

Hosting arrangements

30 September 2024

Key points

- Hosting arrangements are a form of individual accommodation in communities which may be offered based on social or personal links and generosity of hosting communities
- Hosting arrangements usually rely on rather informal and self-organized agreements made between hosting and displaced families. Monitor protection risks to avoid exploitation, neglect, abuse, eviction and other forms of rights violation
- Develop assistance strategies that take into consideration the needs of both hosted families and hosting ones
- Assess vulnerability (in terms of food security, income, security of tenure, specific needs, etc.) and set eligibility criteria for the hosting program
- Put in place accountability mechanisms through which hosted families can raise assistance needs and safely report abuse, exploitation or other protection risks

1. Overview

Individual accommodation in communities refers to people living in individual housing or with host families in cities, towns or villages. The term 'hosting arrangement' describes how forcibly displaced and stateless persons are sheltered in host communities: they may **settle with and among local households, on land or in properties that are owned by the host community, with their agreement**. Such arrangements may happen through family to family negotiation, facilitated by leadership structures (e.g. traditional leaders), or offered through online platforms. Hosts may be relatives, distant family members, friends, acquaintances (also related to history of labor relations), or people previously unknown to them. Hosting arrangements happen in both urban and rural contexts. **They offer a quick and considerable first response to sudden displacement influx, particularly in urban areas.**

2. Relevance for emergency operations

Hosting communities are normally the first line of response in a displacement crisis, especially when this happens suddenly, and before the Government or humanitarian resources are deployed at scale. It is important to **include hosting arrangements as an accommodation option in both contingency planning and first emergency responses**, while consulting the hosting community so that they are aware of potential dimensions of the crisis, how it could affect them, what their role could be and how humanitarian support could be provided to them as well, to assist the forcibly displaced.

3. Main guidance

Context characteristics and risks associated

Whether in urban or rural context, **hosting arrangements may not suffice** to accommodate a new influx of forcibly displaced people but can **play an important role in the immediate and medium term response**. A combination of accommodation approaches is often needed, while considering the establishment of camps as a last resort option. When host population have limited resources, their hospitality can be granted on short term. **Absorption capacity needs to be carefully monitored, as well as the use of resources when these are not sufficient** to meet the needs of both hosted and hosting communities. It is also important to gain a quick reading of why some forcibly displaced persons are in hosting arrangements as opposed to, say, formal settlements, and what are the links with the host community – if any – facilitating their acceptance.

Risks associated with hosting arrangement are primarily **linked to potential substandard living conditions** including overcrowding, lack of privacy, limited resources, lack of trust, discrimination and tenure insecurity. Furthermore, **hosting arrangements may also not be “genuine”**, with instances of intended exploitation of forcibly displaced families by their hosts. Specifically:

- **Deteriorating living conditions** in hosting arrangements might lead to health and psychosocial problems, as well as risks of stigmatization, harassment, economic or sexual exploitation, and violence against the displaced families.
- **Housing stock may already be substandard**, and host families may need shelter improvements in order to host new arrivals. Inadequate housing can force families to resort to **negative coping strategies**, like living in overcrowded conditions, or to separate. Children may be sent to live with other neighbors, increasing the potential for exposure to neglect and abuse.
- **Host families may have limited resources** (such as to cover utility bills or to share food) and basic domestic items (mattresses, mats, blankets, cooking utensils, etc.) that would have to be shared. Such resource-limited situations can rapidly erode hospitality.
- In areas where forcibly displaced people are not welcome, both host and displaced families might become targets of **retaliation** by parties to the conflict or by surrounding communities.

- Displaced people may be blamed for neighborhoods' problems such as conflict between families, criminal acts – often despite lack of evidence, thefts, etc. **Verbal abuse or accusations** can become **physical abuse**, and forcibly displaced people may not receive protection from the authorities.
- Some hosts may hide malicious intentions to exploit a displaced family. **In exchange of hosting arrangements, sexual favors, child labor, or other forms of exploitation may not be excluded.** It is essential to track those incidents through feedback and complaint, and arrangements with local authorities need to be put in place at the earliest stage.
- **Host families can become overburdened by the responsibility of caring for displaced people, especially those with specific needs, and eventually it may create conflict.** To reduce this risk, every effort should be made to work closely with the community, local government, NGOs and civil society organizations to support both displaced and hosting families to lessen the burden on the host family.

Priority operational delivery mode

Hosting arrangements have the advantage that forcibly displaced and stateless persons settle with families with which they may share cultural ties; increase solidarity and collaboration between forcibly displaced and local population; displaced people have a greater say in where and with whom to live; and there is a greater sense of self-reliance when forcibly displaced people make arrangement for themselves.

On the other hand hosting arrangements are rarely sustainable with overcrowding conditions and insufficient resources for all, straining the relationship between host and displaced families. Below is a description of **different support that can ease the burden and are not mutually exclusive: a combination of them is strongly recommended.**

Household level support to displaced families

In hosting arrangements, support can be provided either **through cash-based interventions** or in kind to the displaced (hosted) family, in order to cover their needs for CRI, food, etc. so as not to be a burden on the hosting family who may have to share limited resources with the displaced family. Considerations for their livelihood needs to earn an income should be also made.

Household level support to hosting families

In hosting arrangements, support to the hosting family should also be considered, **not to create disparities** and consequent rejection of the displaced family, especially when the hosting family may be equally vulnerable as the displaced one. Support can be provided either **through cash-based interventions** or in kind, in order to achieve the following:

- **Increase hosting space** through local construction (typically one room)
- **Improve hosting space** through building rehabilitation or renovation (including of WASH facilities)
- **Compensate resource sharing** (CRI, food, utilities)

Support to hosting communities at large

Beyond household-level assistance and in order to ensure longer-term sustainability of hosting arrangements, it is critical that **support is provided as well to the host community at large**. Depending on the context, and using an **area-based approach**, needs of the communities should be investigated and responses put in place – they could cover: rehabilitation and expansion of communal facilities (including health care facilities and schools) or public spaces (e.g. child friendly spaces), upgrades of infrastructures to guarantee sufficient and affordable access to water, wastewater and electricity, reinforcing solid waste collection, etc.

Response phases in this context

1. Identify, engage and assess the absorption capacity of host communities

- Run a **mapping of existing governance, leadership and social structures** among host communities that can facilitate and coordinate hosting arrangements.
- **Identify host communities that might be able and willing to host displaced people**; assess their absorption capacity, and to the extent possible how durable such hosting arrangements can be, also in relation to potential governmental changing policies. Understanding that the situation may be extremely fluid, map the location of displaced people, as well as existing and potential host communities.
- **Consult** host communities and displaced people following the [AGD approach](#); include representatives from relevant UN agencies, local Government (e.g. mayors), partner and civil society organizations.
- **Promote harmonious relationships** between displaced people and host communities and encourage and support programs and interventions that target cultural exchanges, community-building activities, and conflict resolution mechanisms.

2. Assess the most pressing needs of both the displaced and host communities

- **Assess local resources and coping mechanisms**. Prioritize those most in need of support but make it clear what criteria will be used.
- **Establish the profiles** of displaced and host communities. Assess the resources available to both groups (water, sanitation, health facilities, schools, clean energy sources, livelihoods) and locally available materials that might be of value to hosts and displaced people.
- Make sure that **issues related to security of tenure are addressed** to the satisfaction of both host and displaced communities; cross check the hosting arrangements with local authorities.
- **Support access to employment and livelihood** opportunities to promote self-reliance and reduce dependency on humanitarian aid. Offer skills training and economic empowerment programs to ease the burden of hosting for both displaced and host family.

3. Design, implement and monitor the assistance model

- Drawing on above analysis (the first two steps), agree with partners the **most appropriate shelter solution** (CBI, shelter kits, etc.). Prepare a clear plan with goals and outcomes, attribute roles and responsibilities, and set a timeline and budget.
- **Select program participants** by applying the agreed targeting criteria. Agree who owns shelters or materials that are distributed by the program; do so before distribution starts. If possible, arrive at a legal agreement.
- **Agree on a distribution protocol** that is widely publicized in information campaigns in

the community so that each host family and displaced is clear on the material or cash support they are entitled to, also depending on their family size.

- **Plan for long-term sustainability** of hosting arrangements, considering potential protracted displacement. Ensure that infrastructure and services are maintained and improved over time.

4. **Monitoring**

- Establish a monitoring plan to **track progresses of the assistance program**, also in line with national and local standards.
- Make sure that population in hosting arrangements are included in **protection monitoring**.
- Put in place mechanisms to **ensure accountability** to program participants at all stages, including communicating goals and progress, collecting, responding, and adapting to feedback.

Priority actors and partners in this context

Consult relevant national authorities, operational partners (UN, NGOs, and civil society organizations), the host community, and the forcibly displaced population in all phases of program development.

From the start of the response, **collaborate closely with local authorities, especially municipal ones, traditional leaders, civil society organizations and neighborhood governance structures** that may play a significant role in coordinating, facilitating and encouraging hosting arrangements.

Collaborate closely with local technical offices to examine rules and regulations with respect to land tenure, public works, and housing. To reduce the risk of conflict over land, ensure the program complies with local building regulations and house, land and property rights. **Pay particular attention to compliance with building codes and plans when building extensions of existing houses.**

4. Policies and guidelines

[IFRC, Assisting Host Families and Communities after Crises and Natural Disaster - A Step-by-Step Guide, 2012](#)

[IASC, Haiti Shelter Cluster Technical Working Group, Host families shelter response guidelines, 2010](#)

[UN Habitat, UNHCR, Guidance for Responding to Displacement in Urban Areas, 2022](#)

[NRC/Shelter Centre, Urban Shelter Guidelines, Assistance in urban areas to populations affected by humanitarian crises, 2010](#)

5. Links

[Emergency Shelter Solutions and Standards Safe and Secure Settlements UNHCR needs assessment for refugee emergencies \(NARE\) checklist, 2024](#)

6. Main contacts

Technical Support Section, Division of Resilience and Solutions - DRSTSS@unhcr.org