

GUIDE FOR PEOPLE SUPPORTING REFUGEES



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Who are we:

HumanDoc Foundation is a Polish NGO focusing on development and humanitarian aid, leading education and social projects. We carried out over 50 projects in dozens of countries worldwide. We have been present in Ukraine since 2015. After the outbreak of conflict in Eastern Ukraine in 2015, we set up a Center of Support and Integration for the victims of the conflict in the city of Kharkiv. Since the beginning of Russian aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 HumanDoc Foundation supports “Bereginia” – Mariupol’s Women’s Association, with whom we personally led support activities for the victims of war in the Donetsk Oblast. To date, “Bereginia” has helped tens of thousands of people.

As the refugee crisis deepens, millions of men, women and children face an uncertain future. What can you do about it?

Every day we are contacted by various people who are willing to help refugees. We cannot always accept each offer but usually we can provide them with information about another organization or a group that you can approach. We are always grateful for your kind words and support.

If you have any questions, you can simply contact us and if you have decided to host refugees at your home, welcome them to your community. Read our guide on how to make newcomers feel welcome and safe.

Remember...

...as a „refugee host” you are the one deciding for how long you can offer a room or a property, depending on the circumstances.

What you are doing is one of the most practical forms of help that you can offer to those who are fleeing their own country from war and crisis. It is a great trauma and tragedy for them. With your support, these families or individuals will find care and respite as they try to get their lives back on track. They will be able to work out their opportunities, organize formalities to start a process of searching a job and education, rebuilding their families, life and future.

Before your guests arrive

Before welcoming your new guests, **you should decide which room will be available for her/him**. A lot of people offer a spare room where there are many things they don't use often. When guests arrive, it is advisable to provide them with some privacy. Make sure you have moved all things you might need from the room you will be offering.

Some people will arrive only with a small bag but others may come with suitcases. If possible, **you could offer them some storage space** (especially if they will be staying more than just a few days). They will surely appreciate it. It is also a good idea to organize bedding and towels and prepare them before the arrival of the guests.

It is also necessary **to think about the rules at your home**. You might think that your home does not have any, but every house does! Each household functions in its own way and your guests will not know how you do certain things. Analyse things such as everyday life, safety, using bathroom, shared use of the kitchen, when is the light-out period in the house and all the other things.

You cannot predict everything and you will have to explain some things when your guests arrive but the more things you think of ahead, the easier it will be later for everyone. You can also prepare a short introductory packet to explain how your home works in a non-verbal way.

Arrival

It is worth agreeing the approximate time of arrival with a person that coordinates the process of bringing the refugees. These arrangements usually work well, but remember that for some guests the whole process can be very challenging - they come to the house of someone they have never met, know little about and may be overwhelmed with anxiety, fear of rejection or abuse.

Sometimes guests may panic in the last minute and prefer to stay where they are (even if it's a street) rather than face the unknown. Please, don't be offended by that. It is not about you, but their fear and anxiety. If you stay in touch with the coordinating person, it might be easier for both of you and your guest.

The best way to host a guest is to offer her/him some tea or something to eat. Be prepared that the guest may not feel comfortable eating with you. Again, this is not a personal issue – the prospect of eating in unfamiliar environment with people they don't know may be too disturbing for them. Lots of smiles, basic information and a chance to rest and sleep can be all they really need in that moment.

Apart from the warmth and relaxation, Internet access may be an important aspect for your guests. Remember that often their families and friends stay in Ukraine so they will want to have contact with them. Therefore, please provide them with the Wi-Fi password or in any other way allow them to connect to the Internet. They will surely be grateful to you and it will allow them to calm down. Contact with their loved ones is very, very important.

Make sure they know where to sleep and where the bathroom is – the rest can wait for the next day. Your guest can sleep for a long time or even several days. Don't take it as a kind of inaction. When people experience such a hard time, they can be exhausted and grateful to be clean, safe and to have a quiet place. When they have the chance, they may feel much more at ease and you can start explaining to them how your home works.

Some things may need to be repeated. If your guests do not speak Polish very well, you may need to ask for a help, perhaps an interpreter. Google translate can help too 😊

Gesticulation and simple drawings can be a quick way to overcome many barriers in communication. Ukrainian and Polish are not that different anyway!

Please, provide your guests with a safe place to sleep. They also need a chance to eat – you can have common meals, but they can also need a place to prepare their own food (remember to think of where they can store their food and when to use your kitchen).

Some are ashamed to be in need so you have to be sensitive to what they need and how you offer things. Many people will also appreciate the opportunity to practice their Polish language skills and understand your lifestyle. Even listening to your family conversations might be helpful, while TV and a radio are invaluable in many ways.

Persons with special needs

The people you will welcome at your home have experienced trauma, loss and have seen/ heard terrible things that are happening in their country. Difficulties with falling asleep, distrust towards people they don't know and new experiences and depressive mood are to be expected.

Perhaps you will host a pregnant woman or woman with a small child. Help them if you feel up to it and have such possibility. If not - let us know, we will do so...

Refugees and asylum seekers are by definition vulnerable. This doesn't mean that they are not articulate, intelligent, determined human beings but they find themselves in a complicated legal and personal situation, often experiencing difficult emotions and situations that have left them with many complicated issues to work through- all of this in a foreign country and culture.

As a host, you should be aware of power differences and really consider how this might influence your relationship with your guest.

Special attention should be paid to developing any relationship that goes beyond the relationship between the host and guest and to consider what consent may mean for the guest. This is especially important when it comes to sexual relationships (which we believe would never be appropriate between hosts or members of their household and guests), but also business relationships or any financial arrangements (we believe these are highly inappropriate and poses a significant legal risk if the hosts accept any rent or payment that may be interpreted as the rent from guests). A host may be making a very honest offer of help or friendship, but the guest may feel powerless and obligated to consent as a result.

If you are unsure what to do, talk honestly about it with your guest or one of the Foundation's members.

If at any moment you feel uncertain how to react or what to do – let us know.

Vast majority of problematic situations run smoothly without any conflicts and minor problems are easily and quickly resolved. However, if for any reason you feel uncomfortable or your situation has changed and you need your guest to move out, let us know and we will take care of that.

Life goes on – people get sick, everything changes. If you need help, let us know.

It also happens that refugees clearly do not cope with what is happening. It is difficult for them to live with people they don't know, they feel isolated from friends and family. Remember what they experienced - give them warmth if possible.

Some of the arrangements you made in the beginning don't work because the guest doesn't follow the house "rules". If this happens, it is up to the guest to adjust to the household, and not the other way around - again – let us know about it. This kind of situation happens when we have different habits. For example, young guests may not be accustomed to the situation where they should change their bed linen regularly with the support of their family. For some visitors, these are problems that you can solve with a little patience and explanation.

How to help a person that experienced traumatic events?

If you take responsibility for helping people who have experienced tragic events, it is important that you do it with respect for their rights, dignity and safety.

- Respect the safety of the people you help;
- Avoid putting people at further risk with your actions;
- Make sure you do everything in your power to keep those in your care safe. Protect them from further suffering.
- Treat people with respect.

- Make sure you treat those you care for equally, without discriminating them.
- If you pass on further contacts to them, make sure that they are treated with due respect and their rights.
- Act only in their best interest.
- Be patient and try to understand. It takes time to recover, even if the person is undergoing therapy. Be an ally and a good listener. A person with such experiences may need to constantly talk about the traumatic event. It's also part of recovery, so avoid the temptation to tell them to stop re-living what happened and start a new life.
- Try to anticipate and prepare for the stimuli that trigger PTSD symptoms - that is, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (disorders that arise as a result of experiencing traumatic events such as violence, war, catastrophe, etc.). Sights, sounds and smells, reports from the country, as well as people and places related to the trauma can be triggers for the escapees. If you are aware of which stimuli trigger anxiety responses, you will be better able to help as well as to calm them down.
- Observe the people you are helping. Talk to them. Ask. Take time to simmer down.
- Don't take PTSD symptoms personally. Symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) include emotional numbness, anger, and withdrawal. If the person you are caring for seems distant, irritable, or closed, remember that this probably has absolutely nothing to do with you.
- Don't insist on speaking. People with PTSD often find it very difficult to talk about what they have experienced. For some, it may even worsen the situation. So never try to force them to open up to you. Make it clear, however, that if he / she wishes to talk, you are there for them, willing to listen.

How else can I help?

Bring food. At first it might sound ridiculous or irrational, but remember that people who are in crisis may not only have trouble sleeping, but also eating regularly. If such a problem exists, encourage them to eat.

Emotions come in waves. There are no rules about how people in crisis behave. Refugees may feel numb, overwhelmed with emotions, or be somewhere in between. All reactions are okay, even laughing or crying for no reason. Emotions always come in waves - they come and go.

Let them cry. When someone cries in front of us, we may feel uncomfortable with it. But crying is a way of expressing emotions, and it's not bad.

Be aware - aware of what stirs you up. Crisis is a stressful and emotional time. So, it is likely that people will be oversensitive. If you feel nervous, take a deep breath and get back to your personal matters.

Get professional help. If your guests start talking about suicide, don't hesitate and let us know!

Support your guests in everyday activities as much as possible. In the first few days of a crisis, even the most minimal and routine activities can become impossible. Gently encourage walking, eating regularly, and taking a shower.

The night is the hardest - remember that nights are the most difficult time for people in crisis - inform your family about it so that they show empathy and understanding. Remember that while you are sleeping, refugees experience their trauma.

If you take children into your home

Children are extremely prone to stress and the negative impact of traumatic events. If you want to be supportive for them:

- Help them to verbalize their feelings, fears and questions by using basic terms such as sad, scared, angry - do not use words that increase emotions.
- Talk to teenagers in a way that is similar to communicating with adults.
- Sit or crouch at eye level when talking.
- Ask if they need anything.

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Thank you for your willingness to help refugees!

Whatever you can give - time, money, or a warm welcome - and no matter how big or small your action is, it is needed and of the utmost importance!



SUPPORT US!

HUMANDOC FOUNDATION

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NOTE: While making a payment you need to provide the complete address of the foundation as stated above.

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MONEY TRANSFERS IN GBP:

IBAN: PL63249010570000990472562710

SWIFT/BIC: ALBPPLPW

Bank address: Alior Bank SA, ul. Lopuszanska 38D,
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MONEY TRANSFERS IN USD

IBAN: PL782490 00050000460018296035

BIC/SWIFT: ALBPPLPW

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