

Photo: Djamila Grossman

## Summary

# Housing instead of accommodation Opportunities and challenges of private accommodation for refugees with protection status S

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# 1 Key facts in brief

## The study and its context

After Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, private accommodation became a key element of the official reception policy for refugees in Switzerland for the first time and helped to prevent the asylum system from becoming overburdened (Strauss et al. 2023). This project investigated whether and in what way private accommodation facilitates the arrival of refugees and promotes social integration. We investigated how refugees and "host families" experienced private accommodation. To this end, we conducted qualitative interviews with both "host families" and Ukrainians. In addition, we conducted a quantitative online survey in winter 2022 in collaboration with the Swiss Refugee Council (SFH) to ask the "host families" about their general experience of living with the refugees.

## Recipients and persons admitted

Up to 30,000 families and individuals were immediately prepared to take in Ukrainian refugees to their own homes following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. By the end of 2022, around 75,000 people from Ukraine had applied for protection in Switzerland. While around 60 per cent of refugees initially lived with "host families", in May 2023 this figure had fallen to just under a third (SEM 2023a).

The "host families" surveyed accommodated 2,400 Ukrainian refugees. The hosts tended to be economically well-off, middle-aged people with plenty of living space, mainly in urban areas. These were not just "families" in the narrower sense, but a variety of forms of cohabitation that also included single households and single parents or flat-sharing communities<sup>1</sup>.

On average, each household hosted two people. Of the people taken in, 70% were female and 30% male. A third of the refugees were children and young people under the age of 18 and only just under 5% were people over the age of 65.

## Housing needs

The "host families" and also the refugees interviewed described the private accommodation as positive, especially in the initial phase. Private accommodation was described as promoting orientation and support, but also as security and safety.

However, needs can only be put on hold for a certain period of time. The biggest challenge for both sides was maintaining privacy over a longer period of time. The refugees do not want to be a burden. Among other things, there is a lack of space and opportunities for retreat, rest and relaxation. In connection with the question of available space, the time rhythms and the organisation of the use of space are also relevant and must be arranged at an early stage.

## Language and communication

Finding a common language is central to living together, especially when bathrooms and kitchens are shared. This not only involves speaking the same language, but also mutual openness, respect and a willingness to exchange ideas and clarify expectations and needs. Under these conditions, communication with "hands and feet" or an app can be successful.

## Giving, accepting and rejecting care

The "host families" did a lot of care work for the refugees, especially in the early days. Many "host families" had a high *mental load* in order to offer the refugees initial orientation and to support them with health issues, housing and job searches as well as with the authorities. Many of them did a great deal, which was very much appreciated by

<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the term "host family" is used here, as this term is widely used in public and refers to the temporality and the special form of cohabitation in which "strangers" are initially taken into an existing household. This also indirectly addresses the challenges and opportunities that arise when established residents and newcomers live together. The international literature suggest the term "homestay accomodation", see Bassoli/Luccioni 2023.

the people they took in. However, this also sometimes led to exhaustion and fatigue on the part of the "host families", who felt that they were alone in looking after the people they took in.

The needs of the refugees are very different. In some cases, "host families" struggled to understand needs such as retreat, peace and privacy, which led to misunderstandings and conflicts.

### **Potential for integration**

Overall, refugees have often found their own accommodation and/or a job thanks to the support of the "host families" and have received practical information and concrete support. In this sense, private accommodation can make many things possible that are not possible in shared accommodation (cf. Baier et al. 2022). It is not yet possible to make any statements about effects over time.

### **The future of "host families"**

The results show that a certain degree of formalisation, support and clarification of responsibilities are necessary in order to establish private accommodation as an integral part of the reception policy of refugees in the long term. We would like to emphasise the following points in particular:

#### **1. Creating a suitable living environment and respecting housing needs**

Enabling and respecting each other's privacy is very important. Open, respectful communication about expectations and needs supports understanding and a good relationship.

#### **2. Preparation, support and supervision of private accommodation**

Specific preparation in advance shall clarify mutual expectations and needs. Official responsibilities should be centralised. Guidance and support for all those involved would protect against excessive demands and reduce power imbalances.

#### **3. Networking, exchange and further training**

By sharing experiences and providing thematic input, all parties involved can support each other. In terms of prevention, further training also helps to prevent excessive expectations, creates resilience and shows the personal limits of this commitment.

#### **4. Appropriate and standardised financing**

Standardised compensation from the authorities for the actual additional costs incurred by the "host families" is necessary; a formal tenancy with a contract helps to ensure that both sides meet on an equal footing.

#### **5. Accessible, understandable and reliable communication with authorities with centralised and accessible contact points**

Good communication with the authorities is necessary in order to reduce the *mental load* of "host families" through clear responsibilities so that they can continue to offer their valuable support services in the long term.

## 2 Introduction

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine resulted in an unprecedented refugee movement in mainland Europe since 1945. People in Switzerland demonstrated great solidarity. Up to 30,000 families and individuals were immediately prepared to take in Ukrainian refugees in their own homes. By the end of 2022, around 75,000 people from Ukraine had applied for protection in Switzerland. While around 60 per cent of refugees initially lived with "host families", in May 2023 it was still just under a third (SEM 2023a). That is just under 25,000 people who would otherwise have had to be accommodated in state facilities. On behalf of the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM), the Swiss Refugee Council (SFH) was able to place around 5,700 refugees in 2,500 "host families" by the end of 2022. For the first time in recent history, private accommodation formed a key element of the official reception policy for refugees in Switzerland and helped to prevent the asylum system from becoming overburdened (Strauss et al. 2023).

Against this background, our project focussed on the question of whether and in what way the private accommodation of refugees facilitates their arrival and promotes social integration (see Werner 2021, Scherr & Yüksel 2019). Integration is understood as a reciprocal and mutual process that develops through social contact between immigrants and locals (Scherr & Yüksel 2019, p. 385). In their study on Germany, Schmidt et al. (2020) show that social integration is a longer-term process: regular contact between Germans and refugees becomes more likely the longer the refugees are in Germany. Institutional contexts such as schools, work or neighbourhoods are important for building informal social relationships (Scherr & Yüksel 2019, p. 388). The neighbourhood and circle of friends are particularly important (Schmidt et al., 2020).

In order to explore the potential of private accommodation for refugees compared to other forms of housing and accommodation, we investigated how private accommodation was experienced by those involved. To this end, we conducted qualitative interviews with both "host families" and Ukrainian women. In addition, in a quantitative online survey in collaboration with Swiss Refugee Council (SFH), we asked "host families" about their general experience of living with the refugees. With the results obtained in this project, we plan to analyse forms of housing, social integration of refugees, the contribution of civil society as well as the determinants of the extremely high level of commitment over a longer period of time.

This is a summary of the results of the cooperation project between the Departments of Social Work at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts (HSLU) and the Bern University of Applied Sciences (BFH) and the Swiss Refugee Council (SFH). The complete presentation of the analysis results and the documentation of the survey instruments are only available in German. The project is financed by "Interdisziplinärer Themencluster Raum & Gesellschaft», internal funds from the universities, the Swiss Refugee Council and the Migros Culture Percentage. We gratefully acknowledge their support.

### 1.1 2.1 Legal and political context

According to the UNHCR, around 90,300 people from Ukraine applied for protection status in Switzerland between the start of the war in February 2022 and the end of September 2023 (UNHCR n.d.). This makes Ukrainian refugees the largest group of people seeking protection in Switzerland. The number of refugees in Poland, Russia and Germany is significantly higher, with more than one million refugees in each country. In October 2023, the UNHCR recorded a total of more than 5.8 million refugees from Ukraine in Europe, out of a total of over 6.2 million refugees from Ukraine worldwide. This also shows that most people are fleeing to neighbouring countries and that Europe as a whole is very strongly affected by the effects of the war in Ukraine (UNHCR n.d.).



In Switzerland, people seeking protection from Ukraine are generally granted S status unless they have already been granted protection status in another European country (exception: Poland)<sup>2</sup>. This also applies to persons from third countries who had to leave Ukraine due to the war. The requirements for obtaining protection status S are a valid Ukrainian residence permit, actual residence in Ukraine until 24 February 2022 and the absence of another nationality in the nuclear family, i.e. no dual citizenships and no binational families. Refugees are therefore quickly granted a right of residence without having to go through a proper asylum procedure. Of the 93,886 applications for S protection status submitted by the end of October 2023, 88,285 received a positive response (SEM n.d.-a).

Status S was activated for the first time in March 2022 for people from Ukraine, although it was introduced in 1998 in response to the refugee movements in the context of the wars in the former Yugoslavia. Status S is valid for one year and was extended in November 2022 and again in November 2023 until March 2025. Persons with S status can work immediately after being granted S protection status and their children can and must attend school. Family reunification is also possible, unless the family members have already been granted protection status in another country (SFH n.d.). Status S beneficiaries are entitled to social assistance under the same conditions as asylum seekers and temporarily admitted persons. However, social assistance benefits differ according to cantonal law (Art. 3 para. 2 Asylum Ordinance 2 cf. SKOS n.d.).

At the time of activation of S status, there was no legal provision to support integration. The Federal Council changed this in April 2022 and the "Support measures for persons with protection status S" programme (Programme S) was set up (SEM 2023b). The cantons are responsible for the actual implementation of this programme, which means that there are major differences between the cantons. The cantons are required to set the following priorities in particular: language acquisition, labour market integration and support for children and families (SEM n.d.-b). Some of the cantons provide for case management in line with the integration agenda, others provide for so-called "case management light", while some cantons continue to dispense with case management altogether (SEM 2023b). On 1 November 2023, the Federal Council announced its intention to introduce more binding guidelines for the promotion of integration (SEM 2023c).

## 2.1 2.2 Housing in the context of flight

Housing for refugees is often a marginal topic in academic research (Werner, 2021). However, it can be stated that the practical organisation of accommodation for refugees in Germany - and presumably this also applies to Switzerland - is characterised by the continuity of highly regulated, compulsory accommodation and is also referred to as "non-housing" (ibid.).

*"Refugees live like other people: in large and small flats or houses, in the countryside and in the city, for rent and in property, in old or prefabricated buildings. They do this before and after their flight. However, until they have managed to live in their own four walls (again), they go through various forms of so-called accommodation during their flight and when they arrive in one place. The forms are similar, but there are many different names for them: shared accommodation, collective accommodation, anchor centers, emergency accommodation, initial reception facilities or camps. What these types of accommodation usually have in common,*

<sup>2</sup> Status S largely corresponds to the Mass Influx Directive (2001/55/EC) invoked by the EU on 4 March 2022. There are deviations, for example, with regard to the waiting period for access to gainful employment and the freedom to travel. In the interest of the most uniform regulation possible in the Schengen area, the Federal Council has therefore made a number of concretisations of Status S in these areas: see Art. 9 para. 8 RDV (SR 143.5) and Art. 53 para. 1 VZAE (SR 142.201) as well as SEM 2023a.

*however, is something provisional, temporary, forced and segregated." (Werner 2021, p. 408, translated)*

In contrast to these collective forms of accommodation, accommodation in private households offers the potential to satisfy housing needs such as security and protection, self-realisation and appropriation, belonging and recognition, privacy, familiarity and continuity (cf. Werner 2021, p. 422). Living with "host families" also brings with it social contacts. These are an essential condition for arriving and participating in society. This potential needs to be explored. Our aim is therefore to generate initial knowledge and hypotheses about the social integration potential of living in private households.

### **3.1 2.3 Accommodation for refugees from Ukraine**

According to the SEM (SEM o.D-c), the Federal Asylum Centres (BAZ) are the first point of contact for asylum seekers and offer up to 9000 accommodation places. Persons in the regular asylum procedure stay in a BAZ for up to 140 days. However, people seeking protection from Ukraine only stay in a BAZ for a few days until they get S status. After that, Ukrainians are allocated to a canton based on a population-proportional distribution key. From this point onwards, the canton in question or, depending on the organisational form, the municipalities are responsible for the support of Ukrainian refugees (SEM 2023a). The SEM compensates the cantons with a lump sum of around CHF 1,500 per person receiving social assistance per month (including for accommodation, support and medical care).<sup>3</sup>

Direct placement from the federal asylum centres in "host families" was discontinued at the end of 2022. However, there are still various initiatives for private accommodation at cantonal level. Many cantons cooperate with the SFH in the areas of support and supervision of host families as well as in coordination and organisational matters. Several cantons have now also opened up the system to other refugees. The canton decides on any compensation for providers of private accommodation. Whether the basic conditions for private accommodation are met is clarified on a case-by-case basis. According to the SFH, a lockable bedroom is important, as is access to the bathroom and kitchen. It is up to the canton to decide whether and how much of the federal government's global lump sum (see SKOS n.d.) is passed on to private individuals for accommodation (SEM n.d.-c). According to the Status S evaluation group (SEM 2023a), private accommodation undoubtedly makes a very important contribution to coping with the high number of refugees from Ukraine, as it would hardly have been possible to accommodate up to 80,000 people with Status S in the structures of the federal government and the cantons, cities and municipalities. The same applies to the great commitment shown by civil society in many places to those seeking protection from Ukraine. However, working with private individuals brings new challenges in terms of processes and support. For example, the authorities had to create new points of contact and support for the "host families" (SEM 2023a).

## **3 The project - questions, data and methods**

### **3.1 Questions**

This report addresses the following questions:

- What factors promote social integration through housing in private households on a spatial, sociological, social-interactive and institutional level?
- Which types of housing offer particular potential or pose particular challenges?
- What are the stumbling blocks and obstacles in the process on a spatial, sociological, social-interactive and institutional level?

<sup>3</sup> Art. 22 para. 2 AsylO2, SR 142.312

As the structural and institutional framework diverges greatly among cantons and in some cases also at municipal level, we were unable to analyse in depth their impact on the potential for social integration through housing. Nor were we able to thoroughly examine the contributions of organised civil society involvement on the basis of this sample. This is due to limited financial resources, but also to the limited time resources of officials in public administration who deal with these issues.

To answer the questions, we used qualitative and quantitative methods

- Almost 1000 "host families" reported on their experiences in an online survey
- In narrative, guideline-based interviews, we spoke with 12 Ukrainians and 12 host individuals and couples/families each.

### **3.2 Quantitative survey**

Between October and December 2022, we conducted an online survey of "host families" with the Swiss Refugee Council (SFH). A total of 1,073 "host families" from 19 cantons took part in the survey. This included 986 valid responses that met the criterion of having shared their flat or house with one or more refugees from Ukraine for at least four weeks. The majority of those who took part in the survey were "host families" who were placed via the official SFH placement offices in the federal asylum centers. The overall response rate was around 40 per cent.

We asked the "host families" for information about their living situation, the people they had taken in, support, living together and contact with the authorities, and finally what they considered important for social integration. In addition to closed questions, we also asked open questions that provided further information.

Open-ended questions in quantitative surveys are usually used to gather information, for example to explore new aspects of a topic or its broad spectrum (Züll & Menold 2019, p. 855) and to minimise the risk of social desirability of the answers (Wagner-Schelewsky & Hering 2019, pp. 788-89). In this way, the open answers give us a good insight into experiences, (verbalised) everyday knowledge and wishes or demands on politicians, which can also be quantified with all due caution.

While a lot of data is therefore available regarding the perspective of the "host families", we mainly know about the refugees from the narrative interviews.

### **3.3 Qualitative survey**

The qualitative survey is based on guided narrative interviews with Ukrainian refugees and private individuals who have taken in Ukrainians. For the interviews with the refugees, we decided to recruit Ukrainians so that the interviews could be conducted in the refugees' native language. To this end, we engaged Ukrainian students (Bern) and a member of staff (Lucerne) to conduct and transcribe the interviews. The field access, data collection and data analysis are described below.

#### **Field access**

We chose different ways to find interview partners. In both universities, we started with private and professional contacts in order to get in touch with "host families" and, in some cases, the refugees. Calls in a neighbourhood WhatsApp chat in a larger city, contacts to a cultural meeting place and to an association for refugees helped to attract more "host families" and Ukrainians in a snowball system.

#### **Data collection and sample**

Between August 2022 and March 2023, we spoke to a total of 12 refugees and 12 "host families" in German-speaking Switzerland. We were able to take into account both urban and rural living situations, where between one and four people were accommodated.

In the narrative interview (Schütze 1983), we asked open questions about how the private accommodation came about and how it was experienced. If necessary, follow-up



questions were asked about living together, support and moving out. These follow-up questions were recorded in a guideline.

Four interviews with Ukrainian women were conducted in English, all others in Ukrainian and Russian. The interviews with the "host families" were conducted in (Swiss) German. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. We translated the anonymised Ukrainian and Russian transcripts using translation software (DeepL Pro).

The private placements lasted between six weeks and around six months. They ranged from single persons to several members of a family (maximum of four people). Placements were made directly via private individuals, sometimes via the SFH or Campax, sometimes via a university.

## Data analysis

The data was analysed in two steps. The first step involved inductive work based on the grounded theory methodology (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Categories were formed on the data material by analysing and comparing cases. The category of care is central to the present analysis and was further elaborated (see Chapter 7). In a further step, narratives on housing needs were deductively coded and analysed from the 12 interviews with refugees from Ukraine (see Chapter 6).

## 4 Who are the "host families"?

The online survey indicates which people have offered private accommodation. These are not just "families" in the narrower sense, but a variety of forms of cohabitation that also include single households and single parents or flat-sharing communities<sup>4</sup>.

The following data illustrates the relevance of socio-economic status and the living situation of the "host families".

### 4.1 Socio-demographic profile

Two thirds of respondents are women. "Host families" are often somewhat older: two thirds are over 50 years old. A good third of respondents live together with a partner, a further 30 per cent with a partner and children. One in five host families is a single household, while single parents (5.7 per cent) and shared flats (3.7 per cent) make up only a small proportion. These figures correlate with the fact that informal volunteer work in the form of care and nursing in Switzerland is performed twice as often by women (14.9%) as by men (7%) and that people between the ages of 55 and 74 are the most involved.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, "host families" are more likely to live in good financial and spatial circumstances. Almost 60 per cent of "host families" live in their own home, while a further 13 per cent own a condominium. The proportion of people who own their own home is therefore almost twice as high as the Swiss average.<sup>6</sup> One fifth of "host families" live in a rented flat that offers sufficient space for them to live together. The remaining "host families" live in other forms of housing (5 per cent) or in cooperative flats (1.9 per cent).

Around half of the "host families" have an annual household income of more than CHF 100,000; a good third have more than CHF 120,000. However, lower incomes are not an

<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the term "host family" is used here, as this term is widely used in public and refers to the temporality and the special form of cohabitation, in which "strangers" are initially taken into an existing household. This also indirectly addresses the challenges and opportunities that arise when established and newly arrived people live together.

<sup>5</sup> For age structure and informal voluntary work as a whole, see <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home/statistiken/arbeit-erwerb/erwerbstaetigkeit-arbeitszeit/vereinbarkeit-unbezahlte-arbeit/freiwilligenarbeit.assetdetail.17124490.html> (12.10.2023), for care work see <https://dam-api.bfs.admin.ch/hub/api/dam/assets/17124490/master> (12.10.2023), data for 2020.

<sup>6</sup> On average, around 58 per cent of the Swiss population live in rented accommodation, while the proportion of owner-occupied housing is 36.6 per cent. <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/en/home/statistics/construction-housing/dwellings/housing-conditions/tenants-owners.html>, (03.12.2023).

obstacle to taking in refugees: Around 8.4 per cent of "host families" earn an annual income of less than CHF 60,000 (see Strauss et al. 2023, p. 6). Information on spatial organisation is available for a good 84% of the responding "host families".<sup>7</sup> Households in urban centres are disproportionately represented.

#### 4.2 Motives for offering private accommodation

The following diagram from our short report (Strauss et al. 2023, p.6 ) shows the motives for accepting refugees.

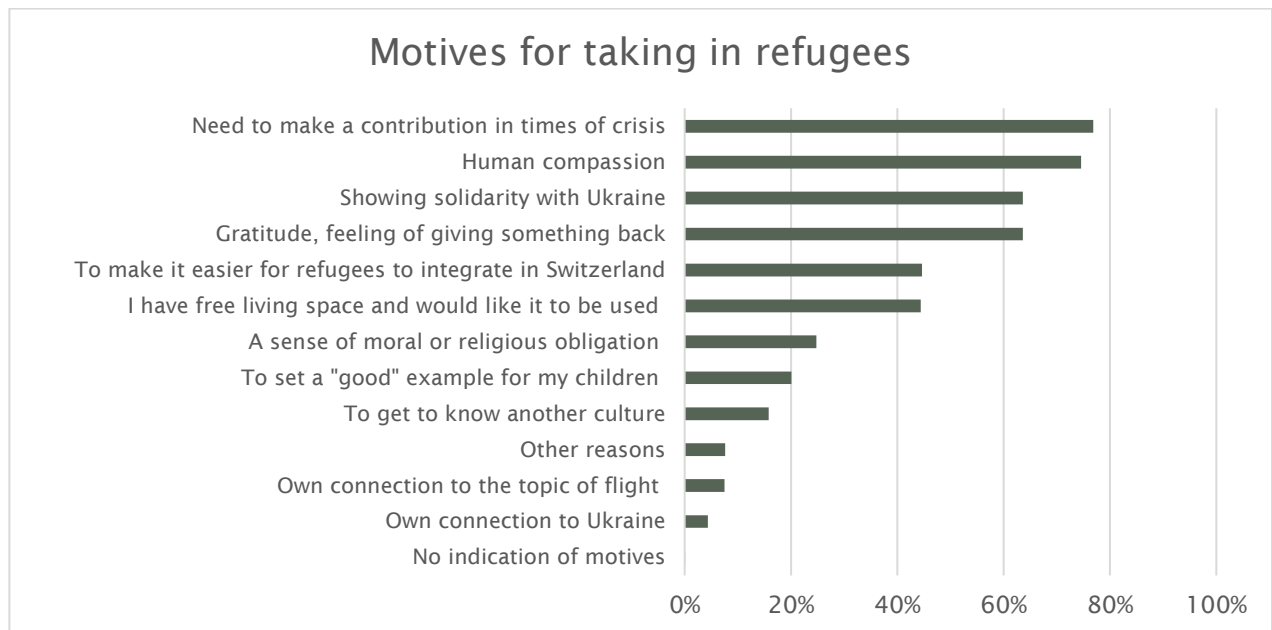


Figure 1 : Strauss et al. 2023, p.6

Overall, the socio-demographic situation of the "host families" and their motives for taking in Ukrainian refugees are similar to "host families" in other European countries, namely Germany and Belgium (Haller et al. 2022, Schrooten et al. 2022). They tend to be economically well-off middle-aged people with plenty of living space.

### 5 Who are the people taken in?

The "host families" surveyed accommodated 2,400 Ukrainian refugees. On average, two people per household were accommodated. Of these, 70% were female and 30% male. As many as 14% of those accommodated were men between the ages of 18 and 60, who are subject to military service and are only allowed to leave the country in exceptional cases, e.g. those with three or more children. Open answers show that pets - especially dogs - were also taken in and were a very big issue in the placement process. A third of the refugees were children and young people under the age of 18 and only just under 5% were people over the age of 65:

<sup>7</sup> Only the postcode of the respondents was recorded. Some municipalities share postcodes but belong to different areas according to the FSO.

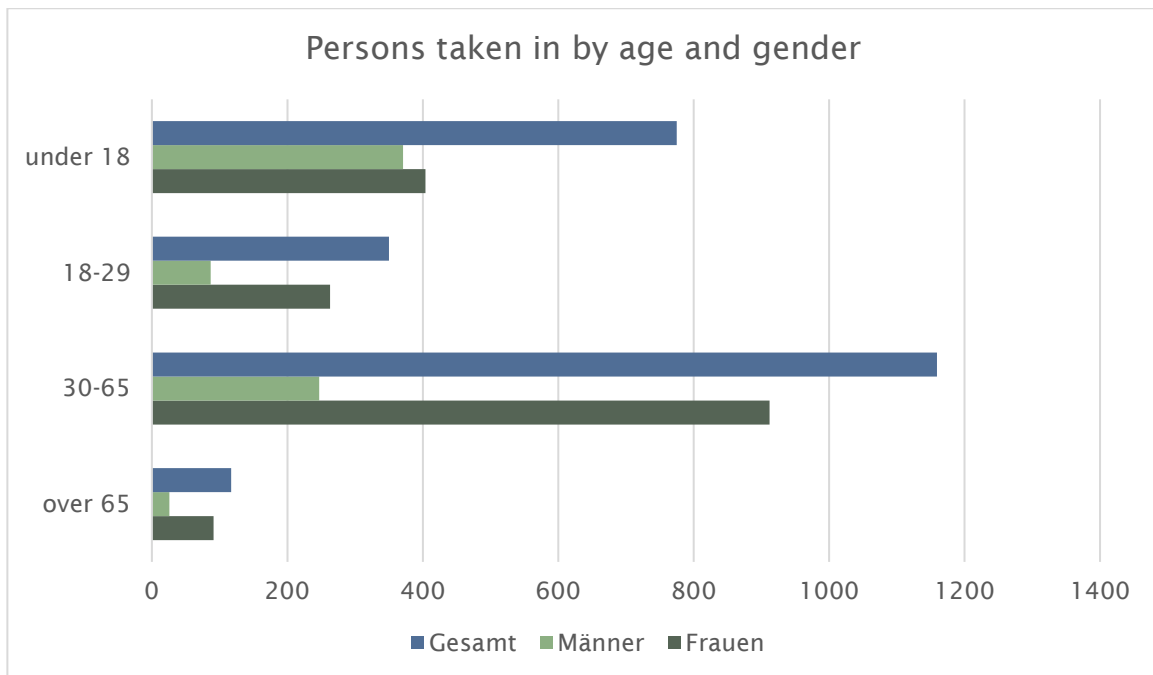


Figure 1. Source: "Host families" data set

The people taken in by the "host families" we interviewed were part of the first refugee movement from Ukraine. It can be assumed that their language skills and level of education are similar to those in a BFH study on the labour market-relevant characteristics of people with S status (see Fritischi et al. 2023): According to this study, the level of education is high: around two thirds of people of working age have completed tertiary education and 93 per cent have at least a secondary level qualification. Scientific, service and technical professions are the most common. Around 30 per cent of refugees have a good command of English and a further 20 per cent have sufficient knowledge to cope with everyday life.

Current SEM statistics confirm the high level of education (SEM n.d.-a). According to the evaluation report of September 2023, the employment rate rose steadily and stood at around 17% at the end of May 2023 (SEM 2023a, p.19). Most people work in the hospitality industry, in IT and counselling and in teaching (ibid.). However, the standardised monthly salary was only just over CHF 4,700 (ibid.). This matches the fact that only a few Ukrainian professional diplomas have been recognised to date, which is necessary for regulated professions, be it an electrician or a doctor. Work in other professions is possible without recognition of qualifications (ibid.), but this is likely to have a dampening effect on wages.

## 6 Housing needs: Living together in a "host family" relationship

The housing situation of refugees in private Swiss households is not a balanced living arrangement as in a conventional shared flat, but rather there are hosts and "guests"<sup>8</sup>. The housing situation can best be described as a "multi-party household" in which the parties share the infrastructure. In a few cases, the refugees live in a granny flat, i.e. a separate flat in their own house.

According to Deinsberger-Deinsberger & Reichl (2022a), housing needs are all those needs that are related to one's own living space, home or living environment. They have their origin in the human disposition and are generic. The expression of needs is determined by habits and experiences and they can vary from person to person, but also depending on age, gender, family, occupation, etc. (Leising, 2002, p.60). Needs can be

<sup>8</sup> Refugees are primarily seeking protection and are staying in Switzerland or other countries for an indefinite and unpredictable period of time. Labelling them as guests is problematic because this term does not take into account their need for protection or normality.

repressed or suppressed at times, but not completely eliminated. If they are not sufficiently in the long term, this can lead to problems such as inner restlessness, discomfort, irritability and the like. Needs recur cyclically (e.g. sleeping) or situationally (e.g. seeking shelter during thunderstorms). As a rule, we are only aware of some of our needs.

We have taken a closer look at those housing needs that belong to the basic needs and therefore appear particularly relevant in the refugee situation. These are the following aspects<sup>9</sup> :

- Privacy
- Protection and security
- Recovery and regeneration
- Regulation
- Personalisation and appropriation
- Territoriality
- Localisation
- Child friendliness

## **6.1 Realization of housing needs in private accommodation**

Overall, it can be stated that the experiences of private accommodation with regard to the fulfilment of housing needs are heterogeneous and vary according to need and situation. For the most part, positive experiences are reported. The refugees describe the benefits of private accommodation, especially in the initial phase, as orientation and support, but also as a sense of security and safety.

Enabling and respecting each other's privacy is key. Opportunities to appropriate the space make it easier for those taken in to experience protection and security. Communication and exchange about each other's needs also appear to be central.

As described at the beginning of this chapter, needs are not singular phenomena and occur again and again (at cyclical intervals or as required). This also means that they can be postponed for a certain period of time and a deficit only becomes apparent after some time. Many statements from "host families" indicate that private accommodation can become more difficult over time. In the long run, the people taken in do not want to be a burden on the "host families". Depending on the spatial organisation, private accommodation therefore only appears to be suitable for a certain period of time.

The biggest challenge for both parties is probably maintaining privacy over a longer period of time, as in many cases the existing living environments are not designed to accommodate additional people on a long-term basis. Among other things, there is a lack of space and opportunities for retreat, rest and relaxation. Closely linked to the issue of space are the time rhythms and the organisation of use, which must be discussed at an early stage. For longer-term private accommodation, many living situations would have to be spatially adapted so that they can function better for a multi-party household.

## **6.2 Comparison of different forms of housing: Collective housing**

The available findings on housing needs do not allow for a direct comparison with other forms of accommodation for refugees, as the relevant data was not systematically collected. However, in the interviews with refugees, some of them mentioned living with a host family in a positive light compared to living in a "bunker".

However, a survey of Ukrainian refugees, primarily in the canton of Zurich (Baier et al. 2022, 14-16), indicates that private accommodation performs significantly better than shared accommodation in terms of satisfaction, feeling of safety, experience of conflict and health: refugees with their own flat were the most satisfied with the housing situation at 95%, followed by 86% with "host families". Shared accommodation scored the lowest at 52%; the respondents' subjective feeling of safety was also lowest here at 73%, and

<sup>9</sup> The results of the analysis of the individual aspects can be found in the final report in German.

highest in their own home at 98%. The level of conflict is highest in shared accommodation:

*"A total of 65.4% of respondents living there report having conflicts at least rarely; for 21.8% this is even more often the case. The level of conflict is second-highest when accommodation is with families that are known - 41.4% of respondents report this. In host families that were not known before the flight, 23.4% reported at least infrequent conflicts. (Baier et al. 2022, p. 15).*

## 7 Giving, accepting and rejecting "care"

The aim of the qualitative interviews was to learn more on how private accommodation was experienced by both the "host families" and the Ukrainians. The aspect of "care" is discussed below. The interviews show that the private accommodation of refugees is characterised by various dimensions of "care" and that the refugees are dependent on care.

Care refers to practical support services such as help with visits to the authorities, assistance in finding accommodation and a job, support with everyday issues, organising clothes or language courses, etc. However, it also includes physical care, for example by shopping and cooking for the refugees and organising medical care. Emotional care manifests itself, for example, in the form of enquiries about well-being, listening and support. This emphasises the great need for support for refugees at various levels at the beginning of their arrival in Switzerland.

In some cases, however, the refugees also took on practical care work by cooking or looking after the host's children, and took care of the emotional well-being of their "host families" as friendly relationships developed.

However, there are also areas of tension in connection with care, which are associated in particular with the rejection of care services. The reasons for this are a need for independence and not wanting to be a burden on the host family. Some of the Ukrainian women described a strong need for peace and quiet, which was thwarted by constant offers of joint activities. Rest is a great need after experiencing trauma. It would be necessary for the "host families" to receive appropriate training in order to deal with the refugees appropriately.

It became clear that the private accommodation was experienced by the "host families", and in some cases also by the Ukrainians as stressful or even overwhelming. For future programmes, better support and closer supervision of the "host families" is important in order to relieve them and protect themselves and the refugees from excessive demands. Due to the lack of institutionalisation of this model and the excessive demands placed on the authorities, the "host families" were left to their own devices. This increased the *mental load* in particular, which represents a further dimension of care work. This includes invisible planning and organisational tasks that the "host families" constantly perform, albeit to varying degrees.

## 8 The future of "host families": conclusion and recommendations

Overall, it can be stated that both many of the refugees and the majority of the "host families" report positively on their experiences.

*"Would do it again at any time, it was very enriching and certainly the best thing we did this year." (ID 1084)*

*"I would recommend because it's a great experience to feel all this atmosphere of the country as they showed me their traditions, they showed me the country. It was really an interesting cultural experience. They showed me to buy groceries, clothes, they showed me everything. I really appreciate this help*



*because it's really hard to be a new person in the country and you don't know anything and they helped me with this" (Svetlana, 404-411)*

The data shows the opportunities that private accommodation can offer in terms of meeting housing needs, as well as facilitating arrival in Switzerland.

## **8.1 Potential of private accommodation for integration**

Our qualitative and quantitative data provide numerous indications of the positive effects of private accommodation on integration. Especially in the initial period in Switzerland, refugees cite the support as very helpful for their arrival and as an initial orientation. They experience emotional closeness and a sense of security and recovery after fleeing the war. However, the prerequisites are that both sides can communicate with each other and that privacy is mutually respected.

### **Flat hunting**

At the time of our survey, half of the relationships had already ended. In half of these, the refugees had moved into their own flat. Numerous descriptions show that the language and organisational support of the "host families" in the search for a permanent tenancy is very important, not only for orientation but also for overcoming discrimination and prejudices of the landlords.

### **Labour**

Many also supported the people they hosted in finding work or arranged jobs. Some of the interviewees found accommodation and academic employment through universities; university members became "host families".

### **Orientation knowledge and social integration**

There are also numerous references to how quickly and easily (everyday) cultural knowledge can be imparted in private accommodation. This ranges from the proverbial waste separation to an explanation of how Swiss administrations work. Many "host families" and refugees have also undertaken leisure activities together and celebrated holidays together.

### **Health**

The topic of health is repeatedly raised. "Host families" often provide important support in terms of access to medical facilities. The refugees receive a lot of care in various forms, which helps them to overcome social isolation, rest and feel comfortable. It can be assumed that these forms of care could hardly be provided in other forms of accommodation. For example, the study by Baier et al. 2022 found significant differences in health indicators by accommodation situation: in shared accommodation, almost 40% of respondents were in poor health compared to 17% who lived with acquaintances or 26% with "host families" (Baier et al. 2022, p. 23).

### **Orientation and empowerment**

Occasional descriptions by refugees point to the major differences between private accommodation and experiences in collective accommodation: they experienced an administrative machinery there, in contrast to the ability to act in private accommodation. With "host families", relationships can be entered into and dissolved, needs can be articulated and satisfied, as the chapter on housing needs has shown. However, this ability to act is also associated with great uncertainty and a great deal of administrative effort, as the interviews with the refugees show. "Host families" often played a central role in mediation and orientation, as the authorities sometimes seemed difficult to reach or to be overwhelmed<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> This is probably also due to the time of the survey, as the S protection status had only just been introduced.

## Security and violence

In the survey on private accommodation, we found no evidence of (domestic) violence between "host families" and hosted persons. Autonomy for the refugees, lockable rooms and often a private bathroom are fundamental prerequisites for the privacy of the hosted persons. The available data shows that private accommodation can enable these people to settle down after their flight, experience security and get off to a good start in the host society

To prevent sexualised violence, an extract from the criminal record was widely requested for the host and no women were placed alone in single men's households. However, this does not mean that there can be no violence between the host and the person taking them in, especially as there is a strong power imbalance, the topic is still taboo and is not readily addressed in an interview situation. Some interviewees also mentioned that people in their environment did not have good experiences in their "host families" and, for example, had to clean and cook for the host family and were exploited as unpaid labourers.

The more formalised a housing relationship is (e.g. through a contract), the lower the power imbalance and degree of dependency. Support for private accommodation therefore seems necessary in order to protect against abuse of power and to mediate in the event of communication difficulties.

Overall, it can be seen that refugees have often found their own accommodation through the support of the "host families", have been helped to find work and have received practical information and concrete support. Positive effects on language acquisition, cultural orientation knowledge, general health and job search have been documented not only in this study, but also in international studies (e.g. Ron & Join-Lambert 2020, pp. 465-467). In this sense, private accommodation can enable many things that are not possible in shared accommodation (cf. Baier et al. 2022). However, it is also clear that social integration is a complex process in which the acquisition of a national language and gainful employment is an often desired and required but not sufficient prerequisite. It is not yet possible to make any statements about effects over time. To this end, we plan to interview the refugees at a later date.<sup>11</sup>

## 8.2 Conclusions

Taking in Ukrainian refugees in private households and flats in Switzerland is a great expression of empathy and lived solidarity. "Host families" were and are an essential and necessary support for state reception structures, which were overwhelmed in 2022. The large-scale private reception of Ukrainian refugees and the (logistical) support provided by civil society is a development that can also be observed in other European countries (for Belgium Schrooten et al. 2022, for Germany Haller et al. 2022). These developments are based on previous programmes and initiatives, such as the SFH's "host family" project, which has existed since 2016. Private accommodation is also receiving increasing academic attention (Ran & Join-Lambert 2020 for France, see also the literature review by Bassoli & Luccioni 2023).

The results show that a certain degree of formalisation, support and clarification of responsibilities are necessary in order to establish private accommodation as an integral part of the reception of refugees in the long term. The study in Belgium comes to similar conclusions (Schrooten et al. 2022):

*"Based on our study we conclude that a proper framework and support for host families can make the difference between success and failure. After all, host families often automatically take on a broader supportive or "buddy" role for their guests. Clear, streamlined, and accessible information for both host families and refugees is crucial in this context, as is a clear distribution of duties between host families,*

<sup>11</sup> Studies on the effects of private accommodation have so far been almost exclusively snapshots, see Bassoli/Luccioni 2023.

*community-based organisations and authorities. It is significant that more than four in ten respondents indicated that they had taken on too much responsibility by agreeing to act as hosts. This must be avoided in the future if governments wish to be able to continue to rely on this form of informal solidarity." (Schrooten et al. 2022, p. 88).*

We would like to emphasise five points in particular:

### **1. Creating a suitable living environment and respecting housing needs**

If private accommodation is to be institutionalised as a form of housing for refugees, it is crucial for both parties that the living environment makes this possible in the medium to long term. First and foremost, this includes enabling mutual privacy in their own and shared living spaces. On the one hand, structural and spatial measures such as the room layout or lockable rooms are relevant in order to create opportunities for both parties to retreat and appropriate their own space. On the other hand, communication and organisational factors are of great importance. Privacy must be mutually respected. Housing needs can take very different forms which cannot always be anticipated on the basis of one's own needs. The fact that refugees frequently regretted in the survey that they withdraw, do nothing or have little interaction may be due to their great need for peace and privacy, but also to traumatic experiences and major worries. Cultural proximity in the sense of similar educational status, professional interests, religious practices or a similar family situation can simplify communication and promote the development of a good relationship.

Open and respectful communication about one's own privacy needs is important. Common rules and codes of behaviour can help to make living together easier. In addition, precise agreements on the use of shared spaces such as kitchens, bathrooms or living rooms are useful to minimise the potential for conflict.

### **2. Support and supervision of private accommodation**

Professional clarification and placement of private accommodation is key to organising a targeted match between "host families" and refugees in advance. In this way, the ideas and needs of the people regarding family situations, pets and the housing situation can be compared before the allocation and included in the decision. Such screening and matching is also recommended by the OECD and the European Union Agency for Asylum (Schrooten et al. 2022, p. 87).

It is important for the "host families" to know the central responsibilities and support options for themselves and the refugees. Professional support for private accommodation therefore seems necessary, also to support mutual understanding and to mitigate the unequal balance of power and intervene in the event of any abuse of power. Appropriate support could also prevent "host families" from taking on too much care work and having to bear too high a mental load. At the same time, it can be ensured that the host family can also receive other support if necessary.

The experience gained from previous private accommodation projects can be utilised here<sup>12</sup>. The existing models for preparing and supporting private accommodation can in principle be extended to the whole of Switzerland, so that each canton and each municipality does not have to develop its own elaborate models or programmes.

The availability of translators is also helpful in providing support when important matters need to be discussed or communication is not working. In many cantons, there are also intercultural language mediators, i.e. people who are familiar with both "cultures", speak both languages but have no interpreter training.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Experience from the Swiss Refugee Council's "Host Family Project" during the Syrian crisis (2015 - 2016), for example, suggests that private accommodation works better the fewer expectations there are of the other party, both for guests and "host families".

<sup>13</sup> For BS and SO see <https://www.heks.ch/unser-angebot/dolmetschdienste#laien-dolmetscherinnen-f-r-ukrainisch-und-russisch> (30 May 2023).

### **3. Further training, networking and exchange**

Having a basic knowledge of trauma and the effects of war on health is very relevant for "host families". This can protect "host families" from excessive demands and prepare them for dealing with potentially traumatised people, but also prevent abuse. Targeted further training could also promote networking between "host families". This was often requested or mentioned as a positive experience. Regular meetings with opportunities for exchange and thematic input would be possible. Other recent studies from Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands have also highlighted the need for networking (Schrooten et al. 2022, p. 88 and Ran & Join-Lambert 2020, p. 471). Sharing experiences, e.g. at meetings or in social networks, is recommended and should be supported by intermediary organisations or authorities.

### **4. Adequate and standardised funding is key to private accommodation**

A formal tenancy with a contract and rental payments helps to ensure that the host and tenant can meet on equal terms. However, this requires appropriate regulations. At present, in many cantons and municipalities, "host families" are hardly compensated for their actual additional costs. If they "step in" on a subsidiary basis, the private reception has positive effects and the federal government reimburses the cantons for the costs of accommodation on a flat-rate basis, the "host families" must also receive a corresponding share.

The great emotional and organisational care work of the "host families" is currently often undervalued. The lack of appreciation of care work can also have an impact on the people who are taken in, who feel like a "burden" for the "host families" and put themselves under pressure to find independent accommodation. This reproduces a social pattern according to which care is not considered full-fledged work. This has been increasingly criticised, particularly from a feminist perspective (Brückner, 2021). The preparation and support of refugees and "host families" must therefore remain part of the state's responsibility and appropriate structures must be created (cf. Alberti, 2022).

### **5. Accessible, understandable and reliable communication with authorities with centralised and accessible contact points**

Communication between the public administration, "host families" and refugees is another important prerequisite for ensuring that private accommodation involves an acceptable level of "mental load" for "host families" and that people who are fully employed can and like to take in refugees. The complexity and dispersion of information, responsibilities and contact points was very high, especially at the time of the survey. Clear responsibilities, easily accessible and clear information as well as competence regulations and agreements with "host families" are very helpful here.

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