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How private accommodation for refugees works sustainably

**An analysis of the functioning of four national chapters of the housing project
Refugees Welcome International in the European Union**

How private accommodation for refugees works sustainably

Authors:

Smaranda Krings,
Carla Szyszkowitz
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Graphic layout:

Sara Consolato

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Abstract

Private accommodation is a frequently overlooked solution to housing problems for refugees in host countries. This report gives insight into this practice by describing the functioning of the refugee housing platform Refugees Welcome International in the country chapters Germany, Austria, Spain and France. For this purpose, interviews with country representatives and volunteers were conducted and research on different practices of private accommodation was done. Furthermore, the legal framework for private accommodation in the previously mentioned four countries was analyzed in the general framework of EU legislation. This report illustrates how such programs can function sustainably and provide real solutions to pressing social issues. It is a practice that benefits refugees and the hosting countries and provides learning experiences to volunteers. Given the evidence that these programs work, they should be supported with dedicated lines of funding in expanding their reach and private accommodation for refugees be acknowledged on a wider basis by integrating it within the welfare state framework.

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01 | Introduction

This report aims at providing an overview on the functioning of the housing project *Refugees Welcome International* (hereinafter RW International) by highlighting the cases of four selected country chapters. It shows how the legal and societal conditions influence the structure and area of impact the organisation has in the respective countries and the different types of structures that have been established in order to provide private accommodation shared with locals to displaced persons with various protection titles.

RW International is a network of eleven individual organisations, primarily active in Europe, which provides accommodation to displaced persons with various protection titles in flats shared with locals. The idea originated in Germany where the first national chapter was founded in 2014 under the name *Flüchtlinge Willkommen* (engl. Refugees Welcome). It received a lot of media attention and caught the interest of many activists around the world who then contacted the German team for guidance on how to establish their own chapter of RW International. Subsequently, many national chapters were created, all operating under the same name and brand identity. An umbrella organisation for all national chapters was created under the name *Refugees Welcome International*, as a sub-project of the German association *Mensch Mensch Mensch e.V.* (engl. Human Human

Human association) located in Berlin.

The umbrella organisation was created in order to enable collaboration across borders and the sharing of knowledge within the network. The main added value of working within this network has proven to be the ability to learn from each other's experiences in the field. All national chapters have the same goal of housing refugees in shared flats with locals. At the same time, each national chapter has approached this task in a slightly different way, according to national circumstances. There are differences in target groups, organisational structures and funding schemes from which valuable lessons can be learned and adapted to other national chapters. Furthermore, the umbrella network aims at representing a European force advocating for humane living conditions for refugees in Europe.

This report has been realized within the framework of the project *Dalle esperienze al modello: l'accoglienza in famiglia come percorso di integrazione/ Obiettivo Specifico 2. Integrazione - Migrazione legale - Obiettivo nazionale ON 3 - Capacity building -lett. m) - Scambio di buone Pratiche - Inclusione sociale ed economica SM* (engl. From experience to model: family-based accommodation as a pathway to integration Specific objective 2. Integration / Legal migration - National objective ON 3 - Capacity building

-lett. m) - Exchange of good practices - Social and economic inclusion SM), implemented by *Refugees Welcome Italia* as lead applicant and co-funded by the European Commission and the Italian Minister of Interior in the framework of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund.

The general objective of the project is to contribute to the consolidation of the practice of domestic housing of refugees and other holders of protection through the involvement of active citizens, a sound collaboration with municipalities involved in the project (Roma, Palermo, Bari, Macerata and Ravenna) and the scientific assessment of the social impact of the practice itself by the University of Tor Vergata.

Within the scope of this project, an event for the exchange of good practices between *Refugees Welcome Italia* and other four chapters belonging to the network *Refugees Welcome International* was foreseen. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it could not take place. In lieu of such an event, this first comprehensive report on the experiences of Refugees Welcome in four countries (Germany, Austria, Spain and France) was drafted.

It provides an overview of the functioning of these four country chapters, including information on target groups, methodologies, numbers of matchings realized, the role of volunteers and the relevant legal framework. As stated above, this report represents the first attempt to provide relevant private and public stakeholders with information on the practice of the network *Refugees Welcome International* across Europe, highlighting the differences as well as the similarities among various chapters.

Keywords

Refugee housing; social inclusion; refugee integration; private accommodation; social innovation; volunteer work; social impact.

Legal framework for accommodation of refugees in the EU

Since the focus of this paper are national chapters established in four Member States of the European Union, this paragraph will provide an introduction into the legal realm of accommodation for asylum seekers in the framework of the European Union.

There are the two main directives that must be considered while keeping in mind that these directives are merely goal-orientated documents. According to Art 288 Para 3 Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the responsibility for the implementation of directives lies with the Member States themselves through national legislation¹. The corresponding national legislation in Austria, France, Germany and Spain will be dealt with in the following sections.

The first Directive 2011/95/EU “on standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection, and for the content of the protection granted” includes very general term definitions and regulations. Access to accommodation for asylum seekers is regulated in Art 32 Para 1 of the Directive. It requires Member States to provide:

“access to accommodation under equivalent conditions as other third-country nationals legally resident in their territories”.

Directive 2013/33/EU “laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection (recast)” defines the conditions of housing in the course of the “modalities for material reception conditions” more in depth in Article 18.

“Where housing is provided in kind, it should take one or a combination of the following forms:

(a) premises used for the purpose of housing applicants during the examination of an application for international protection made at the border or in transit zones;

(b) accommodation centres which guarantee an adequate standard of living;

(c) private houses, flats, hotels or other premises adapted for housing applicants”.

The last sentence of Art 18 states: *“such different conditions shall in any event cover basic needs”*. In accordance with Art 18 Para 9, the conditions may only in special circumstances and for a reasonable time differ from those set in the directive.

¹ Treaty on the functioning of the European Union 2012, Art 288 Para 3.







02 | The Network



Governing principles of the network Refugees Welcome

All national chapters of RW International aim at providing accommodation to displaced persons in shared flats with locals. Due to various country specifics, the process of accommodation varies, to a significant degree, from country to country. Still, there are several basic principles that all members of the network follow.

General orientation of the project

All national chapters represent and “live” a welcoming culture towards refugees. This means that they support policies that aim at enhancing the lives of refugees in their country, but are not affiliated with any political party. In all national chapters, the service of providing accommodation is offered free of charge. Although refugees never pay any sort of arrangement fee, in some countries, refugees pay regular rent for accommodation arranged by the chapters. All national chapters have a support system for the refugees who found accommodation through the program in order to help them to address possible difficulties with the host.

Team conduct

There are clear guidelines on how work is organised and team members work together. All national chapters work on the basis of partnership and equality. This means that all members are allowed to participate in decision-making processes and the overall governance of each country chapter

is structured around democratic principles. It follows that all individuals who express the wish to participate in the project can do so. There are no barriers for becoming a volunteer and working with the organisation.

Interaction with refugees

Concerning the interaction with the refugees registered with the organisation, all national chapters follow similar guidelines. The relationship between the organisation and the refugee is based on equality and respect. This is attained by educating all team members and volunteers on privilege theory, racism and the basics of solidarity work. It follows that all refugees for whom accommodation is provided are contacted individually and are provided with accommodation fitting their individual needs. They are never obligated to accept a housing offer and can always opt out.

Interaction with the hosts

The national chapters have differing guidelines since the host target groups vary to a significant degree. However, in all national chapters the hosts have the possibility to contact the organisation, including after the refugee has moved in. The organisation remains a point of contact for them, in case any difficulties should arise.

BASIC DATA ON THE NATIONAL CHAPTERS OF THE NETWORK

| | AUSTRIA | FRANCE | GERMANY | SPAIN |
|---|---|---|-------------------------|---|
| Number of salaried employees 2021 for housing project | 0,5 | 3 | 15 | 5 |
| Number of volunteers | 25 | 30 | 200 | 200 |
| Annual budget 2020 for housing project | EUR 7,000 | EUR 71,000 | EUR 470,000 | EUR 47,000 |
| Number of co-living arrangements facilitated until May 2021 | 610 | 150 | 700 | 104 |
| Typical protection title of hosted persons 2021 | beneficiaries of international protection, asylum seekers | beneficiaries of international protection | all forms of protection | beneficiaries of international protection |
| Typical profile of hosts 2021 | groups of students | middle-aged couples | no typical profile | single middle-aged women |

There are currently eleven active national chapters in the network of Refugees Welcome International, located in Argentina, Australia, Austria, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Spain and Sweden. They all operate under different circumstances and with varying levels of resources. While some national chapters are fully funded and work with employed staff, most are heavily dependent on volunteers at all levels of operation. The differences are illustrated by using the example of Austria, France, Germany and Spain, with Germany being a fully funded national chapter and Austria illustrating a team working with minimum resources.





03 | Germany



Starting point and history

Refugees Welcome Germany (hereinafter RW Germany) is the founding organisation of the network. In autumn 2014, an activist wanted to privately host a refugee in her flat in order to support this person upon their arrival in Germany. However, she was confronted with the fact that there was no organisation working in this field that was easily approachable for the wider public and provided support in privately hosting refugees. Until then, only few people privately hosted refugees and mostly organised this through grassroots activist groups. In order to make the possibility of hosting a refugee more accessible, the first national chapter of *Refugees Welcome Germany* was established in Berlin. By using clear slogans, an appealing design and social media, many possible hosts could be reached. The platform quickly grew to include many potential hosts and volunteers. In 2018 the organisation initiated a process of reorganisation and structural change. An important aspect of this process was the diversification and renaming of the organisation from *Flüchtlinge Willkommen* (engl. Refugees Welcome) to *Zusammenleben Willkommen* (engl. Living Together Welcome). This is due to the discriminatory and belittling connotation of the German word for refugee *Flüchtling*.

Legal framework for private accommodation of refugees

Accommodation for refugees in Germany is regulated in the German Law on Asylum called *Asylgesetz*¹. Providing accommodation is the responsibility of the federal states, as can be deduced from Para 44 AsylG². There is no standard that is applicable for all federal states, neither for the first reception centers, nor for accommodation during the remaining time of the proceedings³.

The federal states are informed by the Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community (BMI) how many asylum seekers they need to provide accommodation for⁴. The necessary measures must be taken by the corresponding federal state to ensure adequate accommodation. This includes special regard for women and vulnerable individuals. At this stage, asylum seekers are placed in so-called first reception centers and asylum seekers do not have the liberty to make decisions regarding their accommodation⁵. The size and location of the first reception centers, as well as the specific regulations differ in each federal state⁶.

The maximum duration for a stay in one of these centres is 18 months⁷.

1 Asylgesetz 2008 (Germany) (AsylG)

2 Ibid., Para 44

3 Informationsverbund Asyl und Migration, 'Country report Conditions in reception facilities Germany' (2020) Asylum in Europe. <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/germany/reception-conditions/housing/conditions-reception-facilities/> 3 May 2021 (Country report Germany).

4 AsylG

5 Ibid.

6 Country report Germany.

7 Ibid.

The standards between the federal states differ greatly: while the Refugee Reception Act of Baden-Württemberg requires merely 4,5m² per person, a minimum of 7 m² is required in other federal states⁸. After leaving the first reception center, asylum seekers are accommodated in either community housing or decentralised housing⁹. In general, asylum seekers are not given the choice between settling in organised facilities or private/individual ones. Whether and when asylum seekers are allowed to seek private accommodation depends on the municipalities. No national framework is provided for this and thus very different implementations can be found¹⁰. In some municipalities asylum seekers are placed in *Gemeinschaftsunterkünfte* (engl. community housing)¹¹, while in other municipalities asylum seekers may legally be permitted to rent their own apartments/rooms¹².

They must search for private housing themselves, the high rents and racism on the housing market makes this nearly impossible¹³. Hence even if searching and taking up housing elsewhere may be permitted, community housing may be the only feasible option¹⁴. Many experts, asylum seekers and the Refugee Council criticise large

community housing due to the lack of privacy, isolated location and regulated daily routines. However, private accommodation does not necessarily always provide better conditions¹⁵. Asylum seekers are thus exposed to the regulations of their municipality for the course of the entire asylum procedure, even if these proceedings last for multiple years¹⁶. Only once the asylum procedure is completed and international protection is granted, regardless if the individual is receiving social services, s/he can organize their accommodation individually.

Structure of the organisation

RW Germany is a project operated by the non-profit organisation *Mensch Mensch Mensch* e.V. (engl. Human Human Human association) that is also the supporting association of the Refugees Welcome International network as well as other projects in Germany related to migration.

In 2014, the project was initially only funded by private donations and was operated by a team of volunteers. Throughout the years the project has grown significantly and attained an annual budget of EUR 470,000 in 2020. Refugees Welcome Germany is supported by the Minister of State for Migration, Refugees and Integration, Germany as well as private foundations and donations. This enables the project to have as many as eleven

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ 'Flüchtlinge privat aufnehmen - wie geht das?' (2017) PRO ASYL <https://www.proasyl.de/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/privates-Wohnen.pdf>; Country report Germany

¹¹ Sophie Hinger and Philipp Schäfer, 'Wohnst Du schon - oder wirst Du noch untergebracht?' (2017) Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, <https://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/migration/kurzdossiers/243947/wohnst-du-schon-oder-wirst-du-noch-untergebracht>, accessed 1 May 2020 (Hinger/Schäfer); Country report Germany

¹² Country report Germany

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Hinger/Schäfer; Country report Germany.

¹⁶ Country report Germany

employees mostly working part-time. They are supported by around 200 volunteers all over the country working in 24 local groups.

Until 2021 there was a clear divide between tasks done by salaried employees and tasks done by volunteers. Their responsibilities barely overlapped. Volunteers were mainly in charge of publicity work in their regions. This includes running info stands at different events to collect donations and promoting the cause on social media. The organisation created a set of guidelines for volunteers involved in these tasks such as *Aktionen für eure Info-Stände* (engl. Actions for your Infostands), *How to Infostand? Eine Kommunikationsgrundlage* (engl. How to Information Stand? A Communication Basis) and *Leitfaden zu Social Media für die Lokalgruppen von Zusammenleben Willkommen* (engl. Social Media for the Local Groups of Living Together Welcome).

Other guidelines on specific topics are *Aktionsanleitung Semesterstart* (engl. Instructions for Actions Start of the Semester) and *Online engagiert! Aktionen für die Corona-Zeit* (engl. Being active online! Actions in Times of Corona). Some local groups also organised housing consultations for refugees and supported them in finding adequate accommodation for themselves. In order to provide entirely accurate information, volunteers receive various handouts from the headquarters, which they pass on to refugees looking for accommodation. These handouts

cover topics such as which expenses are covered by the social welfare office, how to best contact a flatshare, what the basic principles of a flatshare are and basic information on rent law. Only very rarely were volunteers involved in the so-called matching process. This term describes the process by which refugees looking for housing are matched with potential hosts. This was always done by a salaried employee working in Berlin and coordinating all requests from both refugees and hosts.

In 2021 the organisation started a process aiming at bringing volunteers and salaried employees closer together in order to make the organisation less dependent on employees. A concept under the name *Tandem-Begleitung* (engl. tandem support) is being tested whereby volunteers will be more involved in the matching process. Registered refugees will no longer be in direct contact with the salaried employee in charge of matches based in Berlin, but with a volunteer or groups of volunteers in their region. In order for this to meet the highest standards, volunteers will be trained on various subjects. The more training a volunteer has completed, the more tasks this individual is authorized to complete within the organisation. This new concept requires a general regionalisation of the volunteer management which is why the position of 'volunteer manager' was split into four different positions, each in charge of a different region in Germany. The concept of *Tandem-Begleitung* is currently being

tested in pilot regions and will subsequently be implemented in all regions.

As mentioned above, volunteers are mainly in charge of publicity work. They create visibility for the project, but are only very rarely involved in the conceptualisation of new projects and have until recently not been involved in matches at all. The team of employees is therefore in charge of the general project coordination, volunteer management, housing consultations, coordination of single projects, press work, matches, fundraising and accounting.

Matching process

In order to be considered for a room in a shared flat, refugees need to get in contact with the organisation via mail, phone or in person. There are opportunities for in-person meetings at the regular counselling sessions that RW Germany hosts all over the country. At these events they receive basic information on how the German housing market works and can also register to be considered whenever RW Germany has a free room available.

Possible hosts need to register through a form on the website www.zusammenleben-willkommen.de and provide a wide array of information about the available accommodation that is then automatically transferred to OsTicket, an open source online ticketing system that was adapted

to the organisation's specific requirements in 2014 by a volunteer in the Austrian country chapter.

It stores all the information on available accommodation and registered refugees, though information on refugees is input manually and not via a form. This enables the organisation's many employees and volunteers to work together remotely across all regions and share information easily. Whenever a new possible accommodation is uploaded into the system, an employee calls the contact person for a first screening. During this phone call the employee tries to find out more about the potential host's specific reason for joining the program and whether the motive is in accordance with the organisation's values.

For example, hosts who register in order to secure free household help are immediately disqualified. In addition, the employee will find out more practical things, such as whether the apartment is easily reachable by public transport. Another topic that is covered are the host's interests. Whenever possible, RW Germany tries to facilitate matches that also take into consideration the host's and the refugee's interests in order to create a co-living situation that is as close as possible to conventional co-living arrangements.

After the conversation with the host, the employee contacts volunteers in the region in order to determine whether there are suitable refugees on the regional waiting list. Often there is also direct access to state-run facilities in the area, where refugees can be contacted directly

and offered private accommodation.

Even though the organisation does have a waiting list, it frequently prioritizes women, people from the LGBTIQ-community and other groups at risk. When a good possible match is found, they are given each other's contact details and encouraged to meet as soon as possible in a neutral space to find out whether they get along. Usually, no employee or volunteer accompanies the refugee to the first meeting. This can however be requested by the refugee. After that first meeting, both parties have time to think whether they want to live together. If they do not, another possible match is proposed. It is important to note that possible hosts are put in touch with a maximum of three potential flatmates.

The majority of the 700 refugees who have been hosted through the program in the last years are from Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. They are predominantly male (70%) and of all age groups. RW Germany primarily supports people who are still in the asylum process and living in state-run facilities. The hosts are mostly young people living in shared flats in urban areas. Men and women participate as hosts in the program in equal measure. Ideally, the hosts offer the room in their shared flat rent-free. If that is not the case, the organisation offers the room to a recognized refugee who has financial means to cover the rent. Another possibility is to get in touch with the relevant authority in order to finance the rent through the state. If that is also not possible,

the organisation covers the rent via a specifically created rent-donation account.

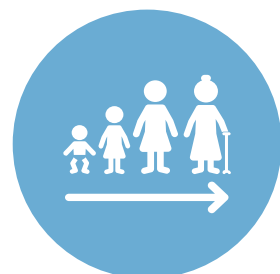
The German chapter of Refugees Welcome has facilitated 700 matches since 2014, although a big majority of the matches were done between 2014 and 2018. Since then the number of registered hosts has decreased dramatically. They are noticing a slight increase since the beginning of 2020. There is no data on the average length of co-living initiated.

A successful match

As mentioned above, the German team has matched over 700 refugees with suitable hosts since their foundation in 2014. Over the years, their methodology has changed and adapted to various circumstances.

At the beginning of 2021, the refugee F. registered with the organisation via mail. He had been living in a state-run mass accommodation facility for more than a year and had just been recognised as a refugee. According to German regulations, he therefore had to leave the facility and find private accommodation. He had been trying to find a room in a shared flat for several weeks, when his state-assigned social worker first contacted RW Germany. No flatshare that he had contacted on his own had called him back. A social worker met with F. for a first interview. It was evident that the situation was very urgent and F. was unfamiliar

Refugees



AGE

All ages



ORIGIN

*Afghanistan,
Syria, Iraq*



GENDER

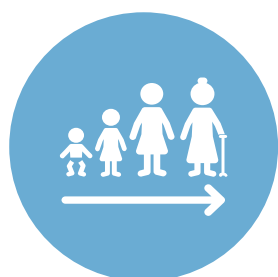
Male (70%)



STATUS

All

Hosts



AGE

25-50



GENDER

All



ACCOMMODATION

Shared flats

with the concept of a flatshare. The social worker in charge of his case therefore visited a flatshare with him and explained basic principles that applied to most flatshares. At the time of his registration there were no hosts available in the area, which is why F. was homeless for several weeks. Approximately 3-4 months after he registered with RW Germany a suitable host was found for him. Both parties were put in touch and subsequently met in a neutral space to get to know each other. They immediately decided that they would live together. The primary motivation for the host was to support a person in need of accommodation. Very few other criteria were taken into consideration in their decision. Since F. was already recognized as a refugee, his share of the rent was covered by the social welfare office. The German team provides only limited follow-up support, which is not performed on a structural level and has no regularity. They can be contacted for important issues and will only engage if there are conflicts of significance, such as conflicts connected to the fact that the person is a refugee/B.PoC or matters of exploitation, assault etc.

They do not get involved in ordinary conflicts that are likely to arise in any flatshare, due to the fact that they believe refugees need to be seen as regular flat mates with whom possible problems can be solved without external support. They believe that the involvement of an advocate-organisation harms the flatshare's dynamics,

which is why it is especially important that potential hosts are screened thoroughly before being matched with a new roommate. Hosts are expected to consider the background of the parties involved in conflicts adequately. Therefore no information can be provided on whether the exemplary match is still working out well.

Other areas of work

Due to the fact that only few hosts are currently offering flats on the German platform, the team has recently started focusing heavily on counselling in order to support refugees to find accommodation without relying on hosts through RW Germany. They offer online and offline consultations to refugees seeking housing in Germany. On their YouTube channel, Instagram account and Facebook account "Zusammenleben Willkommen", one can find videos with titles such as "How to find a flat share & tips for first contact (video tutorial for refugees)", "What happens at a WG Casting? And how to prepare yourself for it? (Video Tutorial for Refugees)" and "What is written in a rental agreement - what should you know about it? (video tutorial for refugees)" in English, German and Arabic. In-person consultations take place regularly in cities or virtually all over Germany and are hosted by volunteers. A new model that is currently being tried is the so-called *Tandem-Begleitung* (engl. tandem support). As

part of this program volunteers are assigned registered refugees one-on-one and support them over several weeks in finding a room in a shared flat in Germany. All volunteers are specifically trained in order to provide qualified knowledge and avoid paternalism and exploitation.

Challenges and long-term perspectives

The organisation is heavily dependent on donations and funds from various foundations and political actors. This specific team has been especially successful in acquiring the necessary funds to operate a professional office with a dozen employees. This is clearly an advantage since it has enabled the organisation to work with a high level of professionalism. On the downside, very few volunteers are actively involved in shaping the organisation and are familiar with the basic administrative structure of the organisation. This makes for a high degree of reliance of the organisation on salaried employees and therefore on the availability of funds to cover salaries. This stands in stark contrast to almost all other national chapters of RW International that are mainly sustained by volunteers. As mentioned above, the organisation is currently in the process of training their volunteers and hence including them more in vital administrative aspects of their work. Since the German team of Refugees

Welcome also tries to find accommodation even in very remote areas, a big challenge is finding appropriate accommodation and having enough volunteers on-site to support the matching process. Concerning matches, another challenge that the team cites as a serious obstacle in their work is the high level and complexity of bureaucracy in the German state. The facilitation of matches often takes very long since intense communication with the authorities is needed and a lot of paperwork needs to be processed in order to finalize the match. Another major challenge that can be observed in many national chapters of RW and not only in Germany is the high dependency on the media and political actors. In times when the media coverage on migration is very negative, there are very few registrations of hosts and therefore few matches can be completed. The German team therefore aims at more representation in political forums in order to keep the topic high on the agenda and counter prejudices by offering positive takes on the issue of migration and human rights. This would also enable them to have a higher visibility which in turn could lead to more donations and therefore less dependency from grants and private foundations. The German team is currently working on strengthening cooperation and building new partnerships with various organisations in the field of migration. This is also a step towards more visibility and reaching a new audience.



Registration form

×

Anmeldung eures Zimmers

Felder mit einem * sind Pflichtfelder

Schritt 1 → Schritt 2 → Schritt 3 → Part Title

1. Angaben zum Zimmerangebot

In welcher Stadt wohnt ihr? * ⓘ

-

Postleitzahl *

Wie lange ist das Zimmer frei?

Eine Vermittlung über uns dauert im Durchschnitt 4 Wochen, deshalb kannst du nur ein entsprechendes Startdatum auswählen.
Wir vermitteln erst ab einer Dauer von mind. 12 Monaten, deshalb kannst du nur ein entsprechendes Enddatum auswählen. Für Zimmerangebote mit kürzerer Dauer schreib bitte eine Mail an vermittlung@zusammenleben-willkommen.de – wir leiten dein Angebot dann ggf. an entsprechende Organisationen weiter.

Startdatum *

Enddatum *

☐ Unbefristet

Benötigt ihr Hilfe bei der Finanzierung? * ⓘ

☐ Ja

☐ Nein, das Zimmer ist mietfrei

Bitte schreibe ein paar Worte zu deiner/eurer Wohnkonstellation (optional)

Wie viele Menschen leben in eurer Wohnung? Seid ihr eine Zweck-WG oder lebt ihr als Freund*innen oder Familie zusammen? Wie ist euer Zusammenleben und Umgang miteinander?

WEITER



Ticketing System

Deutschland
osTicket
Support Ticket System

Welcome, [User] | [Admin Panel](#) | [My Preferences](#) | [Log Out](#)

[Dashboard](#) [Users](#) [Tickets](#) [Knowledgebase](#)

[Open \(21,597\)](#) [Answered \(2,328\)](#) [Overdue \(4\)](#) [Closed \(8,400\)](#) [New Ticket](#)

[Search](#) [advanced] ⓘ

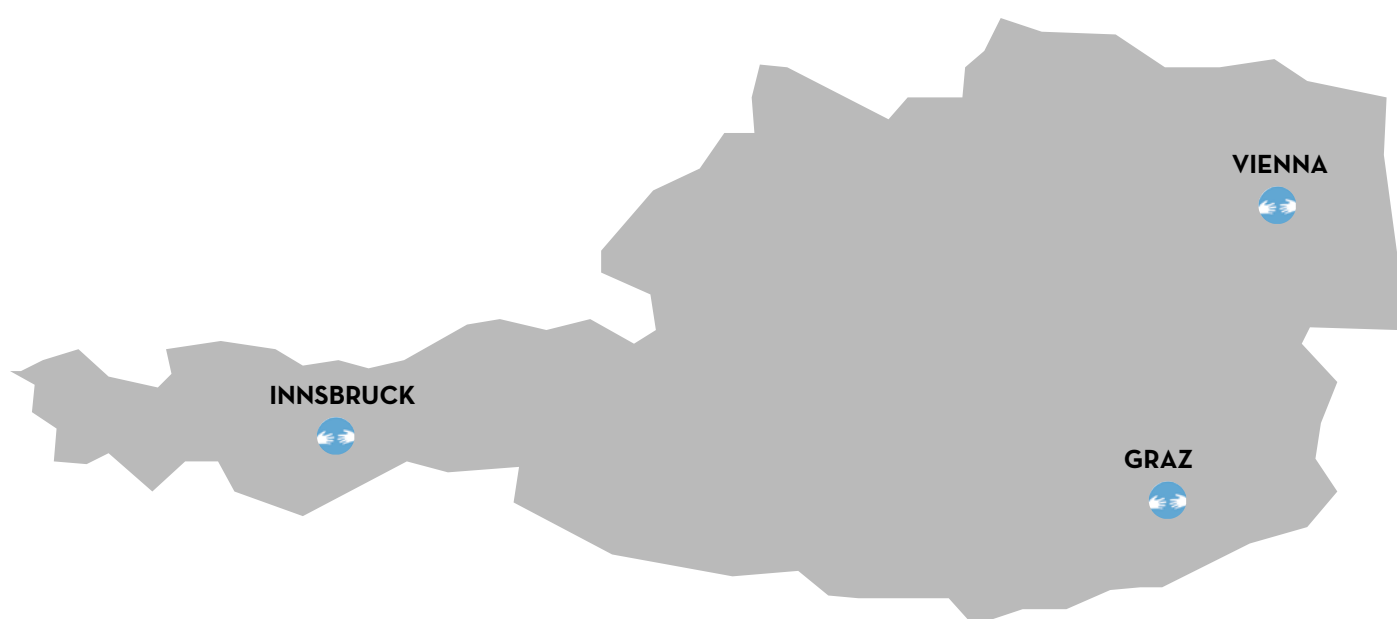
🔄 **Open Tickets — Showing 1 - 25 of 21597** [Change Status](#) [Delete](#)

| | Ticket | Date | Subject | From | Status | Priority | Assigned To |
|--------------------------|--------|------------------|---|------|----------------|----------|-------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 378300 | 2021-07-05 08:40 | WG Anmeldung - Deutschland (4) | | Open | Normal | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 222124 | 2021-07-01 13:23 | WG Anmeldung - Deutschland (15) | | In Bearbeitung | Normal | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 325416 | 2021-06-30 09:21 | WG Anmeldung - Deutschland (6) | | In Bearbeitung | Normal | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 286333 | 2021-06-27 14:51 | WG Anmeldung - Deutschland (3) | | Open | Normal | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 294651 | 2021-06-27 14:50 | WG Anmeldung - Deutschland (3) | | Open | Normal | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 468040 | 2021-06-25 15:44 | WG Marburg | | Open | Normal | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 116325 | 2021-06-22 12:06 | WG Anmeldung - Deutschland (10) | | In Bearbeitung | Normal | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 281680 | 2021-06-21 17:07 | Alternative incroyable que Lillia ... (2) | | Open | Normal | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 894538 | 2021-06-21 16:19 | WG Anmeldung - Deutschland (13) | | In Bearbeitung | Normal | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 250758 | 2021-06-17 07:04 | WG Anmeldung - Deutschland (8) | | Warteliste | Normal | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 333821 | 2021-06-16 12:44 | WG Anmeldung - Deutschland (13) | | In Bearbeitung | Normal | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 169547 | 2021-06-16 10:48 | WG Anmeldung - Deutschland (12) | | In Bearbeitung | Normal | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 959709 | 2021-06-16 09:36 | WG Anmeldung - Deutschland (6) | | In Bearbeitung | Normal | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 183597 | 2021-06-15 09:30 | WG Anmeldung - Deutschland (10) | | In Bearbeitung | Normal | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 706097 | 2021-06-11 10:11 | WG Anmeldung - Deutschland (13) | | In Bearbeitung | Normal | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 430631 | 2021-06-07 15:02 | WG Anmeldung - Deutschland (19) | | In Bearbeitung | Normal | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 169612 | 2021-06-02 23:24 | WG Anmeldung - Deutschland (14) | | In Bearbeitung | Normal | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 963224 | 2021-05-28 06:52 | WG Anmeldung - Deutschland (11) | | In Bearbeitung | Normal | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 353275 | 2021-05-25 05:45 | Journée agréable _ (2) | | Open | Normal | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 770595 | 2021-05-19 16:04 | WG Anmeldung - Deutschland (7) | | In Bearbeitung | Normal | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 236593 | 2021-05-18 17:42 | WG Anmeldung - Deutschland (7) | | In Bearbeitung | Normal | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 387365 | 2021-05-12 19:38 | WG Anmeldung - Deutschland (12) | | In Bearbeitung | Normal | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 714796 | 2021-04-27 11:58 | Anfrage Nr. 558704 | | Open | Normal | |





04 | Austria



Starting point and history

Refugees Welcome Austria (hereinafter RW Austria) was established soon after the German model in 2014. Four activists from Austria contacted the German team independently from one other in December 2014 in order to find out how they could implement a similar project. They were then put in contact with each other by the German team and subsequently started researching the legal framework for private accommodation of refugees in Austria and developed a fitting housing model. The project was started in January 2015 informally and without any institutional backing. After a couple of weeks the decision was made to implement the project as part of a bigger association in order to have access to more resources. However the project always remained independent in terms of conceptualisation and structure. From 2015 to 2018 the Austrian chapter of Refugees Welcome was legally part of an association called *Vielmehr für Alle! - Verein für Bildung, Wohnen und Teilhabe* (engl. A lot more for all! - Association for education, accommodation and participation) that was founded in 2012. It implements a variety of projects aiming at supporting refugees in Austria, like for example *PROSA - Projekt Schule für Alle!* (engl. PROSA - Project School for All!), a school for refugees wishing to complete their compulsory schooling. In 2018 Refugees

Welcome Austria founded its own association under the name *Flüchtlinge Willkommen Österreich - Wohnraum für geflüchtete Menschen* (engl. Refugees Welcome Austria - Housing for refugees). The main goals of the project remained the same, the only difference being the legal structure. In 2020 the name was changed to *Flüchtlinge Willkommen Österreich - Verein für ein solidarisches Miteinander* (engl. Refugees Welcome Austria - Association for togetherness in solidarity) since the association began also implementing other projects that were not only focused on housing.

Legal framework for private accommodation of refugees

Accommodation for asylum seekers over the course of their asylum procedure is dealt with in the Austrian legal framework in compliance with Art 15a B-VG in the so-called *Grundversorgungsvereinbarung* (GV). *Grundversorgung* deals with the basic needs of asylum seekers¹.

¹ Vereinbarung zwischen dem Bund und den Ländern gemäß Art 15a B-VG über gemeinsame Maßnahmen zur vorübergehenden Grundversorgung für hilfs- und schutzbedürftige Fremde (Asylwerber, Asylberechtigte, Vertriebene und andere aus rechtlichen oder faktischen Gründen nicht abschiebbare Menschen) in Österreich 2021 (Österreich) (Grundversorgungsvereinbarung).

Different steps with regard to the housing of asylum seekers in Austria can be identified. In the first stage asylum seekers are accommodated in primary reception centers. These are centrally regulated by the Federal Government¹. The asylum seekers remain in this accommodation while the admissibility of the procedure is dealt with, especially when the admissibility is unlikely². The costs incurred by the Federal Government for care a day per person in 2018 was an average of EUR 183,00³. In 2018 (Statistics from January to May) asylum seekers spent an average of 19 days in federal facilities⁴. Once the application is permitted, asylum seekers may remain in federal reception centers for a maximum of 14 days if there is an influx of arrivals⁵. In the second stage, the responsibility for the adequate accommodation of the asylum seekers and their general wellbeing is transferred to the federal states as regulated in Art 6 Para 1 GV⁶.

This agreement between the Federal Government and the federal states determines their corresponding responsibilities in the second stage of accommodation. According to Art 3 GV the Federal Government remains responsible for the logistics (distribution key, transport, insurance registration etc.) and 60% of the costs⁷. The federal states, as regulated in Art 4 GV, are responsible for the provision of basic needs for the asylum seekers, creating the necessary infrastructure and maintaining said infrastructure, as well as supporting the relevant authorities in the course of the asylum procedure and financing 40% of the costs⁸. Private accommodation refers to individual rooms, apartments and houses accommodating asylum seekers without further organisational structures, whereas organised housing are larger community housing infrastructures that are either led through contracts between the Federal Government and entities that can be of a humanitarian, ecclesiastical nature or employed by private organisations⁹. There are significant differences between the accommodation federal states employ. Federal states such as Styria and Burgenland placed the majority of asylum seekers in organised housing, namely reception centers in 2019 (Styria 82 %, Burgenland 94%),

¹ Grundversorgungsvereinbarung.

² Asylkoordination Österreich, 'Country types of accommodation Austria' Asylum in Europe (2021). <<https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/austria/reception-conditions/housing/types-accommodation/>> accessed 2 June 2021 (Types of accommodation Austria)

³ Types of Accommodation Austria; Wolfgang Peschorn, 'Parlamentarische Anfrage betreffend "Rückkehrberatungseinrichtung Fieberbrunn"' (2019) <https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXVI/AB/AB_03837/imfname_764733.pdf> accessed May 2021, P.14 (types of accommodation Austria).

⁴ Types of Accommodation Austria.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Grundversorgungsvereinbarung, Art 6 Para 1.

⁷ Ibid, Art 3.

⁸ Ibid, Art 4.

⁹ Grundversorgungsvereinbarung; Types of Accommodation Austria.

while others like Vienna placed 71% in private accommodation¹⁰.

The costs for this accommodation are measured by the actual costs. The upper limit is set in rates and regulated in Art 9 GV¹¹. The rates differ between the different types of accommodation. It also varies whether meals and accommodation are regarded as a unit or have independent maximum rates depending on the type of accommodation. With regard to the divergence of the funding for asylum seekers in individual accommodation and those in organised housing no reasons are provided for this in the GV.

1. Accommodation and meals in an organised housing per person and day are calculated at a maximum of EUR 17
2. For meals in private accommodation per person and month the following rates are established.
 - a. For adults - EUR 180
 - b. For minors - EUR 80
 - c. For unaccompanied minors - EUR 180
3. For rent in an individual accommodation per person and month
 - a. For a single individual - EUR 110
 - b. For families (starting from 2 individuals) together - EUR 220

- c. Allowance per person and month - EUR 40¹²

In practice these subsidies can deviate from these upper limits. For example, in Vienna and Lower Austria a maximum of EUR 150 per individual and EUR 300 for families is provided for individual accommodation¹³. Whereas in Tirol a maximum of EUR 120 for an individual and EUR 240 for families is allocated for the same purpose¹⁴.

Asylum seekers do not have a claim to a certain type of accommodation but rather are dependent on its availability, although there is an intention by the federal states to take into consideration the individual's needs and preferences¹⁵. According to Art 6 GV the accommodation must assure human dignity is being respected and family unity is kept intact¹⁶. For a change of accommodation extra circumstances are necessary¹⁷. Since the 2014 *LandesflüchtlingsreferentInnenkonferenz* (engl. Conference for federal state experts on refugees issues), there are minimum standards that housing must fulfil.

¹² Ibid., Art 9.

¹³ "Refugees.wien, 'Grundversorgung' <<https://www.refugees.wien/infos-fuer-gefluechtete/grundversorgung/>> accessed 3 June 2021 (Refugees.wien); Noe, 'Häufig gestellte Fragen (FAQ's) zur Grundversorgung von hilfs- und schutzbedürftigen Fremden in Niederösterreich'. <https://www.noegv.at/noe/SozialeDienst-Beratung/FAQ_Grundversorgung_Noegv.html> accessed 26 July 2021

¹⁴ Solidarität Igls, 'Welche Leistungen bekommen AsylwerberInnen in Tirol' <<https://solidaritaet-igls.org/welche-leistungen-bekommenasylwerberinnenin-tirol/>> accessed 25 July 2021.

¹⁵ Refugees.wien.

¹⁶ Grundversorgungsvereinbarung, Art 6

¹⁷ Refugees.wien.

¹⁰ Types of Accommodation Austria.

¹¹ Grundversorgungsvereinbarung, Art 9.

The basic principles are that they must be in accordance with human dignity and family union, while they must also consider gender, ethnic and religious aspects¹⁸. Once the asylum procedure is closed and the individual has received international protection in the form of asylum or subsidiary protection they naturally have the right to individually seek private accommodation.

Structure of the organisation

The organisation RW Austria is legally an association under the name *Flüchtlinge Willkommen Österreich - Verein für ein solidarisches Miteinander* (engl. Refugees Welcome Austria - Association for togetherness in solidarity). In Austrian law a Verein is a group of at least 2 persons that voluntarily pursue a common purpose for a limited amount of time based on a specific set of bylaws without generating profit. It is an easily accessible form of legal entity that is often encountered in the social sector in Austria. This legal form was chosen since the organisation decided to make their services free of charge for refugees and can therefore not generate profit.

In order to fund the necessary infrastructure the organisation is thus dependent on grants and donations. In the first years of its existence RW Austria mainly generated funds through two private foundations and donations from supporters. Since 2019 it has mainly been funded by private donations since the focus of many private foundations in Austria shifted away from topics related to migration to others. Additionally there has been support through small grants (less than EUR 10,000) from funds administered by the City of Vienna.

The maximum number of employees the project ever had was five and none of them were employed full-time. This was in 2016 when the association was funded by private foundations. Since then the number of employees has decreased yearly. In 2017 two people were employed for 20 hours each and since then there was mostly only one employee at a time employed for a maximum of 8 hours per week. At the moment there is one employee specifically for the housing project, employed for 7.5 hours a week. The organisation has around 25 volunteers, although this number fluctuates.

As of July 2021, the board of RW Austria is composed entirely of volunteers as are all project managers and monitoring staff.

¹⁸ LandesflüchtlingenreferentInnenkonferenz 'Mindeststandards betreffend die Unterbringung in der Grundversorgung in Österreich' (2014)

However the majority of them were employees at some point in the last years and will possibly be employees again in the future. It should be noted that in the last years the core group of people involved with RW Austria has remained fairly constant and without much fluctuation. However, depending on the availability of funding their employment status with the organisation has changed throughout the years.

It can also be observed that a considerable number of the volunteers in the association were hosts before deciding to become volunteers.

Since the entire organisation is volunteer-based, also the general management and coordination is done by volunteers. However, it can be observed that with increased professionalisation these tasks are often taken over by the board or salaried employees. The board aims to involve volunteers mainly in the implementation of specific projects and realisation of matches as illustrated in the internal document *Ehrenamtliche Tätigkeit bei Flüchtlinge Willkommen Wien* (engl. Voluntary Work with Refugees Welcome Vienna). The involvement of volunteers in the matching process serves the goal of matching as many refugees as possible with hosts while also giving volunteers the opportunity to dismantle their preconceptions about refugees. Seen from this perspective, the project benefits not only

refugees and hosts, but also provides learning opportunities for volunteers willing to confront their biases. It can be estimated that around 80% of matches were done by trained volunteers.

At no point in time did the organisation have an employee dedicated solely to volunteer management. Therefore any kind of volunteer engagement with RW Austria demands self-management. Volunteers are therefore expected to have a good self-perception in order to be able to judge which tasks are suited for them. Furthermore, any volunteer working with RW Austria needs to be communicative, open and reliable. It is also vital that volunteers speak either English or German (preferably both) to be able to communicate with the target group as well as locals. Due to the fact that RW Austria currently does not have a physical office, all communication takes place online. Also, a number of different softwares and digital tools are used to handle the matches. Therefore digital literacy is a must.

Since the majority of volunteers are not refugees themselves, they sometimes start as volunteers while still harboring biases about refugees. While volunteering they need to be open for criticism in order to address these issues and learn how to break down these prejudices.

The organisation aims at having local teams in all federal capitals in order to easily implement matches in all of Austria. At the moment there are teams only in Vienna, Innsbruck and Graz. In 2015 there were local teams in all federal capitals, which is currently not feasible due to budgetary restrictions.

Matching process

The first step for both refugees looking for accommodation and potential hosts is the online registration via the organisation's website www.fluechtlinge-willkommen.at. There one can find a separate form for refugees and one for hosts. Each form requests the submission of different pieces of information that are crucial in the matching process. All information from the forms is automatically transferred to the organisation's internal ticketing system, run on the Open Source platform OsTicket and adapted to the organisation's preferences by an Austrian volunteer in 2014. All communication with both host and refugee can be documented in this system, enabling the cooperation between volunteers all over the country. Over the years, the matching process has undergone significant changes. Between 2014 and 2019 the matches were done entirely in person.

As soon as a host registered a free room, a volunteer manually looked for a refugee on the waiting list for whom the offered room could fit well. Then the volunteer would first meet with the refugee in order to find out more information on his or her situation and then meet with the host to find out what their expectations were. Only after these two separate meetings, both parties met together with the volunteer to get to know each other and decide whether they want to live together. In most cases the refugee then moved in. Since 2020 the matches are no longer done in person, but rather entirely via phone and email. This is due to multiple reasons such as the Covid-19-pandemic but also the fact that almost all refugees the organisation currently works with, speak German at least at a conversational level. Therefore they don't need a volunteer to support them in the communication with the potential host. Another reason is that the majority of refugees they find accommodation for are no longer new to Austria. They have often been living in Austria for several years and already know the housing market and what is important when renting a room. They are therefore no longer in need of basic assistance in understanding the housing market, but registered on the platform due to discrimination on the housing market.

The third reason is that many hosts no longer register their flat for the sake of supporting a refugee, but because they are simply looking for a new flatmate. In order to make the encounter with the refugee looking for a room as similar to regular meetings with potential new flat mates as possible, the volunteer does not join the meeting. The matching process is therefore very simple, as illustrated in the internal guide for volunteers *FlüWi Tutorial - Wie führe ich eine Vermittlung durch?* (engl. FlüWi Tutorial - How do I conduct a matching?).

As soon as a host registers a room in a shared flat on the platform, a volunteer contacts the host by phone to clarify their expectations and find out additional information that was not given in the online tool. In the next stage the volunteer looks for up to three potential flatmates on the waiting list of registered refugees and sends their contact information to the host. Multiple potential flatmates are suggested for the same reason the volunteer does not join the meetings: the process should be as close to regular meetings with potential new flat mates as possible. In Austria this is usually done in the form of a “casting” of all potential flatmates. After receiving the contact information, the host contacts all potential flatmates independently to find a suitable time for the meetings.

After meeting all potential candidates, the host decides whom to welcome as his or her new flat mate. The refugees hosted through the program are predominantly male (about 80%) and a big majority are under 30 years old. The main countries of origin are Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia and Syria. While from 2014 to 2018 many of the hosted refugees were still in the asylum process, since 2018, the majority of hosted refugees already have asylum in Austria. The hosts that are part of the program are mainly students and between 20 and 35 years of age. Rarely, also families host refugees through their program. All genders participate in equal measure and a majority of the hosts have Austrian citizenship. In most cases the rooms that are found through the organisation are not rent-free. Since the majority of the hosts are students, they rely on financial contributions from the refugees for the rent. Therefore the protection titles of refugees registered on the waiting list have a big impact on the possibilities for finding a room in a shared flat. Refugees who have already been granted asylum in Austria have full access to the labour market as well as to social aid and thereby have the financial means to pay for accommodation in a shared flat. Depending on their income level, suitable hosts can be found.

However, asylum seekers can only be considered for rooms that are rent-free or paid for through donations. This is due to the fact that their monthly housing allowance is only between EUR 110-150, depending on the federal state, while rooms in shared flats cost up to EUR 450 in cities such as Vienna and Innsbruck. Only very few hosts can offer rooms rent-free. However, many hosts are willing to crowdfund the rent that needs to be covered and RW Austria supports them in the process. If crowdfunding among the hosts' friends and acquaintances is not possible, the organisation draws on a group of around 50 private donors that have been paying extra monthly housing allowances to refugees that find accommodation through RW Austria. Additionally, the organisation regularly acquires funds for supporting refugees' housing expenses through company donations or crowdfundings. The Austrian Chapter of Refugees Welcome has facilitated 610 matches since its foundation in 2014. Many of the matches were rather permanent and lasted many years. The average length of co-living initiated is one year and no co-living arrangements are initiated that are shorter than six months. This is due to the fact that RW Austria aims at providing long-term accommodation and connections inside Austrian society. The number of matches was subject to significant

fluctuations over the years. While the number of matches was very high in 2015 and 2016 when many refugees came to Austria and there was a lot of positive media coverage on the topic of migration and flight, it has steadily declined since then. The organisation believes this to be due to the decline in media coverage focused on refugees and their difficulties in settling in Austria. In addition to matching refugees with available hosts, the organisation regularly hosts housing counselling sessions in Vienna, as described in the concept paper *Konzept Wohnraum-Working Session* (engl. Concept Housing Working Session). During these sessions, volunteers counsel refugees on-on-one and provide information on how to find a flat in Austria. They look for flatshares online and write a short text together that the refugee can use to present himself/herself to flatshares s/he is interested in. The volunteer supports the person in writing this text in German and including all the relevant information. Oftentimes refugees coming to these counselling sessions are not very proficient in using email services which is why volunteers often go with them through the basics. All information provided during these sessions is also available on their website in the guide *Wohnen in Wien - Ein Ratgeber für geflüchtete Personen* (engl. Living in Vienna - A Guide for Refugees),

which was written in German and translated into Arabic and Farsi. Further information is available for volunteers that are not familiar with the asylum system in Austria. The document FAQ - *Flucht und Asyl* (engl. FAQ Flight and Asylum) offers responses to many questions volunteers may have.

A successful match

Since 2014 the Austrian Team has matched over 600 refugees with locals providing accommodation. Over the years, the matching process has changed and adapted to the circumstances. At the moment matchings are done remotely via telecommunication with refugees and hosts. In March 2021 J. registered her flat via the online platform, offering a room in the flat she shares with her flat mate D. They are tenants in this flat and therefore need to charge a rent of EUR 390 for the free room. J. is an artist and educator and D. is a student.

The volunteer A. was assigned to this case and first contacted the hosts to find out how their co-living functions and what requirements they have for a future flat mate. With this information the volunteer then contacted three possible flatmates from the waiting list.

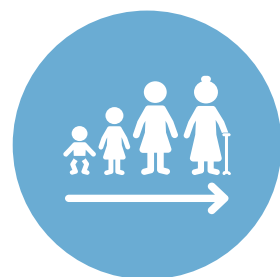
All of them had similar interests as J. and D. and

were invited to visit the apartment and meet the possible hosts. One of these people was R. He immediately got along well with the hosts and it became clear very fast that they wanted to live together. Two weeks later R. moved into his new room. He pays EUR 310 every month, EUR 20 are covered by the hosts and EUR 60 are covered by RW Austria through donations.

R. came to Austria in 2017 and was granted subsidiary protection. During the first two years he lived in an asylum center in Vienna that hosted a total of 150 people. At the beginning of 2019 he moved to a smaller asylum center that provides double rooms and more privacy. He lived there for two years and now found accommodation with hosts through RW Austria.

R., J. and D. state that their co-living arrangement has been very harmonious until now since they are all very easy-going people that enjoy a calm and peaceful atmosphere at home. They have similar ideas of what it means to be good flat mates and respect each other's privacy while also spending time together occasionally. During the first weeks R. was very occupied with settling into his new room and getting used to living in private accommodation. He is happy to live there and to know that his stay there is not temporary.

Refugees



AGE

18-30



ORIGIN

*Afghanistan,
Syria, Iraq,
Somalia*



GENDER

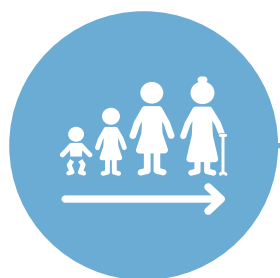
Male (80%)



STATUS

Refugees

Hosts



AGE

20-35



GENDER

All



ACCOMMODATION

*Students
in shared flats*

Other areas of work

From 2014 to 2018 the organisation was part of a bigger association that provided a wide range of different services for refugees, such as education and psycho-social counselling. Since then the organisation has focused almost entirely on housing. The only other area of work is in arts and culture. Since 2019 the organisation has run a project called QUESTION ME & ANSWER focused on supporting artists that are refugees or migrants at networking inside the Viennese cultural sector and advocating for more diversity in Viennese cultural institutions.

Challenges and long-term perspectives

The organisation faces numerous challenges due to the fact that it is highly dependent on a number of stakeholders. For one, it is very dependent on private donors in upholding its basic infrastructure. This is owing to the fact that there are currently only very limited public funds available for this kind of work. At the moment it can also be observed that private foundations are funding very little work in the field of migration and especially housing of migrants and refugees

in their new home countries. This high level of reliance on private donors makes it difficult to attain planning certainty in the long-term.

Secondly, the organisation is highly reliant on volunteers and the amount of free time and motivation they have. At times when only very few volunteers had time to invest, only few matches could be completed. Volunteers also need to be able to act fast since many hosts are under time pressure to find new flatmates. As mentioned above, the main target group for hosts are students. Whenever they have free rooms in their shared flats, they need to find new flatmates quickly in order to pay the rent.

Thirdly, the Austrian media landscape has a significant impact on the activities of the organisation. Only when there is sufficient media coverage on refugees and migrants, do hosts register on their platform. This is also due to the fact that the organisation does not have the financial means to publicize its work, which makes reaching potential hosts and securing funds more difficult.

Many challenges result from the fact that the legal system hinders integration of refugees who are still in the asylum process. They have very little access to language courses and only receive a very small allowance if they want to move out of refugee camps and into shared flats

with locals. This means that communication with them is often more difficult and funds need to be raised to pay for a room in a shared flat. Raising the funds to provide extra housing allowances for refugees in the asylum process is very challenging for the organisation and there are never sufficient funds available to support everyone in need.

Another big challenge lies in the fact that the main target group for hosts in Austria are students who are very dependent on a financial contribution for the rent. Only very few hosts offer their rooms rent-free. This is a big difference to the functioning of the organisation in countries such as France or Italy, where a large proportion of hosts offer their rooms rent-free.

Many of the challenges listed above are due to a lack of financial stability and limited financial resources. In the long term, the organisation is looking to acquire a more stable source of funds such as regular support from the state or a private foundation. This would make the deployment of a paid core team possible and thereby enable more professional volunteer management.

The organisation is looking to strengthen their community and actively work on community building as an approach to remain visible and financially stable. This would also enable them to build more local teams anew that were partly dissolved in the past years for various reasons.

One approach in community building is by strengthening email marketing and creating a digital community that feels connected to their cause. This would also help in strengthening the brand and becoming more recognizable.

A key component in remaining relevant and functioning is the consolidation and development of networks with partners in the field such as the international network of RW International but also cooperation with local NGOs in the field of migration. Stronger collaborative efforts facilitate lasting change and create opportunities for growth.



Registration form

×

Anmeldung für WGs & Wohnungen

Felder mit einem * sind Pflichtfelder

1. Persönliche Daten → 2. Über dich/euch → 3. Wohnen → 4. Kosten → 5. Wie es weitergeht

Wie ist dein Vorname? *

Wie ist dein Nachname? *

Wie ist deine E-Mail Adresse? *

Bitte gib deine E-Mail-Adresse nochmal an *

Wie ist deine Telefonnummer? *

Wie alt bist du? *

Was ist dein Geschlecht? *

Hast du ein einzelnes Zimmer frei oder eine ganze Wohnung? *

Welche Sprachen sprichst du/sprecht ihr? *

- ☐ Deutsch
- ☐ Englisch
- ☐ Arabisch
- ☐ Farsi
- ☐ Spanisch
- ☐ Russisch
- ☐ Französisch
- ☐ Türkisch
- ☐ andere Sprachen

WEITER



Registration form

Anmeldung für geflüchtete Menschen

Felder mit einem * sind Pflichtfelder

1. Persönliche Daten → 2. Über dich → 3. Wohnen → 4. Kontaktperson → 5. Wie es weitergeht

Wie ist dein Vorname? *

Wie ist dein Nachname? *

Wie ist deine E-Mail Adresse? *

Bitte gib deine E-Mail-Adresse nochmal an *

Wie ist deine Telefonnummer? *

Was ist dein Geschlecht? *

▼

Wie alt bist du? *

↕

Welche Staatsangehörigkeit hast du?

▼

☐ Ich bin staatenlos.

Wie ist dein Aufenthaltsstatus? *

▼

Seit wann bist du in Österreich?

Welche Sprachen sprichst du/sprecht ihr? *

☐ Deutsch

☐ Englisch

☐ Arabisch

☐ Farsi

☐ Spanisch

☐ Russisch



Ticketing System

Österreich osTicket Support Ticket System

Willkommen, [Admin-Bereich](#) | [Meine Einstellungen](#) | [Abmelden](#)

Übersicht Kunden **Tickets** Wissensdatenbank

Offene Tickets (253) Geschlossen (7,261) Neues Ticket

[Erweitert]

Offene Tickets — Zeigt 1 - 25 von 253 Status ändern Löschen

| <input type="checkbox"/> | Ticket | Datum | Betreff | Von | Status | Priorität | Zugewiesen an |
|--------------------------|--------|------------------|--------------------------------|-----|--------|-----------|---------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 857461 | 2021-04-18 14:53 | Refugee - Österreich (15) | | Open | High | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 244040 | 2021-03-31 22:08 | Refugee AT (85) | | Open | High | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 714512 | 2021-03-30 13:22 | Refugee - Österreich (15) | | Open | High | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 918753 | 2020-06-22 21:21 | Refugee - Österreich (10) | | Open | High | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 987564 | 2020-05-17 23:08 | Refugee - Österreich (23) | | Open | High | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 399035 | 2020-05-06 04:30 | Refugee - Österreich (5) | | Open | High | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 179865 | 2020-03-30 18:00 | Refugee - Österreich (37) | | Open | High | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 177110 | 2020-03-12 14:12 | Refugee - Österreich (9) | | Open | High | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 489780 | 2020-03-12 12:15 | Refugee - Österreich (5) | | Open | High | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 590054 | 2020-03-11 17:32 | Refugee - Österreich (8) | | Open | High | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 256766 | 2020-03-06 21:15 | Refugee - Österreich (18) | | Open | High | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 550591 | 2020-03-06 16:17 | Refugee - Österreich (14) | | Open | High | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 350541 | 2021-07-09 21:42 | Refugee - Österreich (3) | | Open | Normal | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 123806 | 2021-07-09 21:42 | Refugee - Österreich (3) | | Open | Normal | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 969832 | 2021-07-08 09:09 | WG Anmeldung – Österreich (4) | | Open | Normal | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 107310 | 2021-07-08 08:29 | Refugee - Österreich (5) | | Open | Normal | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 568589 | 2021-07-07 13:38 | WG Anmeldung – Österreich (10) | | Open | Normal | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 770042 | 2021-07-07 10:55 | Refugee - Österreich (7) | | Open | Normal | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 121317 | 2021-07-06 11:36 | Refugee - Österreich (4) | | Open | Normal | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 417479 | 2021-07-06 08:40 | Refugee - Österreich (5) | | Open | Normal | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 709256 | 2021-07-04 04:38 | Refugee - Österreich (5) | | Open | Normal | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 643694 | 2021-07-02 10:19 | WG Anmeldung – Österreich (9) | | Open | Normal | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 490253 | 2021-07-01 14:52 | Refugee - Österreich (3) | | Open | Normal | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 431001 | 2021-06-29 02:03 | Refugee - Österreich (3) | | Open | Normal | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 454710 | 2021-06-28 14:16 | Refugee - Österreich (3) | | Open | Normal | |

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05 | Spain



Starting point and history

Similarly to the founding process in many other chapters of Refugees Welcome, around 20 individuals all over Spain contacted the German organisation in August 2015 in order to find out how to establish their own team. They had read about the project in the media and were inspired to do the same in Spain. The majority of these people had a background in communication and not migration-related topics. By that point the German team had already developed a clear procedure for the establishment and support of new teams. They put all the individuals in touch and then provided them with basic digital infrastructure. The local activists then adapted the idea of the project to their local circumstances and reached out to relevant actors in the field. According to the organisation, there was a lot of support for the project at its foundation. There were working groups run by various municipalities that also included participants from *Refugees Welcome Spain* (hereinafter RW Spain) and a lot of public support in Barcelona and other cities. The first financial support for the project came from the Córdoba Provincial Government.

Legal framework for private accommodation of refugees

In Spain the responsibility for asylum seekers is split between the state and the local authorities. While the authority to regulate lies with the state, the communities are in charge of securing the implementation of healthcare, education and housing¹.

There are different stages of reception in Spain and the accommodation is regulated accordingly. The reception phase constitutes the period before an asylum application and determines the individual needs for that time. The first phase concerns the admissibility of a procedure. The second phase is the material part of the proceedings for international protection.

The relevant provisions are contained in the Regulatory Act 12/2009 on the Right to Asylum and Subsidiary Protection in Spain. Art 30 of the Asylum Act regulates that accommodation only applies to asylum seekers without financial means². Those that do not require financial aid must organise their accommodation individually³.

1 Refugee Law and Policy: Spain.' (Library of Congress Law). <<https://www.loc.gov/law/help/refugee-law/spain.php>> accessed 10 May 2021

2 Ley Reguladora del Derecho de Asilo y de la protección subsidiaria 2009 (Spain) (Ley protección subsidiaria), Art 30.

3 Intergovernmental Consultations on migration, asylum and refugees, 'Asylum Procedures: Report on Policies and Practices in ICG Participating States' (2012) accessed 7 May 2021, p. 374; UNHCR, 'Access to the Reception and Integration System' (Help Spain) <<https://help.unhcr.org/spain/en/acceso-sistema-acogida/>> accessed 8 May 2021; Ley protección subsidiaria.

Further regulations such as where the application for reception is to be made, the availability and the covered programs are decided and issued by the competent ministry, as can be deduced from Art 30(2) and 31(1) Asylum Act⁴.

While their application is processed, asylum seekers can request accommodation at the *Centros de acogida de refugiados* (CAR, engl. Refugee reception centers)⁵. There are four state-run facilities which are operated by the *Dirección General de Inclusión y Atención Humanitaria* (DGLAH, engl. Directorate General of Social Inclusion and Humanitarian Assistance)⁶. Currently, more than 20 NGOs run reception centres for asylum seekers, through funds granted by the State Secretary for Migration. (such as Red Cross, CEAR and Accem) through a subcontract with the DGLAH⁷. The specifics of these facilities differ according to their operating institution. While some are big facilities, others consist of apartments. There is a big deviation with regard to the location of the facilities as well⁸.

Asylum seekers have no choice with regards to their accommodation, but are subject to availability⁹. Special attention is to be paid to vulnerable people¹⁰. Single women are placed in apartments with other women, while men are placed in apartments with other men. Furthermore family union is addressed and applied in accordance with Art 31(2) of the Asylum Act¹¹. In practice not all asylum seekers are being accommodated due to capacity issues and therefore are left homeless and without means¹². This state of affairs has led to demonstrations, reports in newspapers and 20 complaints filed in 2019¹³.

The reception phase may last up to 30 days¹⁴. The stay in the first phase may last for a maximum of six months¹⁵. The six-month period is meant to correspond with the time that the accessibility of the application is determined.

9 Barcelona Ciutat Refugi, 'International protection and asylum seeking in Spain' <<https://ciutatrefugi.barcelona/en/international-protection-and-asylum-seeking-spain>> accessed 12 May 2021.

10 Reception System Spain.

11 Accem, 'Conditions in reception facilities' Asylum in Europe (2021) <<https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/spain/reception-conditions/housing/conditions-reception-facilities/>> accessed 3 May 2021 (Conditions Reception Facilities Spain); Ley protección subsidiaria Art 31(2).

12 Reception System Spain

13 Conditions Reception Facilities Spain.

14 Accem, 'Criteria and restrictions to access reception conditions' Asylum in Europe (2021) <<https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/spain/reception-conditions/access-and-forms-reception-conditions/criteria-and-restrictions-access-reception-conditions/>> accessed 4 May 2021 (Criteria and restrictions to reception Spain).

15 Ibid.

4 Ley protección subsidiaria Art 30(2), 31(1).

5 Accem, 'Short overview of the reception System Spain' Asylum in Europe (2021) <<https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/spain/reception-conditions/short-overview-of-the-reception-system/>> accessed 3 May 2021 (Reception System Spain)

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

Accommodation for the first and second phases together can take up to 18 months, with an extension of 24 months for vulnerable groups¹⁶. It is worth mentioning that the transition towards personal autonomy commences in the second phase. Up until 2020 individuals were permitted to live in private accommodation and receive financial support until there is a final decision on their application¹⁷.

At the beginning of the year 2021 the Secretary of State for Migration issued new directives with regards to accommodation. Due to the accessibility period (first phase) taking longer than six months (the corresponding time limit set in the Asylum Act) he called for an extension of the stay in the first reception centers and only when the first stage is completed can financial aid for housing in this category be ceased¹⁸. This means that access to the second phase is only granted if a favourable decision is reached.

The prolonged waiting period is said to correspond with the increase of asylum seekers in Spain. In 2017 over 31,700 asylum applications were filed, by 2018 they reached 55,668 applications and in

2019 a total of 118,273 asylum applications were filed¹⁹. Art 33 of the Asylum Act furthermore regulates under which conditions the withdrawal of reception services is justified. These reasons include an asylum seeker disposing of substantial financial means for the asylum seeker or leaving his/her place of residence without permission²⁰.

Structure of the organisation

The Spanish chapter is operated under the full name *Refugiados Bienvenidos España* (engl. Refugees Welcome Spain) as a non-profit association. In order to fund the necessary infrastructure the organisation is dependent on private donations as well as grants from several municipalities in Catalonia. They mostly support them with local funds that are connected to the welfare state and dedicated to "Citizenship and Participation". The total annual budget in 2020 amounted to EUR 47,000. The organisation currently has 3 part-time employees, all of whom work in Barcelona and are mainly in charge of facilitating matches.

¹⁶ Criteria and restrictions to the reception Spain; Reception System Spain

¹⁷ Daphne Panayotatos, 'Reform Past Due: COVID-19 Magnifies Need to Improve Spain's Asylum System' (2020) Refugees International. <<https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2020/7/22/reform-past-due-covid-19-magnifies-need-to-improve-spains-asylum-system>> accessed 20 May 2021.

¹⁸ Criteria and restrictions to reception Spain; Reception System Spain.

¹⁹ Instrucción Sem 6/2020 por la que se modifica el Manual de Gestión (Versión 4.1) del Sistema de Acogida de Protección Internacional y el Procedimiento de Gestión del Itinerario de Protección Internacional Aprobados por la Instrucción Dgiah 2020/05/15, en Relación con los Requisitos para el Acceso a la Segunda Fase del Sistema de Acogida de Solicitantes y Beneficiarios de Protección Internacional 2020 (Spain).

²⁰ Ley Reguladora del Derecho de Asilo y de la protección subsidiaria 2009 (Spain), Art 33.

They are supported by around 200 individuals all over the country who are organised in different teams such as the Communications Team or the Social Work Team. Their role in the organisation is defined in the *Plan de voluntariado 2017-2020* (engl. Volunteering Plan 2017-2020) which is to be updated this year. The Spanish team differentiates between the terms 'activist' and 'volunteer'. The term 'activist' in this context is used to describe individuals who have key positions inside the organisation, but work on a voluntary basis. They are very proactive, head various teams and are in charge of internal communications between the Volunteers and the employees. There are around 40 activists in the Spanish team, all of whom had to be approved by the board before beginning their engagement with the organisation. By completing this process of evaluation they also gain voting rights, which volunteers do not have. The term 'volunteer' is used for individuals who are involved in the organisation, but with more limited involvement and responsibility. Oftentimes they initially join the organisation to become informed on the situation of refugees in Spain and invest around 3-5 hours a week. Possible tasks include communication with the registered refugees, communication with partner organisations and support in event planning. It is a challenge that many volunteers

want to perform tasks that they do not perform in their day-to-day job which is why they are rarely involved in administrative tasks. There are around 160 volunteers all over the country who all need to sign the *Acuerdo De Voluntariado* (engl. Volunteering agreement) before beginning. It covers what tasks the volunteer is entitled to carry out for the organisation and where those tasks can be carried out. The agreement also includes a code of conduct on communication with hosts and refugees.

All strategic and administrative tasks are managed by a core team of around ten activists and volunteers that have been in the organisation for many years. For the general conceptualisation they are supported by the board of the organisation. Since RW Spain does all matches in a very personalized way and meets all registered hosts and refugees in person, it is vital that the organisation has many teams all over the country. Currently there are teams in Madrid, Catalonia, Murcia, Galicia, Balearics and Valencia.

Matching process

The placement of refugees in shared flats or houses with locals is done in a very personalized and individual way in Spain. There are many social workers involved in the process in order to ensure

that most suggested matches work out well after the first meeting. The whole process is divided into two working stages. The responsibility for the first stage lies with the Social Work Team while the second stage is executed by the volunteers. During the first step refugees looking for accommodation in Spain are invited to register on their website www.refugees-welcome.es and provide relevant information about their situation. Around 50% of all registered refugees are registered by NGOs that support them in other areas of their life, besides housing. Interested hosts also register on the website to give the organisation relevant information on the type of accommodation they are offering. Information from both forms is automatically transferred to the organisation's internal database that was developed especially for this cause and creates a separate page for each registered refugee or host where all the necessary information is stored in a comprehensive manner.

Both parties are then contacted by the Social Work Team that is divided into members who are more in charge of hosts and those that are more in charge of refugees. All registered refugees are then contacted by a social worker in order to schedule an interview. In this interview, the social worker gathers information on topics such as their economic situation, language skills,

special needs and sexual orientation in order to find a suitable host and answers the person's questions concerning the program. Additionally, all questions are answered in a separate hand-out that refugees receive during their first interview. The social worker puts strong emphasis on finding out how eager the refugee is to live with local people and what type of co-living arrangement could benefit them. Types of arrangements include co-living with families, single people over 60 years of age, young students or couples in their 30s working full-time. After the interview, the social worker contacts other NGOs that have previously worked with the registered refugee in order to get the full picture. Only then is a match with a suitable host proposed.

All the relevant information concerning the match is then transmitted to a designated Local Link, a term used for the volunteer who is in charge of connecting the host and the refugee. The Local Link is specifically trained before conducting a match and receives all the relevant information in the form of a project dossier. For the first step, the Local Link schedules a meeting in a neutral space with both parties. This meeting serves as an opportunity to get to know each other and find out if both parties can imagine living together. The Local Link prepares some icebreakers in order to facilitate the conversation.

During the second step, the refugee visits the proposed accommodation together with the Local Link. If both meetings go well and both parties agree with the match, the refugee can move in. The whole process of matching takes around 4 to 6 weeks. Also after the match is completed, the organisation continues to offer support. The Local Link is in charge of following up on the match and supporting the new housemates in acclimating to the new situation.

If the refugee and the host do not get along well, a new match is proposed by the Social Work Team. However, most proposed matches are successful and have resulted in a several months-long co-living arrangement. This is due to the fact that the proposed match takes many aspects into consideration and is carefully found with the help of many social workers. The role of the Local Link is crucial in the matching process. They usually live close to the proposed host and are the main contact points for both parties. They are the face of the organisation that is always available and easy to contact. The Spanish team attributes high significance to this role and sees its existence as one of the key reasons for their success. The Local Link reduces fear of contact on both sides, while offering reassurance and trust.

The refugees hosted through the program are predominantly male (about 70%) even if the

Social Work Team prioritizes female profiles. They are mostly between 30 and 35 years old and are primarily from Colombia, Honduras, Morocco and Venezuela. The reception system in Spain has changed significantly in the last year, which is why there have been changes to the specific target group that RW Spain works with. Up until 2020 they focused on people already in the second phase of the Spanish reception system, as mentioned in previous chapters. Many of them were still in the asylum process but received financial support from the state and could therefore pay for accommodation. This is important because RW Spain only works with people who have means to pay the host for accommodating them. In the view of the organisation, this helps to establish a co-living situation at a level playing field, which is not driven by pity.

However, since 2021 only recognized refugees or individuals who have subsidiary protection can enter the second phase of the Spanish reception system and receive financial support to pay for accommodation. Asylum seekers no longer have this possibility which is why RW Spain has ceased to work with this group of people. Only in rare cases, when they are financially supported by other organisations, can they still be supported by RW Spain.

Since the beginning RW Spain has also been working with individuals who have already completed the entire assistance program for refugees and have already been recognized as such in Spain as well as with individuals who have subsidiary protection and can therefore also work regularly. But also individuals whose asylum application was rejected and live outside the system, can find accommodation through RW Spain if they work irregularly and can pay for the accommodation. Very rarely the organisation also cooperates with other organisations to crowdfund the rent for individuals without financial means.

The majority of hosts (56%) are single women between 40 and 60 years old, while 37% of hosts are single men in the same age group. Many of them have rented rooms to exchange students before and are therefore familiar with the process. Only around 7 % are families or couples without children. The incentive to host a refugee mostly comes from the women in the family. RW Spain has been trying to target young hosts, but have had difficulties with it. The rental market in Spain is very competitive and free rooms in shared flats are rented out very quickly. Since a normal matching process in RW Spain takes 4 to 6 weeks, it is impossible in most cases to place a refugee in a shared rental with young hosts. Since its foundation RW Spain has managed to

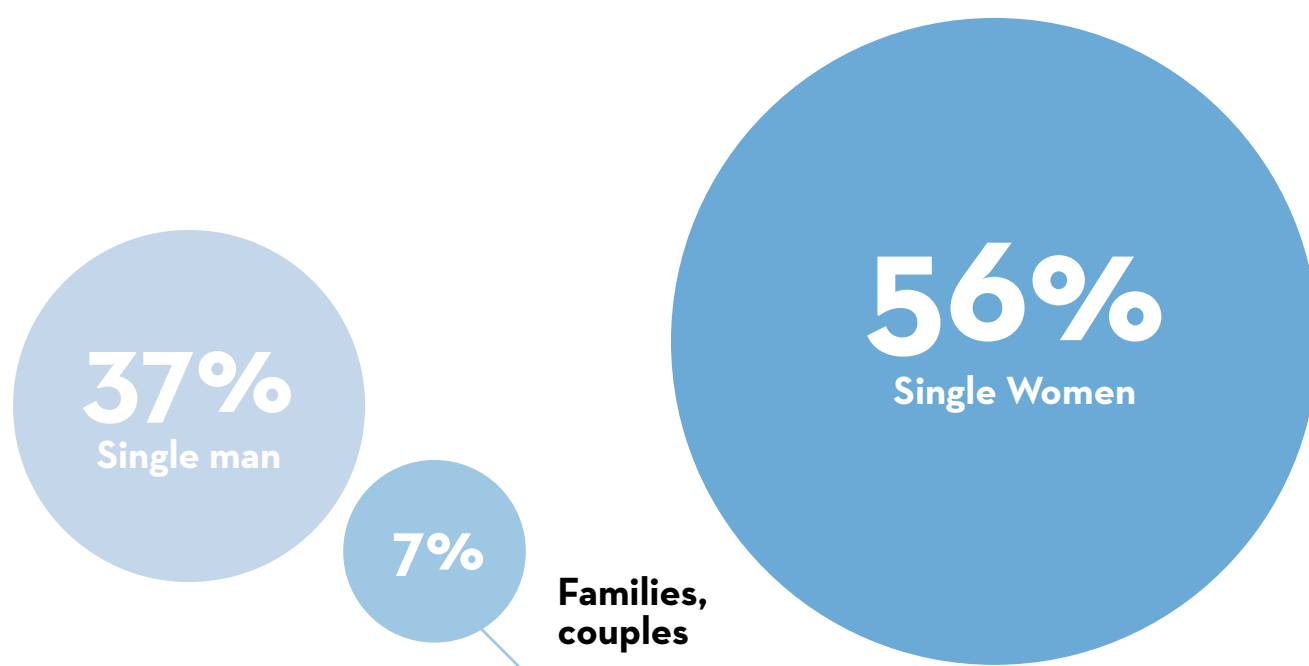
find accommodation in shared flats for a total of 104 individuals. The average length of co-living arrangements is six months. The number of matches per year has decreased every year since 2015, as is the case in all chapters of RW International. All national chapters are very dependent on media coverage on the topic of migration in order to generate interest in hosting a refugee. However, with increased professionalisation and cooperation with other NGOS, RW Spain has seen an increase in registrations in the last year.

A successful match

As mentioned above, the Spanish team has facilitated over 100 matches in the last few years. The team strongly emphasizes the fact that they deploy a very personal approach to facilitating matches and focus more on the quality than the quantity of matches.

At the beginning of 2021 the refugee B. registered with the Spanish team in order to find suitable accommodation. B. had been living in a shared flat with other refugees and migrants for the past 6 months since his arrival to Spain, while still having the status of an asylum seeker. He needed to move out urgently, because the landlord was creating many problems for him. RW Spain

Hosts



conducted a first interview with B. and shortly afterwards proposed a match with the host D., who was also interviewed beforehand. The match was proposed because B. and D. had many things in common and lived in the same area. Once both parties agreed to start the process, they were assigned a Local Link.

The Local Link first contacted both parties separately and then arranged a common meeting for the three of them. The Local Link states that the first meeting went very well and it became clear very quickly that they want to live together. After the first meeting, there was a further meeting to discuss the rules of cohabitation and to adapt the rental contract to their profiles and cohabitation needs. The matching process was completed very quickly, mainly due to the fact that B. needed to find a new accommodation urgently and D. was in need of a flat mate. However, the social worker emphasizes that this is a special case. Oftentimes both parties meet several times in order to be sure that they want to live together.

B. and D. state that their co-living arrangement has been a positive experience so far. It has allowed B. to improve his Spanish language skills and to be able to start training courses that will enable him to access jobs with better working conditions. They regularly cook each other's national meals for one another and share meals

together. Several months after B. moved in with D. he received subsidiary protection.

Other areas of work

RW Spain focuses primarily on the facilitation of co-living, but since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, they have also begun implementing a language buddy program. It was created when the organisation's social workers started noticing that the lack of social activities was having an impact on the refugee's language skills. To counter this, refugees that are part of the program are now offered the possibility to be assigned a volunteer with whom they can train their language skills in Spanish or Catalan. The volunteers are not specifically trained, but are offered didactic material as well as templates to facilitate the documentation of the language training sessions. Depending on both parties, the sessions can take place online or offline and may vary in frequency.

Challenges and long-term perspectives

The reception system in Spain has changed significantly in the last year, challenging RW Spain to change its structures. Until 2020 asylum seekers in the first phase of the state assistance program could enter the second phase and receive financial support regardless of whether they already received a positive result to their asylum request or not. Now the situation has changed and only recognized refugees can enter the second phase of the reception system. Asylum seekers are no longer eligible to enter the second so-called “autonomy” phase. This has prompted the decision for RW Spain to no longer work with asylum seekers unless they are supported financially and otherwise by another NGO. This change in legislation also means that many displaced persons live very precariously in Spain and some of the refugees who had already been placed in shared flats with hosts no longer receive financial support. This puts a lot of strain on the Social Work Team of the organisation, which is largely composed of people working voluntarily. In order to reduce the pressure on the Social Work Team, the organisation has started working even closer with other NGOs in order to build support networks. There are efforts to establish a clear distribution of tasks among the various NGOs in order to support individual refugees collectively and share the responsibility,

including financially. There are also aspirations to strengthen the Social Work Team and provide more resources to them.

The organisation is also in the process of professionalisation. This has been taking place in different regional groups and includes putting a focus on data collection. In order to improve and professionalize their services, RW Spain has started collecting extensive anonymized data with which key performance indicators can be measured. The process of professionalisation also includes expanding to other regions in Spain so that matches can be conducted in more Spanish regions. For this reason an internal wiki (accessible at <https://refugees-welcome-espana.gitbook.io/welcome-pack/>) is currently being piloted that will be used to provide information to volunteers wishing to create their own local group of RW Spain.



Registration form

Crear cuenta

Datos de la cuenta

Nombre de usuario (*)

Dirección de correo electrónico (*)

Escribe una contraseña (*)

Confirma la contraseña (*)

Datos personales

Nombre y Apellidos (Requerido)

Fecha de nacimiento

Teléfono (Requerido)

Género (Requerido)

Femenino

Masculino

Calle

Número

Código Postal (Requerido)

Localidad (Requerido)

Provincia (Requerido)

Otros datos

Tipo de colaboración (Requerido)

Habitación gratuita

Alquiler social

Número de convivientes (Requerido)

Vivienda adaptada (Requerido)

No

Si

Habitaciones libres (Requerido)

Idiomas

Español

Inglés

Francés

Árabe

Otros

Otros idiomas

Tiempo de alojamiento (Requerido)

6 meses

1 año

Tiempo que sea necesario

Sobre ti (Requerido)

Visual

HTML

B I U “ ABC [] = > ↶ ↷ 🔗 ✕



Registration form

Crear cuenta

Datos de la cuenta

Nombre de usuario (*)

Dirección de correo electrónico (*)

Escribe una contraseña (*)

Confirma la contraseña (*)

Datos personales

Nombre y Apellidos (Requerido)

Fecha de nacimiento

Teléfono (Requerido)

Género (Requerido)

Nacionalidad (Requerido)

Localidad (Requerido)

Provincia (Requerido)

Otros datos

Idiomas

Otros idiomas

¿Cuánto tiempo llevas en España? (Requerido)

¿Cuál es tu estado legal? (Requerido)

¿Te mudarías solo o con más familiares? (Requerido)

Disponibilidad económica (Requerido)


Sobre ti (Requerido)



VISUAL HTML


¿Estás rellenando este cuestionario para una persona refugiada?




Ticketing system

 Refugees Welcome

¿CÓMO FUNCIONA? ▾ ¿QUIÉNES SOMOS? ▾ CONVIVE ▾ COLABORA ▾ BLOG RECURSOS  











Conviviendo con: 
Vínculo local:
[Mensaje privado](#)
hace 9 meses
[IMPRIMIR](#)

Avisos (0) Mensajes (0) Foros Ajustes Perfil

Editar

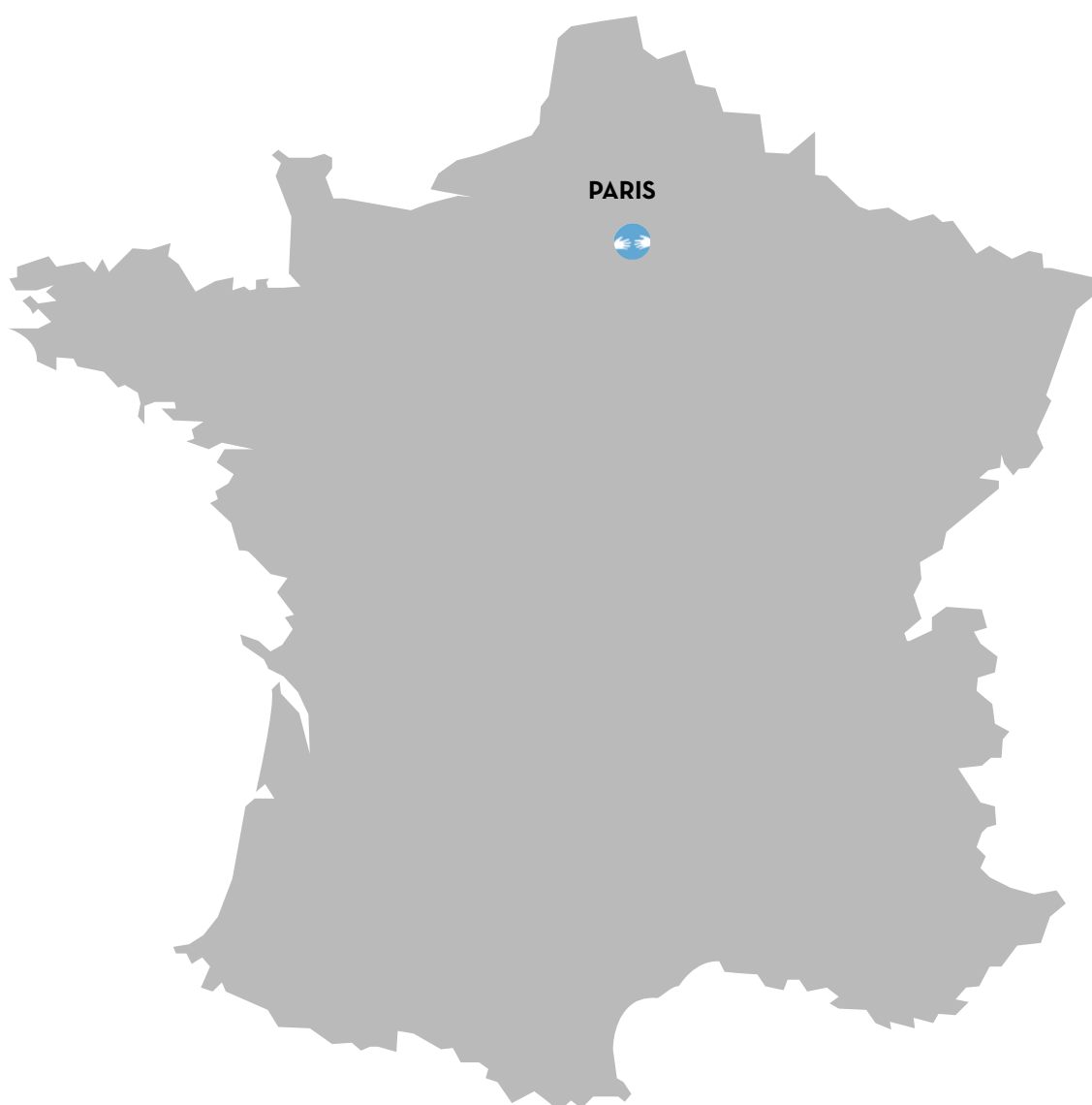
Información personal

| | |
|---|---|
| Nombre y Apellidos |  |
| Fecha de nacimiento |  |
| Teléfono |  |
| Género | Masculino |
| Nacionalidad |  |
| Localidad |  |
| Provincia | Barcelona |
| Correo electrónico |  |
| Idiomas | Español, Inglés, Árabe |
| Otros idiomas | alemán |
| Conviviendo | Si |
| Convivencia |  |
| Vínculo |  |
| ¿Cuánto tiempo llevas en España? | 3 meses |
| ¿Cuál es tu estado legal? | Permiso de residencia en España |
| ¿Te mudarías solo o con más familiares? | Solo |
| Disponibilidad económica | No recibo ningún tipo de retribución económica |
| Sobre ti | Vivo en Barcelona me gusta deporte, fotografía, viajar, comedia, Pízza, salir con mis amigos. |
| ¿Tienes alguna ONG/institución que te esté colaborando contigo? | no |
| ¿Estás rellenando este cuestionario para una persona refugiada? | si |
| Estado del caso | Abierto |
| Apto | Si |
| Tipología refugiado | Refugiado |
| Fecha de mudanza | 2020-07-01 |





06 | France



Starting point and history

The French team was founded in 2015 by a group of students in international law at the Sorbonne in Paris. Similarly to most other country teams, they were supported by the German team in building up the necessary infrastructure. Until 2019 the organisation *Refugees Welcome France* (hereinafter RW France) was run entirely by volunteers and the focal target group were asylum seekers. According to the overall aim of the network, they were provided accommodation in shared flats with locals. However, the French team additionally employed a unique method of acquiring more hosts by working together with the platform Airbnb in 2018 and 2019. The platform provided monthly credits to RW France that enabled them to find suitable and long-term accommodation for asylum seekers on a very short notice. In 2019 the cooperation was dissolved unexpectedly, creating a sudden funding gap and the need for new hosts, since many asylum seekers in the program had to be rehoused. At the same time many volunteers left the organisation for various reasons and the continuation of the project in its current form was no longer feasible. At that uncertain stage of the organisation, RW France applied for national funding for the first time and managed to secure sufficient funds, which enabled them to recruit salaried employees for the first time.

Legal framework for private accommodation of refugees

In France the accommodation of refugees is regulated in the *Code de l'entrée et du séjour des étrangers et du droit d'asile* (engl. Code of Entry and Residence of Foreigners and the Right of Asylum)¹. The L744 Régime de la Rétention (engl. Legal framework on accommodation) regulations contain provisions regarding the accommodation of asylum seekers over the course of their asylum procedure². Provisions on accommodation are also included in the *Conditions Matérielles d'Accueil* which are the material reception conditions that an asylum seeker is entitled to in France³.

The reception centers, also referred to as *Centre d'Accueil de Demandeurs d'Asile* (CADA), consist both of private and collective entities. While the capacity has increased in the previous years, it still falls short of the actual need⁴. In 2020 90.000 asylum seekers were not accommodated⁵. So while accommodation is a right granted to asylum seekers by law, in practice many asylum seekers

¹ Code de l'entrée et du séjour des étrangers et du droit d'asile 2013 (France)

² Code de l'entrée et du séjour des étrangers et du droit d'asile 2013 (France), Régime de la rétention, L744-1- L744-17.

³ Dom'Aisle, 'Information for exiled persons in France.' <<https://domasile.info/en/what-social-rights-do-i-have-as-an-asylum-seeker-in-france/>> accessed 10 May 2021 (Dom'Aisle).

⁴ Forum Réfugiés and Cosi, 'Country Report: Types of Accommodation in France' (2021) Asylum in Europe <<https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/france/reception-conditions/housing/types-accommodation/>> accessed 25 May 2021 (Types of Accommodation in France).

⁵ Dom'Aisle; Types of Accommodation in France.

are left homeless in what is being referred to as “a chronic housing shortage”⁶.

Further evidence of this can be seen in the Case N.H. and Others v France before the ECHR, where the treatment of the five applicants was ruled to amount to degrading and failed to respect the claimants dignity⁷.

Once a request for accommodation has been made, the *Office Français de l'Immigration et de l'Intégration* (engl. French Office for Immigration and Integration), an organisation operated under the Ministry of Interior, which also provides the allowance, is in charge of finding adequate accommodation for the asylum seeker⁸. This organisation is primarily responsible for asylum seekers over the course of the proceedings⁹. They can be housed anywhere within the French territory. A refusal of the proposal for accommodation results in an extinction of said rights including financial aid¹⁰.

After the asylum seeker has accepted the offer s/he must relocate to their new accommodation within the next five days.

A leave from the accommodation for more than five days needs to be registered and can otherwise result in penalty and/or the prohibition of returning¹¹.

A right to remain housed in CADA remains until the asylum procedure is completed. In case of a negative asylum decision, the asylum seeker is granted accommodation for an additional month. If protection is granted, the accommodation is renewed for another three months (and can be extended for up to six months)¹².

CADAs are operated via subcontracts by Adoma, a semi public company, or NGOs¹³. The NGOs are selected via public call. At the moment these include Forum-réfugiés-Cosi, French Red Cross and l'Ordre de Malte¹⁴.

Structure of the organisation

The organisation *Réfugiés Bienvenue* (engl. *Refugees Welcome*) is an association working on a non-profit basis. From 2015 to 2018 it was funded through donations and private foundations reaching a maximum budget of around EUR 5,000 yearly and was entirely volunteer-led. Since 2019 it is also funded through a national funding plan

⁶ Dom'Aisle; Types of Accommodation in France; Sophie Stubner, 'What's behind the housing crisis for asylum seekers in France?' (2021) The New Humanitarian <<https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/behind-the-housing-crisis-for-asylum-seekers-in-france>> accessed 1 June 2021 (Stubner).

⁷ Types of Accommodation in France.

⁸ Dom'Aisle.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Types of Accommodation in France; Dom'Aisle.

¹¹ Types of Accommodation in France; Dom'Aisle.

¹² Dom'Aisle.

¹³ Types of Accommodation in France.

¹⁴ Ibid.

related to the welfare state and social housing, managed by the regional agency, that was established in light of the housing crisis concerning immigrants and including asylum seekers and refugees. Nevertheless the organisation continues to get support from private foundations. The total budget in 2019 was EUR 113,000 and in 2020 EUR 71,000. This enables the association to currently have three full-time staff members. A clear cut in the organisation's structure can be observed in 2019, when it shifted from an organisation relying on a big group of volunteers managing the organisation together to an organisation run primarily by two (and since 2021 three) salaried employees. They continue to be supported by the organisation's volunteer-run administrative council. It was established as a decision-making body in 2015 and tackles questions such as what kind of funding to apply for and what kind of communication strategy is to be employed. It is composed of five individuals who have a slightly different perspective of the organisation and represent different stakeholders. Currently there are hosts, volunteers and interns on this council. As mentioned above, the involvement of volunteers in the organisation has seen significant changes throughout the organisation's existence with merely 30 volunteers being involved in 2021. From 2015 to 2019, when the organisation

was run entirely by volunteers, these volunteers were in charge of social work, administrative tasks, fundraising and communications. After salaried employees were recruited in 2019, these employees started taking over areas of work that were until then managed by volunteers and have not yet established a new organisational structure that accommodates salaried staff members as well as volunteers and enables clear communication between them.

This is seen as one of the biggest challenges that they aim at tackling in the near future which is why the internal directive *Procédure Pour Accueillir Les Bénévoles* (engl. *Procedure to Accommodate Volunteers*) was set up. It includes guidelines on how to attract new volunteers and also how to strengthen their involvement in the organisation. Another reason for the stark decline in the number of volunteers in the association was the Covid-19 pandemic. The French team decided to not move the entire matching process online and maintained the meetings with refugees and hosts while adhering to safety regulations. In order to minimise the risk for volunteers, their involvement in the matching process was reduced significantly. The last reason that was stated is the professionalisation of the association. In order to ensure a high level of service for the refugees seeking accommodation, more and more tasks

connected to the management of the co-living arrangement were taken over by trained staff instead of volunteers.

Currently the only area that still relies heavily on volunteers is communication. Other than that volunteers are only assigned to specific time-limited tasks such as, for example, going to appointments with refugees who are part of the program. The majority are no longer in charge of any kind of administration, although there are some volunteers that continue being a big part of the association. With regards to the current structure of the association, the goal is to involve volunteers mainly in communication, event planning and networking. They are encouraged to educate themselves on the topic of housing in France which is why the team regularly puts together compilations of relevant reading material on the topic, the most recent being *Lecture sur l'hébergement solidaire - Extraits- 2020* (engl. Reading Matter on Solidary Accommodation - Extracts - 2020).

Matching process

RW France is a highly professionalized association that has very clear guidelines on how matches are facilitated, as described in *L'hébergement Pas*

À Pas: guide du bénévole au pôle hébergement (engl. Housing step by step: a guide for volunteers on the topic of housing). At present all matches are primarily conducted by the so-called housing coordinator that involves volunteers in specific tasks according to the guide mentioned above.

As in all national chapters, possible hosts and refugees need to get in touch with the organisation in order to be put on the waiting list. Recognized refugees are usually referred to the organisation by a partner NGO while hosts need to register for the program via a form on the website www.refugiesbienvenue.com. All the information from the form is automatically transferred to the organisation's internal database run on Ninex.

All refugees who register for the program are automatically put on the organisation's waiting list. As soon as a new host registers, the next refugee on the waiting list is contacted in order to arrange a first "intake" meeting with the organisation's social worker and the housing coordinator. In this meeting the refugee's housing situation is discussed as well as preferences concerning the form of co-living. The organisation has a very thorough screening program for possible hosts. After a first registration, the housing coordinator asks a series of practical questions via mail, such as where the flat is located, in what timeframe a room is free, what languages are spoken there or

whether the person has pets. In the next step, the housing coordinator schedules a call with the potential host in order to go through some questions in more detail and find out whether the person's expectations match the organisation's aim. During this call, the hosts typically ask many questions concerning the matching process and co-living with a refugee. The housing coordinator answers all their questions according to the document *Le Programme D'hébergement: Questions Fréquentes* (engl. The Housing Program: Frequently Asked Questions).

The next step is visiting the possible host in their flat. The housing coordinator does a house inspection before any kind of match is proposed. This includes checking, for example, whether the house is clean and there is a lock on the bathroom door. In order to be able to give an accurate description to refugees looking for accommodation, they also note whether there are a lot of stairs, there are basic services in near proximity and public transport can be reached easily. Only if everything matches the organisation's standards and the possibility of finding an interested refugee seems high, does the organisation proceed with the next step of the matching process. Deciding whether a registered host should be considered for a match is seen as a weighty decision inside the French Team, which

is why it is important that this is done by a trained professional and not a volunteer.

If the host is accepted to the program, the next step is identifying a refugee from the waiting list that could be a good match. Many factors are taken into consideration before a match is proposed. The first meeting with both host and refugee takes place in a neutral location, such as a park or cafe near the proposed accommodation. The housing coordinator also joins this meeting to answer possible questions and facilitate the first conversation between both parties. If they get along well and there are no evident problems during this first meeting, they go on a tour of the accommodation. After this meeting both parties have 24 hours to make a decision whether they want to live together. Under no circumstances do they have to make that decision during their first meeting.

This ensures that both parties do not feel pressured into accepting an arrangement that does not fulfill all their requirements. If both parties accept the matching proposal, the match can be finalized. The housing coordinator supports the refugee in the process of moving and pays for transportation of their belongings. On average they then live together for 11 months, before the refugee moves to public housing. All participating hosts offer the accommodation

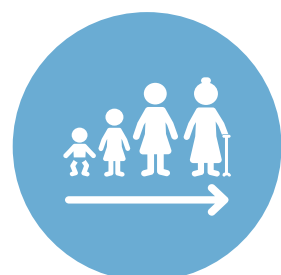
free of charge even if the hosted refugee already has a job in France or is supported financially by the state. This is a big difference to other RW national chapters where at least a symbolic rent contribution is paid in order to reduce power imbalances within the co-living arrangement. With this approach, the French team gives refugees the possibility to save up money for future deposits for their own flat. This however is one of the reasons why only few hosts register for the program. Nevertheless, over 150 matches have been facilitated in France since the beginning of the project in 2015 with the number of matches being fairly stable over the last years. Only in 2020 a strong decline in host registrations could be noted. 41 people were housed in that year, out of which 93% moved to a stable housing solution after having been hosted through RW France. The association stresses that media coverage of refugees and homelessness has a certain impact on the number of host registrations.

The majority of hosts are 40-50 year old couples with a high level of education. They mostly offer rooms in houses they own and live in. The hosted refugees are predominantly male (83 %) and from Afghanistan, Syria or Sudan). Since 2019 the association supports mainly recognized refugees.

A successful match

Since 2015 the French team has matched over 150 refugees with locals, while always employing a very professional approach to matches, as described in the previous chapter. All matches are done by trained social workers and only very rarely by untrained volunteers. That has to do with the fact that they often work with refugees in situations of extreme distress who need to be handled with the appropriate care and knowledge. A recent match illustrates this. A., a recognized refugee, contacted the organisation looking for appropriate accommodation. After his arrival to France he had been housed in the public asylum housing centers until he was granted asylum status. At this point he had to leave the center and had been homeless since, sleeping in his sleeping bag and sometimes in a tent in various places throughout Paris. After having contacted the organisation, A. was invited for an interview with the social worker in order to establish his needs. Since his situation was so urgent, the match was completed very quickly afterwards. A host family was found that already had experience hosting refugees and therefore was not required to undergo the entire interview process, as described in the previous chapter. Instead, both parties met immediately and decided on the spot that A. would move in. Of course, logistical aspects were taken into consideration. The host

Refugees



AGE

18-30



ORIGIN

*Afghanistan,
Syria, Sudan*



GENDER

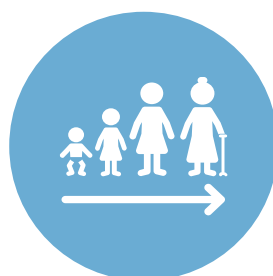
Male (73%)



STATUS

Refugees

Hosts



AGE

40-50



ORIGIN

France



PROFILE

*Married
heterosexual couples*

family's house is not well connected to public transport, which is why they had to make sure A. was comfortable with getting around on a bike. In this specific case, the communication with the refugee was quite difficult, because A. speaks very little French. An interpreter had to be called for the interview and the first meeting with the hosts. Despite the communication difficulties in the co-living situation, both parties are happy with the arrangement. A. says the hosts are very nice and that he already feels like he is learning more French. However, it is an issue for him that the house is not well connected to public transport. This is why he is searching for a job that is closer to the house he's staying in. He is supported in this by RW France. The hosts say that they enjoy spending time with A., even though they do not often find the time to do so. Whenever they do, they communicate with each other through emojis, pictures, google translate and facial expressions.

Other areas of work

The French team of RW is one of the few national chapters offering many other services apart from accommodation to refugees as part of the program. When refugees first register with the organisation, they go through a so-called "intake"

meeting that covers their employment, health and legal situation. Even though refugees can be assigned a social worker by the state, they often lose contact or it takes too long to get an appointment with them. Only refugees living in state-run housing are in closer contact with their social workers. These are some of the reasons why RW France offers global personalized case work by a trained social worker. The clients are offered support in such things as opening a bank account, enrolling in French classes, finding a job, getting assistance and allocations and getting in touch with specialized organisations in the fields of mental health. For this reason, the organisation also created the guide *Guide Sur L'accueil Des Demandeurs D'asile* (engl. Guide on the Accommodation of Asylum Seekers) that offers precise information on the asylum process in France and further information on relevant organisations providing services to refugees.

Challenges and long-term perspectives

One of the main challenges the organisation faces is finding enough hosts for the refugees that want to be part of the program. This is an issue in all RW International national chapters, but

especially difficult in the French chapter since they operate only in the region of Paris where the rents are especially high. For this reason there are plans to scale the project and open offices in other parts of France such as Marseille, Nantes or Lille. However, this is currently hampered by various difficulties arising in the process of professionalisation and competing priorities. Therefore one of the big goals the association has set for itself is to focus more on volunteer management in order to be able to expand into other regions.

A weak point that has been identified by the organisation is the existing methodology used to implement matches. It is seen as very time-consuming and takes up a big part of human resources. Especially in times of crisis the current model has proven difficult to adapt to changing conditions.

In the long term the association dreams of implementing housing projects that would enable co-living of refugees and locals on a bigger scale in accommodations specifically created for this purpose.





| Conclusions

Since 2015, the network Refugees Welcome International has been housing refugees with hosting families across Europe, illustrating how civil society on its own can provide alternative solutions to pressing social issues, albeit on a small scale.

As this report shows, this practice is sustainable and has provided real solutions to many problems faced by refugees, such as shortage of housing, discrimination on the housing market and limited contact with locals.

The impact of cohabitation is high, as the French example shows, where 93% of refugees moved to a stable housing solution after having been hosted through RW France.

However, the provision of private accommodation to refugees is not only a solution to a pressing social issue, but a social inclusion practice that benefits refugees, host families, volunteers and society as whole since it reduces biases towards refugees and offers valuable learning opportunities to volunteers.

The practice also illustrates the high impact volunteers can have in an organisation, when enough training opportunities are available and new technology is employed.

The research article *Roomies for Life? An Assessment of How Staying with a Local Facilitates Refugee Integration*¹ provides proof that programs such as Refugees Welcome International are a significant factor in refugees' integration to the host country. The main factors are the creation of social bridges, improvement of language skills, enhancement of cultural knowledge as well as easier access to education, the job market and the health system.

Private accommodation for refugees is a frequently overlooked solution to housing problems for refugees in the EU. Given the evidence that these programs work, they should be supported in expanding their reach and providing their services to more individuals. The practice should be acknowledged on a wider basis as a means of providing accommodation, but also supporting the inclusion process of refugees and thereby benefiting the hosting countries. The involvement of volunteers is seen as a valuable asset that can provide learning experiences for them and should be further valorized by state actors by providing funds for extensive volunteer management. A more structured collaboration between the chapters of RW International and

¹ Hans van Dijk, Lena Knappert, Quita Muis and Sophie Alkhaled, 'Roomies for Life? An Assessment of How Staying with a Local Facilitates Refugee Integration' (2021) *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* <<https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2021.1923879>> accessed 21 July 2021

the Central and Local Governments would allow to integrate private accommodation of refugees within the framework of the welfare state, thereby fostering synergies between the public sector and civil society and promoting a more effective use of existing resources. For such programs to grow, support needs to be maintained and/or extended depending on the country specifics. Financial support is particularly important and should be provided sustainably by means of dedicated lines of funding for programs facilitating private accommodation of refugees in the European Union. This would ensure the continuation of such projects on a scientific basis, taking into account which target group benefits most from private accommodation (f.e. former UAMS, women, women with offspring, young adults). Such dedicated funding could also help sustain such programs over a reasonable length of time to fully appreciate the long term impact on the beneficiaries.

