

GBV AoR HELPDESK

Gender Based Violence in Emergencies

Supporting Women and Girls Fleeing Ukraine Guidance and Tips for Private Accommodation Hosts



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Across Europe, private citizens like you who choose to host a family or an individual fleeing the invasion of Ukraine are playing a key role in providing safe, temporary homes to people in need of urgent sanctuary. The material and emotional support that a host can provide will make a substantial difference in the lives of displaced women and children and their capacity to cope with the trauma and the uncertainty of their current lives. Since most displaced Ukrainians across Europe are women and children at this time, it is important for hosts like you to be aware of the potential risks that adult women and young girls might face during their flight and as they settle in a new place. Women and girls who face multiple forms of discrimination, for instance because of a disability, their gender identity or sexual orientation, or their ethnic group might also face additional risks which can vary depending on the location and the local legislation.

As a host, you can play a critical role in supporting women and girls identify risks in their new context and put in place risk mitigation strategies to keep themselves safe and seek help when needed. Hosts should also be aware that women and girls might have experienced different forms of gender-based violence (GBV)² before leaving Ukraine or during their travel and might need support in accessing available services to deal with the aftermath of the violence once they reach safety in their hosting country. In order to provide the best support, and receive appropriate guidance and resources, it is recommended that all private hosts are connected to a governmental or non-governmental hosting scheme whenever these are available. However, these tips are applicable to all forms of private hosting regardless of whether they are part of a formal or informal scheme.

¹ Limitations of this document: due to the urgency of the current emergency this set of recommendations was necessarily produced in a limited timeframe in early April 2022. The recommendations are based on publicly available and published data available in English primarily.

² GBV is a term used to refer to physical, emotional, sexual and economic violence inflicted on women, girls and people who are perceived as feminine, primarily though not exclusively by men, with the intent or, with the effect of keeping women and girls in a subordinate position. The global technical definition is as follows: “Gender-based violence is an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person’s will and that is based on socially ascribed (i.e., gender) differences between males and females. It includes acts that inflict physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty. These acts can occur in public or in private.” IASC (Inter-agency Standing Committee), (2015a). *Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience and Aiding Recovery*, p. 3.

What GBV risks do Ukrainian women and girls face?

- Women and girls might have experienced **sexual and physical violence** by military and armed groups in Ukraine before leaving the country
- Women and their children might have been living in a situation of **domestic violence** (or **intimate partner violence**) before leaving Ukraine and this might be their first opportunity to escape their violent partner
- During flight, women and girls might be exposed to the risk of **trafficking** for the purpose of sexual or labour exploitation
- During their journey, women and girls might have been **sexually exploited** in exchange for accommodation, transportation, documentation, food or other essential items
- Once they settle in a new country, women and girls who are hosted in private accommodation might face **sexual or labour exploitation** by their hosts
- Women and girls who do not speak the local language or can otherwise be identified as foreigners and/or refugees can be exposed to higher levels of **sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and abuse** and **sexual assault** and have fewer options to seek support.
- Displaced women and girls can also be subject to **sexual exploitation by service providers** who take advantage of their power and position.
- Women and older adolescent girls might struggle to access formal work opportunities and be pushed to work in **unregulated or informal sectors** where they can be exposed to **labour and sexual exploitation**.
- Women and Girls might face barriers in accessing **formal education and learning opportunities** in their new country. Being out of school can increase risk of exposure to **multiple forms of GBV**.
- Women and girls who have diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions might have struggled to leave the country and/or experienced **emotional and physical abuse** while trying to do so because of their gender presentation
- Women and girls from ethnic minority groups, such as Roma Ukrainians, might have faced distinct forms of **discrimination** during their travel
- Many women and girls will have experienced **trauma** before and after leaving Ukraine and will be experiencing severe **emotional distress**, sense of loss and anxiety about their family members, their homes and their futures.

What can you do?

1. Be aware of power imbalances and boundaries

The women and girls you are hosting are in a position of vulnerability. This does not mean they are helpless or incapable of making their own decisions and choices. It simply means that they might find it difficult to speak up about what they need or tell you when something makes them uncomfortable, as they are likely to feel indebted to you for welcoming them into your home and to be concerned about the consequences of saying 'no' (e.g. losing a place to stay, negatively affecting the everyday relationship, compromising opportunities for further support, etc.). This sense of precariousness is likely to be accentuated by other factors such as class differences, knowledge of the local language, gender, presence of children, sexual orientation, gender identity, mental health issues and disability. As a host, you might also be worried about living in close contacts with people with different gender and social norms and who might hold discriminatory views towards you and your family. Being aware of the power imbalance between you and your guests is an essential first step in developing a supportive relationship which will enable them to feel safe in their new temporary home.

Do's	Don'ts
Offer a friendly, welcoming environment where women and girls can feel safe.	Enter in a sexual relationship with your guests. This is NEVER appropriate.
Provide a private space for your guests which can be locked from the inside (doors and windows). Ensure they have time and space to be on their own if they wish to.	Enter in a business or financial relationship with your guests (e.g., lending money to them, employing them in your business, etc.). Helping them in finding employment is a better way to support them achieve financial independence.
Use translation apps, such as Google Translate, if you do not share a language with your guests.	Expect your guests to immediately learn the local language.
Set clear expectations and boundaries regarding the use of shared spaces. Developing a simple Welcome Pack ³ can be helpful to avoid overwhelming your guests with lots of information to be remembered upon arrival.	Expect or suggest that your guests take over childcare, housekeeping, or other caring roles in your household (beyond what would be considered their fair share as a housemate).
Sit together with your guests to agree on cohabitation rules that work for both of your families and consider everyone's different needs.	Do not impose your rules or expect your guests to guess the rules of good cohabitation in your house. "Good manners" can vary from place to place.
Keep any information and stories that women and girls share with you confidential, except in situations when they are at imminent risk of harm to themselves or others when you will need to contact the relevant authorities.	Insist people tell you their story, share their experiences or behave in a certain way.
Provide information to your guests about the local area, available services, local legislation and so on to enable them to make their own decisions.	Make decisions on their behalf or tell them what you think they should do.
Support them with translation and to understand 'how things work' in their new context.	Take over tasks (e.g., filling in immigration forms on their behalf, contacting support services) on a regular basis "because it is easier or quicker".
Provide accurate information about available support services.	Take the place of professional health or psychological support, even if you have relevant skills.
If you are part of a hosting programme which has a code of conduct and/or safeguarding policy in place, upon your guests' arrival, share the policy as well as contact details to report allegations of misconduct or other issues with their hosts.	Make false promises or exaggerate what you can do to help. You are already helping by providing accommodation.
Seek support from your networks and hosting scheme (if applicable) if the hosting arrangement is not working out for you and/or your guest. This can happen with any hosting arrangement; it is not your fault.	Do not evict your guests or ask them to leave without ensuring they have suitable and safe alternative accommodation arrangements in place.

³ Examples of Welcome Packs that can be adapted can be found (in English and Ukrainian) at: <https://vita-network.com/saferefuge/> and, in French, at: https://www.jaccueille.fr/files/ugd/f50b6d_bf7e5c875cc7468baaf095c56e601410.pdf

2. Provide basic emotional support (Look, Listen)

Regardless of whether they have experienced specific forms of gender-based violence, the women and girls you are hosting are likely to need emotional support as they settle in a new country and navigate their new situation. As a host, you are not meant to provide ongoing emotional support, but you can create an environment which allows women and girls to better process their experiences and seek the specific help they need. As you do so, here are some tips to keep in mind:

- Different people react to trauma in different ways. Some people may need to talk through their experiences over and over, while others might withdraw into silence and sleep for several days. All responses are valid.
- Do not push your guests to talk about their experiences and do not ask them to tell you about specific experiences of violence. Instead, demonstrate you are willing and open to listening if/when they would like to.
- Look for signs that your guests might be triggered by specific actions, words, television programmes, telephone calls. Talk to them about what you can all do together to reduce the triggers and manage the response.
- Look out for signs of distress such as not being able to sleep, sleeping a lot, eating too much or too little. Do not make your guests feel judged in any way for their emotional or behavioural responses, rather let them know you are willing to listen, and that support is available if they are struggling.
- If your guests appear distressed, let them know professional support is available and offer to help them set up an appointment. If they do not wish to do so now, repeat the offer from time to time.
- Respect your guests' priorities, even if you do not feel they are the right ones. Some women might prioritise having financial independence and looking for a job, others might want to ensure their children are in school first, yet others might need to receive emotional support and create a social network before they are able to take any further steps towards settling in a new place.
- Connect your guests with social networking opportunities outside your home. These could be networks of Ukrainians in the area, host and guest networks, parenting groups, religious groups, refugee networks, sports clubs, after-school activities and much more.
- Ensure you are also getting emotional support by friends, family, host networks or a professional counsellor during this time. This will help you build resilience and better support your guests.
- If you are not receiving support and training through a hosting scheme, consider following a psychological first aid or similar training online.⁴

3. Signpost to support services (Link)

It is not your responsibility to support all the emotional and practical needs of your guests. The best way to ensure your guests receive a comprehensive package of support is for you to connect with hosting schemes managed by your local government or by non-profit organisations whenever these are available. However, even in the absence of formal arrangements, you can play an essential role in letting women and girls know what services are available and how they can be accessed. You can also support women and girls as they learn how to keep safe while they explore their new environment.

- Before your guests arrive, gather information about available services in the area, including services for survivors of gender-based violence (sexual violence and domestic violence at a minimum), trafficking/modern slavery. Familiarise yourself with benefits and services available to Ukrainian refugees and how these can be accessed. Make sure you are relying on official government information as much as possible to avoid passing on inaccurate information.

⁴ For example see these resources and free trainings by Thrive London: <https://thrivedn.co.uk/2022/04/01/new-guide-to-help-families-create-a-safe-and-welcoming-environment-for-displaced-ukrainians/>; <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/psychological-first-aid-covid-19/1>

- Familiarise yourself with mechanisms to report misconduct by service providers and local authorities. Provide information on how to identify and report misconduct to your guests together with the information on what services are available.
- Seek information about your safeguarding responsibilities, especially if you will be hosting minors, and who you should report any child safeguarding concerns to. Let your guests know what your responsibilities are in terms of safeguarding when they arrive.
- Share information about how to contact emergency services, including sexual violence, domestic abuse, and trafficking/modern slavery hotlines, as soon as your guests arrive.
- Orient women and girls to their new local area. If possible, walk around the area with them and point out to them key support institutions (e.g. doctor/hospital/pharmacy, police station, community center, school, parks, etc.). Point out any areas that are considered unsafe for women and girls.
- Provide women and girls with information about available services in the area, including sexual violence, domestic abuse and trafficking/modern slavery support services, and how to contact them as soon as possible. Do not wait to determine whether women and girls need a service to share information about it.⁵
- Explain to women and girls whether and how much they should expect to pay to access different services, benefits and methods of transportation. Inform them of how to report if someone is demanding more money and/or sexual or other services in exchange for a service.
- Share official informational materials (in Ukrainian or another language they understand, if available) on various forms of abuse, including trafficking, modern slavery, sexual exploitation, and abuse.
- Share service information and contact details separately with adolescent girls and younger children if appropriate, including specific services for teenagers and younger people whenever available. Adolescent girls and young adults might not feel comfortable sharing their experiences with their caregivers in order to access services.
- Do not force women and girls you host to report abuse to the police or other authorities if they do not wish to do so. It is their choice if and when to report.
- If women and girls have a negative experience with a service provider, validate their feelings and experience (it is possible that local services are not set up to support displaced women and girls). If possible, help them identify alternative service providers who might be more appropriate.
- If available, consider joining a local network for hosts or other forms of in-person or online networking and support for people supporting Ukrainian refugees yourself. Connecting with people going through similar experiences will be very beneficial to you and your guests.

Relevant local services for women and girls:

Service provider	Type of service	Locations served	Contact details

⁵ As an example, Women’s Aid in the UK provides informational booklets translated in a number of languages: <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/covid-19-coronavirus-safety-and-support-resources/>

The GBV AoR Help Desk

The GBV AoR Helpdesk is a unique research and technical advice service which aims to inspire and support humanitarian actors to help prevent, mitigate and respond to violence against women and girls in emergencies. Managed by Social Development Direct, the GBV AoR Helpdesk is staffed by a global roster of senior Gender and GBV Experts who are on standby to help guide frontline humanitarian actors on GBV prevention, risk mitigation and response measures in line with international standards, guidelines and best practice. Views or opinions expressed in GBV AoR Helpdesk Products do not necessarily reflect those of all members of the GBV AoR, nor of all the experts of SDDirect's Helpdesk roster.

The GBV AoR Helpdesk

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