenges in communication, and unclear procedures, and the urgency of the situation resulted in different hosting assistance approaches across the Flemish, Walloon, and Brussels-Capital Regions. Non-governmental organisations and the Ukrainian diaspora also played an important role in offering information and support.

The hosting assistance mechanism played a pivotal role in providing emergency housing to people displaced from Ukraine, evolving from a temporary support measure to one of the main housing arrangements offered.

The evaluation conducted by the Belgian Red Cross showed that challenges faced by the local authorities and other stakeholders involved, impacted both hosts and guests, posing obstacles to providing long-term and sustainable integration and housing solutions. It emphasised the need for well-framed hosting assistance with safeguards, continuous dialogue between authorities and NGOs, and support for guests in finding durable housing solutions while fostering their autonomy and aspirations.

While most hosts found their hosting experiences positive, they went beyond merely providing accommodation and offered extensive support to their guests in accessing their rights and the services available.
The central authorities’ approach to implementing French hosting assistance initiatives was grounded in a decentralised model, with prefectures and, in particular, the respective Departmental Directorates of Employment, Labor, and Solidarity (DDETS), assuming a central role in organising, initiating, and implementing nearly all related activities. While the central government’s responsibility was to establish policies, regulations, and guidance, the hosting assistance initiatives were undertaken at the local level.

Prefectures were tasked with coordinating services and providing grants for activities. They collaborated directly with the non-governmental partner organisations responsible for supporting hosts and guests, which included facilitating communication, monitoring, and providing diverse types of assistance. The goal of the hosting assistance initiatives was to provide temporary and transitional housing solutions and social support while promoting cultural integration.

The central authorities’ strategy, however, was unevenly applied across the country, leading to significant variations in the implementation of the hosting assistance activities from one prefecture to another. This variance stemmed from differences in the existing networks and expertise of local organisations, the number of people from Ukraine in need of housing, and the absence of comprehensive preparation and guidance. To mitigate those challenges, regular meetings were convened, bringing together key stakeholders, serving as platforms for dialogue, decision-making, and proactive adjustment of strategies in response to evolving circumstances.

The assessment conducted by the French Red Cross showed that hosts displayed commendable commitment to providing support and contributing to the overall positive experiences of their guests.
Hungary’s experience of providing accommodation to individuals displaced from Ukraine highlights the pivotal role of its citizens. Despite government decrees related to temporary protection and emergency housing, at the beginning of the crisis a comprehensive policy on addressing the situation of displaced people from Ukraine was lacking. Hosting assistance related initiatives mainly arose from the efforts of individuals and informal groups of citizens.

The spontaneous engagement of thousands of citizens providing short- or longer-term accommodation was remarkable, particularly in a country where terms like “refugee” and “migrant” had acquired negative connotations. These citizens provided immediate assistance on the spot or proactively contacted different stakeholders to offer accommodation. Additionally, online platforms and social media chat groups set up by individuals and communities, facilitated the response to the housing needs of people displaced from Ukraine arriving in Hungary.

Some non-governmental organisations attempted to initiate hosting assistance initiatives, but they either did not materialise, could not be sustained, or were transformed into rental subsidy projects. Furthermore, as other types of housing were promoted by the government, the concept of hosting assistance was not introduced, supported or promoted within Hungarian society, with the consequence that many hosts were either discouraged from hosting or had to stop accommodating guests in the longer term due to the absence of financial incentives.

The key lesson learned concerned a need for a comprehensive policy and framework for addressing the situation of displaced people from Ukraine, including a structured approach to housing, hosting assistance and financial support schemes for guests and hosts. This should be accompanied by awareness-raising and promotion activities on the society’s role in hosting assistance and the importance of community participation.

Technology and social media assisted in responding to the housing needs of people displaced from Ukraine. It showcased the impact and importance of using such tools in crisis response and demonstrated their efficiency in helping displaced people access essential services.
The Irish Red Cross’ (IRC) “Register of Pledges” was created in 2015 to enable Irish residents to pledge accommodation, goods, and services for mainly Syrian and Afghan refugees. However, with the arrival of people displaced from Ukraine in Ireland and the corresponding spike in interest from Irish residents to open up their homes, the register had to be quickly adjusted.

To respond to the high volume of pledges and the coordination of vetting, matching of guest and hosts process, and providing both parties with proper services and assistance, the IRC together with the Department of Children, Equality, Diversity, Integration, and Youth (DCEDIY) scaled up the existing private hosting model. This resulted in the establishment of a Consortium of Partners, comprising four organisations: the IRC, IOM, Helping Irish Hosts, and Peter McVerry Trust, working in close partnership with local government authorities.

New and innovative processes were developed and implemented to support hosting assistance. For example, the IRC’s caseworker model was expanded to play the central role in matching, placing, supporting and monitoring the hosts and guests’ relationship. Based on the lessons learned, the data management model was supported by Government and enhanced to tackle the higher volume of pledged accommodation, address the needs of those seeking housing and support their adaptation and integration.

A key learning from the evolution of hosting assistance in Ireland was the value of national and local collaborative partnerships to ensure a coordinated and effective response to displaced people’s needs. Continual investment in data and case management tools was also considered crucial to future preparedness.

The IRC teams of social workers provided direct assistance to displaced people and helped them access education, employment, social protection, and health services. Regular communication between caseworkers, guests, and hosts was facilitated by mediation, trust building, and conflict resolution.
The Dutch hosting assistance programme, known as RefugeeHomeNL, supported guests and hosts through a series of targeted activities. A consortium of four organisations, the Netherlands Red Cross, the Salvation Army, the Dutch Council for Refugees, and Takecarebnb, was set up to implement the programme and related services.

RefugeeHomeNL provided tailored assistance to both guests and hosts, operating in four phases: registration, screening, intake, and departure. The initial matching process of guests and hosts was based on an algorithm to maximise potential compatibility, followed by a video screening call to allow both parties to become acquainted before deciding to live together. The third phase was facilitated by a designated point of contact (the Household Supporter) who provided assistance and conducted home visits to ensure a comfortable and safe living environment for both guest and host. Lastly, the departure phase was managed by the coordinator who assisted with ending the hosted arrangement period and facilitating the transition to a longer-term housing solution.

Guests were provided financial support to pass on to hosts, but most often, the host did not accept anything. In this way the programme operated on a voluntarily basis with Dutch host families accommodating guests displaced from Ukraine without the expectation of financial compensation. The evaluation conducted by the Netherlands Red Cross concluded that the authorities should develop a structured approach and focus on supporting existing hosting assistance initiatives. Furthermore, it was acknowledged that small-scale private initiatives can act faster and more decisively in providing hosted arrangements.
The Luxembourg Red Cross (LRC), Caritas Luxembourg, and government authorities collaborated to create a comprehensive hosting assistance programme in the country, anchored on providing safe and dignified accommodation, practical support, mutual understanding, and promoting solidarity.

The programme used an online registration platform to facilitate connections between guests and hosts, employing objective criteria and a matching process that aimed to create an inclusive, supportive, and nurturing environment for all parties involved. Rigorous assessments of hosts and guests were conducted to ensure compatibility and a positive match. Social workers engaged potential guests in discussions regarding the objectives of hosting assistance, informing them of their rights and duties, and sensitising them about possible risks, such as exploitation, abuse, and human trafficking, along with how they could seek help if needed. At the same time, to ensure a meaningful and thoughtful decision-making process, similar interviews were carried out with hosts and their family members. The matching process included a reflection period and a home visit.

After moving in, both hosts and guests received ongoing support. The LRC established a dedicated social services office that offered social assistance and addressed any questions or concerns while ensuring the well-being of all parties. Moreover, hosts were engaged in the programme through peer support groups to discuss any potential challenges and difficulties.

By December 2022 there was a shortage of available accommodation, and the programme was suspended. The major challenge at the time was to prevent people displaced from Ukraine from having to return to the reception centers. The exit strategy for a small number of people was the possibility of finding private accommodations, with or without LRC help.

The hosting assistance programme was also a catalyst for community integration; however, barriers included issues arising from cultural differences and host-guest relations. The LRC learned that adding a framework for host and guest networking and fostering communication and mutual support, would have limited those challenges and risks.
Romania’s response to address the needs of people displaced from Ukraine involved establishing information points, providing essential services, and creating Regional Integration Centres to facilitate integration. In terms of housing support, the government, in collaboration with international and non-governmental organisations, provided places in collective accommodation centres and supported a national hosting assistance programme.

The hosting assistance programme was implemented by a group of stakeholders supported by the government through a financial incentive scheme. Other organisations, such as the Romanian Red Cross, offered cash assistance to guests while hosts could receive support in covering food, maintenance, and accommodation-related expenses related to the hosted arrangement. Individuals and other entities who hosted were eligible to receive a monthly compensation from the state through the 50/20 programme.

Although the 50/20 scheme initially provided a strong incentive to individuals to host people displaced from Ukraine it also created several challenges. One of them concerned the over-crowding in pledged accommodations to maximise government support received. The scheme also created significant pressure on the rental market, resulting in making the cost of available rentals for both the host population and people displaced from Ukraine highly scarce and considerably more expensive. Due to these challenges, the scheme was transformed in April 2023 into a different assistance package, offering payments directly to guests to support their accommodation expenses.

Lessons learned from the implementation of the hosting assistance programme in Romania highlighted the significance of balancing support for people displaced with assistance offered to vulnerable members of the host communities. Also, it highlighted the importance of fostering collaboration and partnership among stakeholders, including public and private institutions, NGOs, and the beneficiaries themselves to effectively and efficiently implement a hosting assistance programme.

More than 95% of people displaced from Ukraine were women and children. They mostly resided in Bucharest and cities close to the northern and eastern border such as Constanța, Galați, Iași, and Tulcea.
The Slovak Red Cross (SRC) played a pivotal role in developing and implementing the Slovak hosting assistance programme. Initially conceived as a shelter project, it quickly transformed into a versatile initiative streamlining service delivery and community outreach. Beyond securing housing, the programme facilitated integration opportunities and fostered familiarity with Slovak systems and culture.

Central to the SRC’s strategy was a robust case management system, implemented through Humanitarian Service Points (HSPs) offering a variety of services to support the integration of the families into the National System which included hosting assistance.

As part of a state approach, homeowners hosting displaced people received financial support. The SRC supplemented this with additional allowances, including financial aid, a one-time payment for household essentials, and a winterization grant for utility costs. The SRC shelter programme also included rental assistance for both people displaced from Ukraine and vulnerable Slovak families, to ensure a strong community outreach component.

The HSPs reached out to both guests and hosts. The latter, monitored and vetted through SRC visits and calls, were encouraged to extend kindness and empathy to their guests and consider their needs. While guests, with assistance from HSP staff, developed individual plans and roadmaps, outlining specific short- and long-term goals regarding their stay and integration in Slovakia.

Slovakia’s hosting assistance programme, anchored in a case management approach, aimed to provide comprehensive support, encompassing quality housing assistance and facilitating access to essential services.

Through the HSP, social workers were able to monitor hosted arrangements, offered psychosocial support, and disseminated information about state and local services, enabling access to education, language classes, employment, and medical services.