

CASE STUDY

UKRAINE (REGIONAL) 2022-2023 / CONFLICT

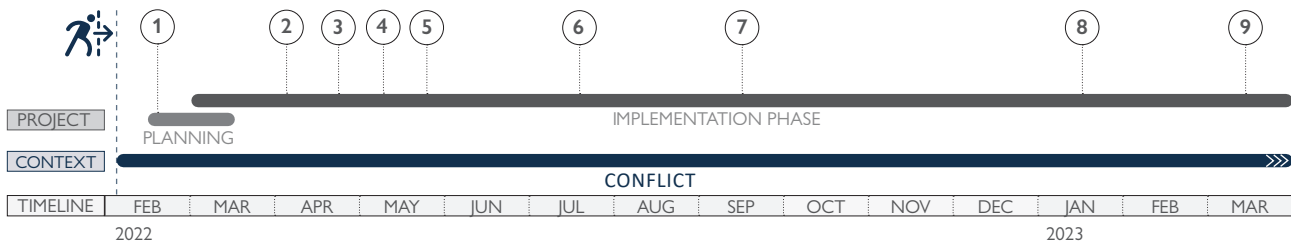
KEYWORDS: Private sector engagement, Remote management, Rental assistance, Social cohesion, Urban accommodation

CRISIS	Russia's invasion of Ukraine (2022) – Influx into neighboring countries
PEOPLE DISPLACED	8,240,000 people displaced (outside Ukraine)*
PEOPLE WITH SHELTER NEEDS	3,130,000 people**
RESPONSE LOCATION	Multiple cities in Czechia, Hungary, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Slovakia
PEOPLE SUPPORTED BY THE PROJECT	2,593 HHs (7,008 individuals)
PROJECT OUTPUTS	175,889 safe-nights were provided through safe, dignified, and secure accommodation 2,593 HHs (7,008 individuals) were provided short-term accommodation assistance at 112 cities across 7 countries Project also supported the local economy through the private host network who had rented their apartments
DIRECT COST	USD 29.37 (Avg. accommodation cost per person per night)
PROJECT COST	USD 6,000,000
	* Ukrainian Situation. Operational Data Portal May 2023. UNHCR ** Profiles and Intentions of Refugees from Ukraine. UNHCR



PROJECT SUMMARY

The project enabled access to temporary individual accommodation through existing tools and capacities in the rental market, such as an accommodation listing platform with large repository of accommodations by landlords from the host community. In addition, the project offered complementary support and services, such as MPCA, psychosocial support, and employment support. Given the scale of the short-term rental service offered through the e-commerce platform and the efficiency of the system, it was possible to provide individual transitional accommodation to thousands of people in a quick, efficient, safe, and dignified manner.



- Feb 2022:** Start of war in Ukraine led to huge refugee influx in neighboring countries.
- 1 Mar 2022:** Organization partnered with non profit partners to access digital platform for providing accommodation assistance in Hungary, Poland, Moldova, Romania and Slovakia.
- 2 Apr 2022:** First household received assistance under the project.
- 3 Apr - May 2022:** Coordination mechanisms were set up and trainings on the use of platform were conducted for staff.
- 4 May - Jul 2022:** Tools and resources were developed for remote management and implementation of the project.
- 5 May 2022:** Country offices started advertising locally.
- 6 Jul 2022:** Prioritization criteria for receiving assistance were revised and periodic review of the criteria was introduced.
- 7 Sep 2022:** Project was expanded to Czechia and Lithuania.
- 8 Jan 2023:** Post Activity Monitoring was conducted.
- 9 Mar 2023:** Conducted an After Action Review (AAR)



8.24 million Ukrainian and 650,000 Third Country Nationals (TCN) were recorded as having crossed borders into neighboring countries in 2022.

CONTEXT

On 24 February 2022, the Russian Federation launched a full-scale invasion against Ukraine. One year after the invasion, approximately 8.24 million Ukrainian and 650,000 Third Country Nationals (TCN) were recorded as having crossed borders into neighboring countries. Such a humanitarian crisis had a regional impact, and in addition to the 10 countries close to Ukraine which were included in the response plan, there have been more than 30 other countries hosting Ukrainian refugees. With an uncertain timeline for the resolution of the conflict and varying degrees of support available, people moved across country borders – primarily to cities – throughout the whole of 2022.

THE ACCOMMODATION CHALLENGE

Neighboring countries responded to the influx and the resulting need for shelter and accommodation in different ways. Most governments prompted a response that offered a combination of collective and individual accommodation, including host family support (subsidized or voluntary). The sudden influx stretched the already saturated housing markets (especially in urban areas) and the social rental assistance systems. Access to individual accommodation became particularly challenging for the displaced TCNs.

People and governments relied heavily on host communities and the rental market available stocks, often providing support through compensation for host HHs, cash support for renting or making student residences, and tourist accommodation centers available for the displaced. The different approaches enabled most people to access individual accommodation solutions, with around 20% being housed in collective centers. As host community support programs decreased, vulnerable Ukrainian refugees started to face difficulties paying the rent, as their savings were consumed over time. Rental prices increased significantly, and in countries such as Poland, Czech Republic, Estonia, and Slovakia the increase in the demand in major cities provoked an increase in the rents to over 20%.

RENTAL ASSISTANCE AND HOUSING MARKET

The rental and housing market in Europe is highly regulated. The processes for adapting regulatory structures to an emerging influx situation and needs would require an



The refugee influx in 2022 stretched the already saturated housing market and social rental assistance systems in Europe.

extended timeline and increased resources – such as modifying tax laws to support the affected population.

In some cases, regulatory efforts that were intended to protect tenants ended up exacerbating the consequences of people’s vulnerability. For example, existing tenant rights regulations that prevent the eviction of women-headed HHs with children and people with specific needs, during the winters, had an adverse effect on the landlords’ hesitancy to rent to those HHs.

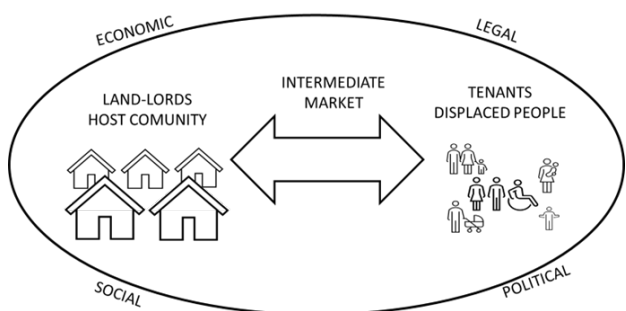
For many, navigating the rental market in a foreign language, with limited understanding of the legal frameworks and, in many cases, without personal, financial, or employment documentation or an existing social support network, was a major challenge. Risks of exploitation and abuse, as well as gender-based violence (GBV), were of high concern as approximately 90% of refugees fleeing Ukraine have been women and children.

While Ukraine-neighboring countries have used a variety of tools to meet the housing needs of refugees, the general aim has been to support their integration towards self-sufficiency.

Rental assistance is considered as a rapid solution to provide financial or other necessary support for accessing accommodation options available within the local rental market stocks. However, access to the rental market is not always easy due to multiple barriers, including economic barrier. In many cases, intermediation, information sharing, and legal advice, in addition to the provision of cash were required to provide adequate access to the rental market.

A rental assistance program may cover various component, such as: protection, information, housing standards, security of tenure, financial support, sustainability, and accountability to the affected population. These components may involve different actions as they may be directed at the refugee population, the host communities, or the admin and legal processes involved. By considering coherently all components, the risk of causing volatility in the rental market or posing a high risk to the well-being, safety, and dignity of refugees can be minimized.

A rental assistance program might be an implementation of an individual or a combination of components, ensuring economic, social, legal, and political operational frameworks appropriate to the needs, capacities, and circumstances of each country, thus establishing it as an adequate modality of shelter assistance in the given context.



Rental assistance as a solution to access the local housing market offered by the host community and to better integrate within the community.

PROJECT DESIGN

An international organization developed a project for providing immediate temporary relief to people fleeing the war in Ukraine, by ensuring safe, secure, and dignified accommodation, aiming to: reduce the number of people that needed collective accommodation, support those like TCNs who had limited access to any assistance, provide short-term stability for those still deciding their mid- and longer-term plans, and allow new arrivals to any location to start the process of finding long term solutions.

As the geographic scope of the project involved different countries, the organization established a partnership with a partner from the nonprofit sector, to facilitate the use of an e-commerce short-term accommodations listing platform with listings offered to the public regularly by hosts/landlords across the world.

The conditions of the partnership allowed the organization to focus on three strategic lines:

1. The organization would focus primarily on the identification of accommodation needs, addressing protection concerns, and providing complementary assistance to the target population by adopting a case management approach.
2. The partner would provide access to an existing e-commerce accommodations platform for renting short-term accommodations and would manage the relationship with the landlords, including contracts, damage insurance, and payments.
3. The organization’s representatives in each country would define the target population profiles based on needs, referrals, and location preference, provide all relevant information on their responsibilities and rights as short-term tenants, ensure they had access to feedback and complaints resolution mechanisms, refer them to other services, and where necessary, support them in accessing longer term accommodation.

	ORGANIZATION PRIVATE PARTNER	LAND-LORDS HOST COMMUNITY	INTERMEDIATE MARKET	TENANTS DISPLACED PEOPLE
COMPONENTS OF RENTAL ASSISTANCE	PROTECTION NEEDS BASED AND REFERRAL	PROTECTION ORIENTATION AND GUIDANCE.	COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AWARENESS-RAISING ACTIVITIES	IDENTIFICATION AND ASSESSMENT OF NEEDS
	INFORMATION ORIENTATION AND MATCHING	REFUGEES SITUATION, RIGHTS AND DUTIES	MATCHING, INTER EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION.	RENTAL MARKET RIGHTS AND DUTIES
	CONDITIONS HABITABILITY AND SERVICE	REPAIRS, IMPROVEMENTS, SERVICES	ASSESSMENT, DATA BASE OF PROPERTIES AND CONDITIONS.	MAINTENANCE AND MANAGEMENT, NFI
	SECURITY OF TENURE LEGAL AND CONTRACT	DOCUMENTATION, LEGAL SITUATION	CONTRACT AGREEMENTS, CODE OF CONDUCT, HOUSING RULES.	MIGRATORY STATUS, DOCUMENTATION
	FINANCIAL SUPPORT PAYMENTS AND GRANTS	RENTAL PAYMENT, FEE, DEPOSIT.	INSURANCE, REPAIRS, UTILITIES	MPC, CASH FOR RENT, CASH FOR SHELTER
	SUSTAINABILITY ADVOCACY AND COMPLEMENTARITY	SOCIAL, RENTAL AND HOUSING PROGRAM	INTERLINK WITH OTHER SERVICES AND SECTORS.	ADVOCACY FOR INCLUSION PROGRAMS
	ACCOUNTABILITY FEEDBACK AND MONITORING	PARTICIPATIVE PLATFORM FOR INFORMATION, COMPLAINTS AND SUGGESTIONS, SYSTEM AND TOOLS THAT ALLOWS FOR REAL TIME MONITORING		

Rental assistance may consists of various components. It should take into consideration the economic, social, legal, and political operational frameworks.

IMPLEMENTATION

The project started in June 2022 in five countries: Hungary, Poland, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, and Slovakia, and it was extended to the Czech Republic and Lithuania in September as needs in those countries increased.

The assistance offered consisted of a free-of-charge stay limited to 29 nights (with exceptional stays of up to 89 nights for the 10% of the families) in accommodations listed on the accommodations listing platform.

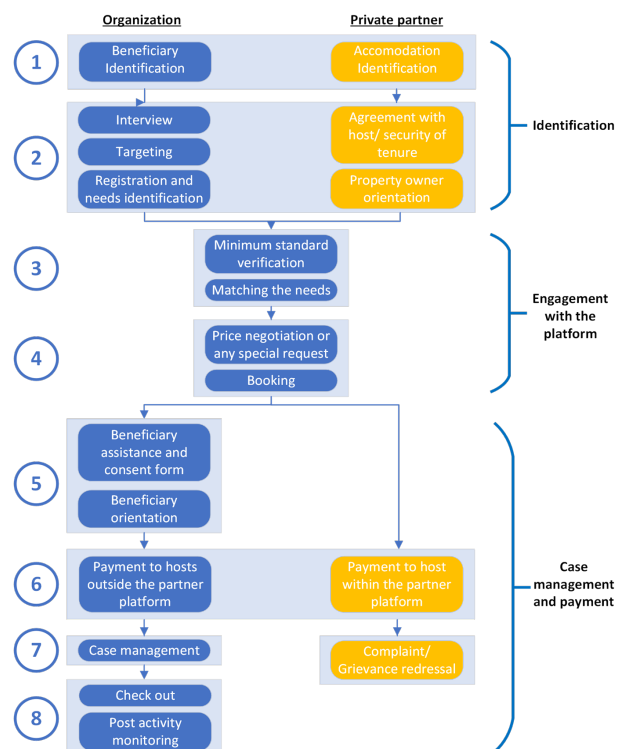
The 10% longer-term exception allowed the organization to increase the assistance to HHs that were in vulnerable situations (e.g., pregnant, and lactating women, persons undergoing medical treatment) for whom individual private accommodation was essential.

The project created opportunities to link the target population to medium- and long-term housing programs. For example, some families continued to rent the same apartments for longer terms after the project ended, thereby enabling easier access to the complex rental market and/or acquiring enhanced knowledge of it.

The accommodations listing platform comprised of an online search engine with an interactive map showing the accommodation listings with pictures and descriptions, public feedback and complaint resolution mechanism, insurance coverage for landlords, and secure online payment systems.

Within the project, only non-congregated accommodation listings, such as apartments or private hotel rooms with an attached bathroom were allowed, to minimize protection risks and ensure privacy and dignity of the affected population.

The main steps for the implementation of the project involved: identifying participants, registration, accommodation verification, booking accommodation, case management, and monitoring.



The partnership provided verification of services and ensured minimum standard quality of accommodation, a complaints and information system, an insurance system for housing situations, monitoring of costs and direct payments to landlords.

TARGETING

The project assisted Ukrainian citizens and third-country nationals (TCN) who were fleeing Ukraine after the full-scale Russian invasion (on or after 24 February 2022). Project outreach mechanisms and the identification of participants included tools such as social media, local advertisements, and referrals from other agencies and governments.

People with extreme vulnerabilities who needed “around-the-clock services,” had special needs, or unaccompanied minors, were referred to specialized service providers. The organization prioritized those in immediate need of shelter (HHs at the moment without shelter or facing imminent risks of losing their accommodation), HHs in overcrowded reception or collective centers, HHs facing other protection risks, single-parent HHs, HHs with pregnant or lactating women, people with disabilities or chronic illness, and elderly headed HHs. These prioritization criteria were flexible to be adapted based on the needs and context of the country. Remote or in-person interviews were conducted by the organization staff to assess the target population based on the set prioritization criteria. As the focus of the overall Ukraine response was put on Ukrainian nationals, TCNs were generally at risk of being left behind and faced difficulties in accessing state support. They became one of the primary target groups of the project, constituting approximately 11% of the people reached on average.

THE PARTNERSHIP

The platform has an existing identified pool of apartments from landlords and an instant reservation system in place, eliminating lengthy administrative processes. Moreover, it allowed the organization to assess and verify accommodations and landlords through a mechanism of public reviews and feedback from the experiences of previous guests, which proved to be invaluable in assessing possible risks or undesirable behavior on the part of the landlord. This also ensured that accommodation met minimum habitability conditions and addressed the specific needs of the tenants such as physical accessibility, availability of utility services, and pet friendliness.

Since the project involved extensive case management, the organization relied on a robust existing complaint and grievance resolution mechanism in place through the platform. This unique mechanism dealt with all complaints by the tenants and the landlords, with limited liability towards tenants. While the platform ensured participant protection, it also protected and compensated the landlords in case of any damages.

RENTAL PROCESS

The project, using an existing and easy-to-use platform, helped to provide adequate accommodation depending on specific needs and taking into consideration the preferences of tenants. The platform also allows remote follow-up mechanisms such as secure electronic transfer of relevant information and open communication channel with the landlords, during the rental process.

Most accommodation requests were in larger urban areas and cities, often in the capitals where rental costs were higher and the availability of affordable housing was limited, including for local populations. In addition to referrals, an email address was set up and disseminated where people could request assistance. The organization followed up with phone interviews to assess needs, the urgency of the cases, and the profile of the HH, and conducted an accommodation availability check in the preferred locations. If a listed accommodation met the needs of the HH, the organization would inform the landlord about the project and make the reservation on their behalf via the platform. Some landlords offered discounts and even free accommodation when the organization explained the project’s purpose.

As the platform offers self-check-in and immediate reservations, the family could have access to accommodation within a matter of hours. In some cases, the organization’s reception teams at Points of Entry would provide transportation to HHs crossing the border and make the reservation whilst on transit ensuring that on arrival at the destination city, the family would have a safe place to stay. The predominantly contactless check-in and check-outs also ensured minimal interactions between landlords and tenants, thereby minimizing associated protection risks.



Follow-up calls or visits were set up by the organization to ensure safety and assess any additional needs of beneficiaries. Based on the needs, other complementary services such as multi-purpose cash, psychosocial support, and employment support were provided.



Organization staff assessing and ensuring that accommodation met minimum habitability conditions and addressed the specific needs of the tenants.

Early in the response, when people's needs changed rapidly (e.g., families who planned to stay in one city for three weeks but decided to relocate to be closer to family or livelihoods vacated the accommodation earlier than planned), the project offered the possibility of modifying reservations and repurposing bookings for other families, for more effective and efficient use of available resources.

Before check-in, tenants were provided with all necessary information regarding the accommodation, including a guest fact sheet including data on emergency services, their rights and responsibilities as short-term tenants, their rights and duties in the hosting country, and other relevant emergency contact information. Moreover, they were also provided with information on how to report incidents of exploitation or abuse. To ensure safety and assess any additional needs of beneficiaries, a minimum of three follow-up calls or visits were set up by the organization throughout their duration of stay. Depending on their needs, other complementary services such as multi-purpose cash, psychosocial support, and employment support were provided directly or through establishing referral pathways.

The rental payments for short-term accommodation were channelized directly through the platform to the local homeowners eliminating any direct transaction between the tenants and the landlords minimizing the risk of any potential financial exploitation.

MAIN CHALLENGES

Lack of baseline information on needs, the movement of people across cities and borders, and varied accommodation prices across cities and countries, made it difficult to predict the number of people that would be served from the design phase. Anticipated caseloads were revised frequently, (e.g., in the summer of 2022 some governments announced the removal of subsidies, affecting those with fewer resources).

Prices increased due to the influx and increased demand, but in some cities, this coincided with seasonal price changes (e.g., tourist/vacation season), presenting new challenges to the project. In case of a lack of available affordable accommodation listings on the platform, the project had the



The project supported people at risk of being left behind and faced difficulties in accessing state support such as TCNs, people with disabilities, large households with children, HHs belonging to particular community etc.

flexibility to use other modalities such as mid-term leases and hotels or apartments available outside the platform.

Despite follow-up and clear obligations in place for the landlords, there were some cases of unsuitable accommodation, privacy breach, discrimination, attempt to charge additional fees, and eviction. Due to the partner's flexibility, the organization quickly found alternatives for those HHs and mitigated the risks, scaling up monitoring and follow-up activities.

A lack of certainty over future plans, language barriers that reduced the possibility to access livelihood opportunities, and other obstacles prevented some people from finding longer-term accommodation right away.

OUTCOME AND WIDER IMPACTS

The project supported the immediate physical well-being of people in vulnerable situations by providing a roof over their heads, as well as impacting their mental and emotional well-being by providing a sense of safety, security, and dignity. It was particularly helpful for those who were excluded from host government benefits and who faced additional barriers in accessing accommodation due to socio-cultural discrimination such as TCNs, HHs belonging to a particular community, HHs with multiple children, large HHs with a single-income member, HHs with people with disabilities, LGBTQI, etc.

The project provided people fleeing the war in Ukraine, with immediate temporary relief, which helped them to assess and plan their next steps. It also promoted integration and cohesion by enabling access to livelihood opportunities, education, social life, and other services in the urban context such as the fact of obtaining an address from the moment of the arrival to a country, facilitated for the refugees some services available in the urban context, such as opening a bank account or applying for jobs.

The project also proved to be a huge financial relief for the tenants as the cost of accommodation was a major source of stress for Ukrainian refugees and the affected population due to the rising costs in the housing markets and general housing shortages. It also posed a financial benefit for the landlords/hosting community, as it served as a cash boost to stimulate the local economy.

According to post-activity monitoring, approximately 64% of respondents reported that the assistance within the project improved their mental/physical health. Around 58% of respondents felt the assistance provided them with a better sense of security. 57% reported financial relief to focus on other necessary items like food, medicines, etc. Many reported being able to plan for their future and process administrative formalities without having to worry about accommodation. More than 90% of respondents reported a high level of satisfaction with the assistance received.

ACCOMMODATION AFTER THE PROJECT

After receiving short-term accommodation assistance, around 20% of the respondents reported that they were able to partially/fully self-support the accommodation cost.

Around 29% of respondents went back for accommodation in collective centers while 13% continued living in hostels/hotels. 10% were reported to be hosted by people either free of cost or within the government scheme. Around 8% of respondents reportedly looked for cheaper or shared accommodation while 6% of them continued to receive rental assistance. As this project was designed to be used as a pathway to mid- and longer-term options, in many countries it paved the way for scale-up of the organization's response in providing other accommodation assistance including setting up mid-long term

rental assistance programs as well as other similar short term accommodation assistance for transit. Moreover, the impact, strengths, and lessons learned from this project have set path for future responses of similar nature.

The project also underlined the solidarity of individuals and nonprofit sector actors to support people in need, providing an opportunity for people who would usually not know how to support refugees to do their part such as providing their accommodation units for free.

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES AND LESSONS LEARNED

STRENGTHS

- √ **Minimal personal data requirement** from landlords, as compared to long-term rental assistance due to existing bilateral agreement between the platform and the landlords.
- √ **Availability of public reviews and feedback** regarding the accommodation and landlords that were used to assess the protection risks.
- √ Since there was no direct transaction with the landlords, there was limited interaction which **ensured the safety of tenants** to an extent from any unlawful means that could be exercised by the landlord.
- √ **Minimum habitability conditions were ensured** as the listed accommodation was assessed and vetted by the platform and prior users via publicly available reviews on the platform. Accommodation units were pre-assessed on various parameters including accessibility and availability of utilities.
- √ Project flexibility allowed the provision of assistance to people who were particularly **excluded from host government protection schemes and faced additional barriers** to accessing accommodation assistance. e.g., Roma Population or TCNs.
- √ Availability of a legally binding minimum **guaranteed security of tenure**.
- √ **The project contributed to the local economy** by providing the landlords with rent as well as insurance coverage, in case of any damage.
- √ Project flexibility allowed providing assistance outside the platform such as hotels, hostels, motels, etc., to be able to **meet the demands of the market and thereby contribute to the local economy**.
- √ **Project flexibility allowed for adaptations** depending on needs and changing situations such as extension of assistance duration and repurposing of bookings in case of unavoidable cancellations.
- √ Availability of a dashboard on the partner platform, allowed for **real-time monitoring of bookings** made pursuant to the partnership agreement.
- √ **Established complaint and grievance resolution mechanism** through the partner platform.

WEAKNESSES

- × The flexibility to assess and support cases remotely increased efficiency, but in some cases, it stretched the organization's services to new locations. Although the organization established effective referral pathways to expand complementary services, **additional resources to reach people physically would have improved support**.
- × Due to individual accommodation, **people may lose the ability to inform and relate to the community, missing out on opportunities and services that contribute to integration and cohesion**.
- × Despite detailed reviews and image descriptions of the listed accommodation, **some did not match the images, or the actual locations were not found suitable**. Although the organization found alternative accommodation, it took time and people had to move to more adequate locations. This affected the initial anticipation of staff needs, adversely affecting staff welfare.
- × **The project only allowed accommodation for 29 nights**. Although an extension of up to 89 nights was permitted for up to 10% of the caseload, often it was not sufficient.
- × The **cost of accommodation assistance varied significantly** due to dynamic market forces, often making it unsustainable during times of high demand like the holiday season.
- × Tenants could **check out often without information** which hindered effective monitoring and follow-up.



The project provided people fleeing the war in Ukraine, with immediate temporary relief, which helped them to assess and plan their next steps.

LESSONS LEARNED

- The project teams worked in close coordination with protection specialists including service mapping, case management etc. This was a critical aspect of the project which should be replicated.
- Establishing partnerships and referral pathways for providing complementary service along with accommodation enabled integration and cohesion.
- Tenants were sensitized on their rights, protection risks, staff code of conduct, and access to complaint and grievance resolution mechanisms through information materials before checking into the accommodation through digital / print resources, but other communication materials (e.g., video instructions) may have been more effective.
- The project highlighted the need to explore possible links with the nonprofit and private sectors for preparedness activities
- Project staff managed communication with the landlord and tenants, effectively mediating communication which took time and significantly more effort than anticipated. Initial calculations of staff per caseload ratio were quickly surpassed and the frequency of communication with tenants was more than expected.
- This project required soft skills rather than traditional shelter skills. A coordination group was set up across the countries where staff could ask questions and always reach specialists.

RECOMMENDATIONS MOVING FORWARD

- Project's strength is the ability to implement market-based rental solutions in less time and cost if the right operating tools are in place. A combination of the activities that make up a rental assistance program along with market-based alternatives can enable many actors without sufficient capacity or funds to support long-term housing by providing transitional emergency accommodation assistance as a complementary measure to other programs.
- The learnings for the organization on the use of a private sector platform, its challenges, and opportunities, have opened the possibility for the development of tools such as the online search engine and the contractual conditions of the platform, adapted to other contexts where such resources and partnerships are not in place.
- To improve the effectiveness of the project and have significant outputs, the organization would recommend setting some prerequisite conditions for the implementation of a similar future programming, such as working in close coordination and support of the protection specialists, having an existing internal complaint and feedback mechanism, and a functional exit strategy, promoting integration and mid- or long-term accommodation, in place.



FURTHER READING ON SHELTER PROJECTS

On Ukraine : [A.22 / UKRAINE, 2022-2023 \(Overview\)](#); [A.16 / UKRAINE, 2016 – 2021](#)

On social cohesion : [A.21 / GREECE, 2019 – 2023](#); [A.2 / CHAD, 2019 – 2020](#); [A.3 / CHAD, 2018 – 2020](#); [A.32 / TURKEY, 2017 – 2018](#)

On urban accommodation : [A.34 / GREECE, 2016 – 2018](#); [A.8 / BAHAMAS, 2019 – 2020](#); [A.20 / JORDAN, 2018 – 2020](#)

