

# How can I help Ukrainians?

From offering Airbnb nights to signing up as a host, ways to offer shelter. By *Caroline Scott*



More than 4.5 million people have been displaced since the invasion of Ukraine

As refugees from Ukraine poured over the border into Poland, homeowners in EU countries where visa restrictions have been waived threw open their doors and prepared to receive them. More than 4.5 million people have been displaced since the invasion of Ukraine on February 24, with 2.5 million refugees fleeing the country, according to the UNHCR. In

the midst of a disaster that has touched the world, the kindness of strangers has known no bounds.

The Facebook page [Accommodation, Help and Shelter for Ukraine](#) has been inundated with offers from all over the world and is minute by minute connecting hosts with refugees, mainly women and children, sometimes travelling with pets, having

left fathers and sons behind in Ukraine to fight. The messages are heartbreaking: brief descriptions of who they are and the work they used to do before their lives fell apart. “We are four professional women, two children and a cat; we are friendly, decent and desperate for help . . .”

Support, including collection from the Polish border, is immediate and humbling. A







Caroline Williams, who has three properties listed on Airbnb, said: "I have no idea what it feels like to run from war but I do know what kindness feels like. I'm so grateful to have the opportunity to help"

family in Denmark offer a place for three to five people with children to live for free: "We live on a farm and have everything ready, food, beds, clothes. You will have your own kitchen and bathroom. Transport from Poland to Denmark can be arranged. No visa needed! We just want to help."

On Monday Michael Gove, the communities secretary, will ask the British public to open their homes to Ukrainians fleeing the Russian invasion and announce details of a new "sponsored" humanitarian scheme.

Already, Britons are among the 15,000 hosts who have signed up through Airbnb to offer their homes to refugees. Caroline Williams, 62, a catalogue designer and mother of one from Compton Dundon, near Glastonbury in Somerset, has three properties listed on Airbnb: Button Cottage, a two-bedroom grade II listed end-of-terrace in Tintinhull; and a barn in Compton Dundon, separated into two one-bedroom flats, Bracken and Bramble. She's offering Bracken, with garden and hot tub, free to refugees. And this morning she has listed her

own three-bedroom farmhouse, where she has a spare double and single room after her daughter Chloe, 26, moved out last year.

"Ever since I retired I've been looking for something meaningful to do," Williams says. "I have no idea what it feels like to run from war but I do know what kindness feels like. I'm so grateful to have the opportunity to help."

Here's how you can help offer shelter.

**HERE'S HOW YOU CAN OFFER A HOME**





Under the UK visa scheme, Ukrainians can enter the country only if they have close relatives here or a British sponsor for their visa application who can provide shelter and support. But that hasn't stopped thousands of Britons offering free short-term accommodation, food and clothes through Facebook, on social media and on hastily constructed websites. The best way to offer a room to a refugee in the UK is through charities.

The Room for Refugees Network ([paih.org](http://paih.org)) is the longest-running refugee programme in the UK; it has accommodated more than 4,000 refugees and asylum seekers in the homes of volunteers since 2002. [Refugees at Home](http://Refugees at Home) matches generous hosts with refugees in need of temporary emergency accommodation. It works closely with the Refugee Council, British Red Cross and other local and national organisations around the country. Or register with [shelter4UA.com](http://shelter4UA.com), set up to match Ukrainian refugees with hosts across Europe and the

US.

Over the past five years, [Airbnb](http://Airbnb) has provided a roof and a bed to more than 54,000 refugees and asylum seekers from all over the world. It has now suspended its operations in Russia and is offering free short-term housing for up to 100,000 Ukrainian refugees across Europe. As of this week, 28,000 hosts including 2,300 British homeowners have signed up to offer their accommodation for free — including second homes in Europe — with nearly 4,000 new hosts signing up in the past week specifically to offer rooms to Ukrainians.

[Ukrainetakeshelter.com](http://Ukrainetakeshelter.com) is an independent platform created by two Harvard students, [Avi Schiffmann](http://Avi Schiffmann) and Marco Burstein (Schiffmann created [ncov2019.live](http://ncov2019.live), the widely used coronavirus-tracking website that kept the world updated on its spread). The site has been designed as a kind of public bulletin board where hosts can post rooms and homes available and Ukrainians can get the information they need as fast

as possible. But there are concerns that no matter how well intended, posting family pictures on these open sites could result in women and children being placed in dangerous situations, at risk from scammers and human traffickers. This week the Irish government set up an online portal in conjunction with the Irish Red Cross ([registerofpledges.redcross.ie](http://registerofpledges.redcross.ie)) to connect refugees with people who have spare rooms; within days 6,000 homes had been pledged.

Meanwhile, in a supreme act of collective kindness, a fundraising drive on social media raised £1.5 million in early March when individuals in Europe and the US booked 61,000 nights in holiday homes and rooms in Ukraine they will never stay in as a way of supporting Ukrainians directly. One couple who made a booking for March 3-10 in Kyiv wrote: "Hello Maria, my wife and I have just booked your apartment for one week, but of course we will not be visiting. This is just so you can receive some money." ■

