



Reinforcing Integration via
Sponsorship Enhancement
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Assessment Report

INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP

Perspectives from volunteers, forced migrants,
and key stakeholders in Belgium, Italy and Lithuania



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This report was written by Sylvie Van Dam, Mieke Schrooten, and Liesbeth Naessens, with contributions from Stefano Portelli, Vincenzo Carbone, Francesco Maria Pezzulli and from UAB „Spinter tyrimai”.

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INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP

PERSPECTIVES FROM VOLUNTEERS, FORCED MIGRANTS AND
KEY STAKEHOLDERS IN
BELGIUM, ITALY AND LITHUANIA

Assessment report

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February 2025

PREFACE

Welcome to the RISE assessment report.

“Insights and Recommendations on Community Sponsorship: Perspectives from Volunteers, Forced Migrants and Key Stakeholders in Belgium, Italy, and Lithuania” is a report based on research carried out by RISE project team throughout 2024. Initially, an extensive literature review was conducted to analyse existing data on the reception and housing challenges faced by forced migrants in Belgium, Italy, and Lithuania. Please refer to the complete literature study [here](#).

Building on the literature review, comprehensive surveys were conducted targeting volunteers and beneficiaries involved in community sponsorship (CS). To complement the survey results, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were also performed. The insights gained from this extensive data collection provide a detailed and elaborate analysis of the situation in the three countries, offering concrete operational recommendations for policymakers and practitioners on effective practices and methods to apply in CS programmes.

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to all our project partners, whose invaluable support and collaboration made this possible. Special thanks to Mieke, Sylvie, and Liesbeth from Odisee University of Applied Sciences, whose leadership, commitment, and boundless patience have been pivotal in guiding this report to its successful completion.

I would also like to highlight the unwavering dedication of my IOM teammates across Lithuania, Belgium and Italy, as well as in the Regional and Global Offices. Agnė, Gabrielė, Greta, Audrey, Daisy, Rosalie, Jozefien, Federica, Sirio, Federico, Paola, Marvin, Jason, Oana, Laura, Andrea, Esra, Caterina, and others who I may not have mentioned but were integral at every step - preparing, reviewing, commenting, and polishing this report. Their hard work and collaborative spirit have truly made a difference and made this report possible.

I believe this assessment report, alongside the literature study, provides meaningful insights and practical recommendations that will be instrumental in advancing the conversation on community sponsorship and integration in Europe. We appreciate your interest in our publications.

Vytautas Ežerskis

RISE Project Manager

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This report is part of the RISE project led by IOM Lithuania that covers Belgium, Italy and Lithuania. The research was prepared by Odisee University of Applied Sciences. The report is the result of a collaborative effort which involved a lot of experts and IOM staff in the three countries, in the Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia in Vienna and in the Global Office of IOM in Brussels.

In Belgium, we would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to the following organizations and individuals: Wim Peersman (Odisee University of Applied Sciences), who supported the quantitative data analysis and Ghassan Bardawil, Mursal Ahmadzai and Olena Chyzhova (RISE interviewers). Many thanks to Abigail Tatenda Chibebe, Agentschap integratie en inburgering (AGII), Association Pour les Nations Unies (A.P.N.U.), Basel Badoum, Brulocalis, Brutus, Buddyproject Lokeren, Buddywerking Leuven, Buddywerking Merelbeke, Caritas International BE, Centres Régionaux d'Intégration (CRI), Cinemaximiliaan vzw, CoNnect buddy, Diaspora Advisory Board (DAB), Espace 28, Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (Fedasil), Filet Divers, Federatie van Mondiale & Democratische Organisaties (FMDO), Hand in Hand, IOM Belgium & Luxembourg colleagues, Bocholt Openbaar Centrum voor Maatschappelijk Welzijn (OCMW), Orbit vzw, Patenschaftsprojekt's volunteers, Une Maison Moins Vide, Sant'Egidio, ShareNetwork, Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), WeKONEKT, and the following municipalities: Bruges, Brussels, Eupen, Ghent, Leuven, Lier, Lokeren, Mechelen, Merelbeke and Turnhout.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ARCI	Associazione Ricreativa e Culturale Italiana – Recreative and Cultural Italian Association
CARA	Centri di Accoglienza per Richiedenti Asilo – Italy’s Asylum seekers’ centres
CAS	Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria – Italy’s Extraordinary Reception Centres
CGRS	Belgium’s Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons
CPAS	Centre Public d’Action Social – Belgium’s Public Centre for Social Welfare (French term)
CS	Community Sponsorship
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
EMN	European Migration Network
EU	European Union
EUAA	European Union Agency for Asylum
FCEI	Federazione delle Chiese Evangeliche in Italia – Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy
Fedasil	Belgium’s Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
GDPR	EU General Data Protection Regulation
IOM	International Organization for Migration
LAI	Local Accommodation Initiative
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OCMW	Openbaar Centrum voor Maatschappelijk Welzijn – Belgium’s Public Centre for Social Welfare (Dutch term)
PCSW	Belgium’s Public Centre for Social Welfare (English term)
RISE	Reinforcing Integration through Sponsorship Enhancement
RRC	Lithuania’s Refugee Reception Centre
SAI	Sistema Accoglienza ed Integrazione – Italy’s Reception and Integration System
SPRAR	Sistema di Protezione Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati – Italy’s Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees.
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USD	United States Dollar
TP	Temporary Protection

GLOSSARY

Asylum seeker: a third-country national or stateless person who has made an application for protection under the Geneva Refugee Convention and Protocol in respect of which a final decision has not yet been taken (EMN, 2024b).

Beneficiary of international protection: a person who has been granted refugee status or subsidiary protection status (EMN, 2024b).

Beneficiary of temporary protection: a person who has been granted temporary protection, which is an exceptional measure to provide immediate and temporary protection in the event of a mass influx or imminent mass influx of displaced persons from non-EU countries who are unable to return to their country of origin (EU Migration and Home Affairs, 2025).

Black market rent: rental agreement that includes illegal elements, such as the violation of registration duties for tax evasion purposes. These tenancies operate outside the legal framework, often to avoid government-imposed rent controls or regulations.

Buddy, mentor: a volunteer who chooses to support a newcomer in their journey of personal growth and integration. This means helping them solve everyday problems, offering support to make the best choices as well as in terms of study or work, sharing friendship and leisure time, and encouraging them to fulfil their potential, and advocating for them in their daily administrative tasks.

Buddying, mentorship: a relationship that fosters a newcomer's integration into the receiving community by providing advice, support, guidance and encouragement from one or more community members. This connection aims to facilitate inclusion, promote equal opportunities and create meaningful interactions between newcomers and locals.

Community sponsorship: a collaborative approach where social, practical and emotional support is provided voluntarily by host country residents contributing to the integration of beneficiaries of international protection while complementing integration measures offered by the state.

Displaced person: in the global context, persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, either across an international border or within a State, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disaster (EMN, 2024b).

Forced migrant: a person subject to a migratory movement in which an element of coercion exists, including threats to life and livelihood, whether arising from natural or man-made causes (EMN, 2024b).

Grey market: while not explicitly defined in EU law, it generally refers to rental agreements that operate in a legal grey area. This can include situations where rental practices are not fully compliant with all legal requirements but are not outright illegal. For example, it might involve informal agreements that avoid certain regulations or taxes without being entirely unlawful. Rental activities outside the regular market as informal agreements or unregistered rentals.

Host (family): a person or family welcoming and accommodating a newcomer in their home or housing units owned by them.

Hostee: a newcomer who receives support from a host or volunteer and who is accommodated in their home or a housing unit (real estate object) owned by their host.

Housing rental contract: a legally binding contract between a landlord and a tenant. It outlines the terms and conditions under which the tenant can occupy the property.

Humanitarian corridors: safe and legal pathways facilitated by CSOs, for vulnerable people who have fled their country of origin, and receive humanitarian visas issued by the countries of destination – as per article 25 of EC Regulation 810/2009 (FCEI, 2025).

Integration: the two-way process of mutual adaptation between migrants and the societies in which they live, whereby migrants are incorporated into the social, economic, cultural and political life of the receiving community. It entails a set of joint responsibilities for migrants and communities and incorporates other related notions such as social inclusion and social cohesion (Sironi, & Emmanuel, 2019).

Integration measures: policies and practices aimed at promoting the full social and economic inclusion of migrants and refugees in the EU, focused on ensuring that basic needs are met in an unfamiliar country, with an emphasis on language learning and employment (European Commission, 2025).

International protection: in the global context, the actions by the international community on the basis of international law, aimed at protecting the fundamental rights of a specific category of persons outside their countries of origin, who lack the national protection of their own countries (EMN, 2024b).

Key stakeholders: individuals or groups with a significant interest or role in the community sponsorship process government representatives, NGO representatives, and landlords.

Landlord: a person or entity that owns property and rents it out to tenants under a rental agreement.

Matching: a systemised process that determines the placement of beneficiaries with sponsors. The matching criteria used may involve consideration of the attributes, needs, and preferences of forced migrants along with the capacities and preferences of sponsors and receiving communities (Smith & Damian, 2023).

Refugee: in the global context, either a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group, is outside the country of nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country, or a stateless person, who, being outside of the country of former habitual residence for the same reasons as mentioned before, is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it (EMN, 2024b).

Property owner: a person who owns a house, or a residential property; possessing full rights and control over as living in it, selling it, or renting it out.

Slumlord: a person who rents out houses and flats that are in poor areas and in poor condition, often charging unfairly high rents (Cambridge Dictionary).

Sponsor (group): a person or a group of individuals that commits to supporting and assisting forced migrants, as they settle into their new environment. Sponsors provide various forms of support, including helping with access to housing, emotional support, local services and learning the language.

Subsidiary protection: the protection given to a third-country national or a stateless person who does not qualify as a refugee but in respect of whom substantial grounds have been shown for believing that the person concerned, if returned to their country of origin, or in the case of a stateless person to their country of former habitual residence, would face a real risk of suffering serious harm as defined in Art. 15 of Directive 2011/95/EU (Recast Qualification Directive) , and to whom Art. 17(1) and (2) of this Directive do not apply, and is unable or, owing to such risk, unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country (EMN, 2024b).

Temporary protection: an exceptional measure to provide immediate and temporary protection in the event of a mass influx or imminent mass influx of displaced persons from non-EU countries who are unable to return to their country of origin (European Commission, 2025).

Volunteer: an individual who offers their time and resources to support forced migrants through community sponsorship or other community-based initiatives such as buddying or mentoring.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Europe, the increase in migrant and refugee flows in 2015-2016 has spurred a search for innovative approaches to refugee protection, including significant interest in the development of community sponsorship (CS) schemes. Originating in Canada in 1978, the sponsorship model has expanded globally in recent decades, thereby taking on diverse forms. In Europe, experience with CS is relatively new, as the first European CS programme has been introduced in the United Kingdom in 2016. Since then, it has been piloted in Spain, Ireland, Germany, Belgium, Portugal, Finland, the Netherlands, and Sweden (EUAA, 2024; Van Dam & Schrooten, 2025).

While the term ‘community sponsorship’ has no uniform definition, its essence lies in the shared responsibility between governments and private or community actors for the admission and/or integration of refugees (Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs et al., 2018). Governments facilitate the legal admission of refugees, while private or community actors provide financial, social and/or emotional support to receive and help refugees settle in the communities (ICMC Europe et al., 2017, p. 36). By directly involving local communities and leveraging their support, CS programmes aim to foster better integration outcomes and broader public support for refugee resettlement (Bond & Kwadrans, 2019; EMN, 2023; ICMC Europe, 2023; Tan, 2021).

Despite the increasing number of CS programmes in Europe in recent years, there is still room for refining, piloting and scaling up CS across European Union (EU) Member States. CS schemes can help Member States increase the number of admission places, addressing key challenges that might hinder the effective upscaling of existing programmes, such as reception needs. The EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021-2027) emphasises the importance of housing, employment, language learning, and social inclusion as core elements for successful integration (European Commission, 2020). In addition, The EUAA guidelines on CS provide a comprehensive framework for the implementation and scaling up of CS programmes across EU Member States. These guidelines emphasise the shared responsibility between governments and community actors, the importance of tailored support for refugees, and the need for robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure the effectiveness of CS initiatives (EUAA, 2024).

Within this context, the RISE project – Reinforcing Integration through Sponsorship Enhancement – was launched. The RISE project seeks to provide actionable insights into addressing housing challenges within CS programmes. Central to this effort is the exploration of effective practices and methods that can

enhance the mobilisation of sponsors, the matching process between sponsors and beneficiaries, and the identification of suitable housing in CS programmes.


In a first phase of the project, the reception and housing issues faced by beneficiaries of international protection in the respective countries were explored, examining relevant policies, trends, and the conceptualisation and implementation of CS models in Belgium, Italy and Lithuania¹ The current report builds on these insights and provides an additional perspective, seeking to better understand operational strengths and areas needing improvement based on past experiences within CS schemes in Belgium, Italy and Lithuania.

The level of experience with CS varies significantly between Belgium, Italy and Lithuania. While Lithuania does not yet have a formal CS programme, Italy was the first EU Member State to launch a humanitarian corridor programme in 2015. Belgium started a humanitarian corridor programme in 2015 and additionally introduced a resettlement-based sponsorship scheme in 2020 (ICMC Europe, 2023). Given these differences, other community-based initiatives providing support to forced migrants were also explored in the research. The previous research phase showed that there were several initiatives in each of the three countries from which relevant lessons could be drawn for the purpose of our study.

While CS programmes target beneficiaries of international protection, this was not necessarily the case for the other community-based initiatives included in our research. Many of these initiatives supported beneficiaries of temporary protection, while others worked with undocumented migrants or migrants with other residence statuses. Therefore, this report uses the broader term ‘forced migrants’ to encompass these groups. We use the term ‘forced migrant’ as defined by the European Migration Network (EMN, 2024b): “a person subject to a migratory movement in which an element of coercion exists, including threats to life and livelihood, whether arising from natural or man-made causes.”

This report discusses the results of the field research, gleaning insights into effective operational practices to be integrated into CS tools and models. It also makes recommendations to address weaknesses identified through the desk and field research. The assessment specifically considers five thematic areas: the engagement of key stakeholders, including landlords and real estate agencies; the recruitment and selection of community sponsors; the need for training and support for sponsors; effective matching criteria; and the availability and verification of housing.

¹ The findings are presented in the report Van Dam, S., & Schrooten, M. (Eds.). (2025). *Reinforcing integration through sponsorship enhancement: Literature study on community sponsorship in Belgium, Italy and Lithuania*. Vilnius: International Organization for Migration (IOM).



This report is one of the few studies that gathered insights from both forced migrants and volunteers via a survey simultaneously disseminated in three EU Member States. The evidence generated will inform the development of toolkits and clear guidelines for existing or prospective sponsorship schemes to support access to housing for beneficiaries of international protection and facilitate their transition from accommodation facilities provided by competent authorities. The creation of such toolkits and guidelines is the primary focus of the next phase of the RISE project. More broadly, the findings strengthen the evidence base on effective practices and methods for sponsor mobilisation, matching and housing identification in CS models.

2. METHODOLOGY

This report is based on research conducted between April 2024 and November 2024 in Belgium, Italy and Lithuania. In a first phase, a comprehensive literature review was conducted and existing data on the reception and housing challenges faced by beneficiaries of international protection in Belgium, Italy and Lithuania were analysed (see Van Dam & Schrooten, 2025). This desk research aimed to present the context of the three countries involved in the project in terms of migration, housing and experiences with community sponsorship, as well as to provide recommendations.

Building on the insights of this desk research, two surveys were developed, targeting individuals who, since 2015, have been involved in a CS programme or other community-based initiatives supporting forced migrants, as either (1) volunteers or (2) beneficiaries. To complement the quantitative survey results, focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews were employed in each of the three countries, to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of volunteers, forced migrants, landlords, policy makers and representatives from Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and governmental institutions. These qualitative methods also addressed information gaps identified in the survey data.

2.1. Quantitative surveys

The surveys aimed to gather data on the current state of sponsorship schemes, focusing on various types of social, practical and emotional support in the integration journey of forced migrants. They also sought to identify challenges and gaps, as well as evidence of effective housing solutions, to inform the design of the project's interventions in later phases.

The target population for the volunteer survey included individuals in Belgium, Italy and Lithuania who have hosted or supported a forced migrant through CS programmes or other community-based initiatives – as a volunteer, not a paid professional – at least once since 2015. This specific time span was chosen because 2015/2016 represented the latest period during which a very high number of refugees and asylum seekers arrived in Europe (before the large-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022), sparking the widespread appearance of CS-like initiative to support and host forced migrants. Similarly, the target population for the forced migrant survey included individuals who have been hosted or supported through CS programmes or other community-based initiatives in Belgium, Italy and Lithuania since 2015.

Both surveys were designed by Odisee University of Applied Sciences and reviewed by other project partners and external stakeholders. The surveys were also tested in Belgium, Lithuania and Italy before being launched. Qualtrics was used as the online platform, ensuring compliance with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) regulations and IOM Data Protection Principles. Due to ethical considerations, only adult respondents were targeted.

The surveys were initially developed in English and then translated into other relevant languages to ensure they could be used in the three project countries, achieving maximum representativity and accessibility for the targeted groups. The volunteer survey was available in Dutch, English, French, Italian, Lithuanian, Russian and Ukrainian. The forced migrant survey was available in Arabic, Dari, Dutch, English, Farsi, French, Italian, Lithuanian, Pashto, Russian and Ukrainian. All translations were done by the IOM offices involved in the project.

Both surveys were disseminated at the national level in the three countries. A multi-channel, stratified cluster sampling method was used to select respondents by spreading the survey through expert intermediary organizations with contacts with volunteers and/or beneficiaries and through email, social media, websites, and in-person. Diaspora-led organizations also played a pivotal role in reaching relevant groups. Each channel reached different segments of the volunteer and forced migrant target populations. In Belgium and Lithuania, the online survey methodology was complemented by in-person surveys and phone surveys to reach the targeted number of responses. The surveys were collected from 9 October to 17 November 2024 (volunteer survey) and from 29 October to 17 November 2024 (forced migrant survey).

The volunteer survey included questions about motivation and process, the support offered, the challenges encountered, future engagement and the personal situation of the respondents. The forced migrant survey included questions about the matching process, the support received, the challenges faced, post-hosting experience and the personal situation of the respondents. Most questions were closed-ended, with several predetermined response categories. For some questions, the respondents had the option of choosing 'other' and providing further explanation. The survey ended with an open question asking whether respondents wished to add anything regarding their experience.

The objective of the survey roll-out was to reach a minimum of 400 survey responses across both surveys. This objective was largely exceeded, with a total number of 950 responses: 463 for the forced migrant survey and 487 for the volunteer survey.

Table 1. Number of responses by survey and by country (absolute numbers)

Country	Forced migrants	Volunteers	Total
Belgium	176	242	418
Italy	34	119	153
Lithuania	238	65	303
Other/unknown	15	61	76
Total	463	487	950

The other/unknown category refers to respondents who indicated they did not live in any of the three countries targeted by the survey or did not wish to complete the question on their country of residence. Their responses were not included in the analysis.

2.2. Focus groups discussions and interviews

To facilitate an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and attitudes on past operational CS experiences, and to assess landlords' and real estate actors' attitudes, focus group discussions (FGDs) and semi-structured interviews with a broad range of strategic stakeholders were conducted. These stakeholders included forced migrants supported through CS-like schemes, volunteers, representatives from civil society organizations and governmental institutions, as well as landlords and real estate agencies. The effective mobilisation of these stakeholders in the three countries was conducted through partnerships and snowball sampling.

For practical reasons, the interviews and FGDs were organised separately in each country. The interview guide for volunteers and forced migrants included the following themes: arrival and matching, the support received, challenges about integration and housing, community sponsorship, and experience after support received. The interview guide for representatives from civil society organizations and governmental institutions included questions about the practice of CS and opportunities and challenges. The interview guide for landlords included questions about the housing market and migrants, challenges for migrants in finding housing, support for migrants and landlords, and good practices.

In Belgium, two FGDs were organised: one with representatives from civil society organizations and governmental institutions (six participants: three men, three women) and one with forced migrants (eight participants: three men, five women, all beneficiaries of temporary protection). Additionally, nine volunteers (four women, five men) and four landlords/real estate agencies (three men, one woman) were interviewed. In Italy, two FGDs were organised: one with migrants and activists who hold a

community radio in a social centre in Rome (five participants: three men and two women) and one with activists and policymakers (nine participants: five men and four women). Furthermore, 46 people were interviewed: nineteen volunteers and professional workers of refugee reception facilities (eleven men and eight women), six scholars (five men and one woman), four policymakers (two men and two women), four activists for housing rights (one man and three women), five operators of humanitarian corridors (three men and two women), four operators of the real estate market (two men and two women), and four forced migrants (four men). In Lithuania, two FGDs were organised: one with volunteers (seven women) and one with forced migrants (five participants, all beneficiaries of temporary protection, all women). Additionally, ten representatives from CSOs and governmental institutions were interviewed (nine women, one man).

Table 2. Number of participants in the FGDs and interviews by country and total (absolute numbers)

Type	Target group	Belgium	Lithuania	Italy	Total
FGDs	Volunteers and activists		7		7
	Migrants	8	5	5	18
	CSOs, policy makers and governmental institutions	6		9	15
Individual interviews	Volunteers and activists	9		23	32
	Migrants			4	4
	CSOs, policy makers and scholars		10	15	25
	Landlords and real estate market	4		4	8
Total		27	22	55	109

2.3. Limitations

The research design is subject to some limitations. Due to the absence of a sampling frame for the survey, it is difficult to determine the extent to which the survey results are representative of all forced migrants or volunteers who have experience with CS or informal support. As described above, the survey was disseminated through various channels. The survey was distributed through partners and social media channels, which may not have fully captured the perspectives of all relevant individuals or groups.

People who read the call to participate in the surveys were free to choose whether or not to do so. Accordingly, the respondent sample of the surveys was subject to self-selection, which can be influenced

by various factors. Respondents, for instance, are likely to be individuals with access to a computer, tablet or smartphone and an internet connection. They are also likely to have an interest in (aspects of) hosting or supporting forced migrants, be motivated to complete the survey, and possibly have a particular positive or negative experience.

Furthermore, while the non-response rate was very low in the first part of the survey, it increased as the survey progressed. Given the flow of the survey – where questions presented to respondents depended on their previous answers – and the possibility to skip questions, the number of answers per question varied. In the next sections, the analysis makes explicit the number of ‘n’ per each of the findings presented.

A notable challenge in the focus group discussions and individual interviews was the variation in the profiles of respondents reached. In Lithuania and Belgium, the forced migrants interviewed were predominantly from Ukraine, whereas the Italian interviews included a more diverse range of nationalities and profiles. While this discrepancy may affect the cross-country analysis, it also provides valuable insights into the experiences of a broad range of stakeholders regarding the current state of sponsorship schemes, their inspiring practices, and the remaining challenges and gaps.

3. INSIGHTS FROM BELGIUM

Before presenting the research findings for Belgium, it is worth contextualising the pressures and challenges Belgium faces in the reception and housing of beneficiaries of international protection and present the current state of CS in the country. To do so, the next paragraph summarises the chapter *Refugee reception and housing in Belgium* from a previous RISE report (Van Dam et al., 2025).

3.1. Reception and housing challenges

Belgium's asylum policies are federally managed. The Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (Fedasil) oversees national reception capacity, providing material assistance (accommodation, meals, social and medical support, etc.) to asylum applicants. The reception network includes collective accommodation centres and Local Accommodation Initiatives (LAIs). In 2021 many reception centres were closed, leaving Belgium unprepared for the subsequent increase in asylum requests and an accumulation of cases at the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRS), leading to prolonged stays in reception centres (Geldof et al., 2023; Rea et al., 2019; Sewell et al., 2023). This resulted in many asylum seekers being denied basic human rights in recent years, drawing criticism and legal action against the Belgian state.

After receiving asylum, refugees are expected to find independent housing, often on the private rental market (Wyckaert et al., 2020). Belgium faces a significant housing crisis characterised by rising demand, limited supply, and geographic price disparities (Godart et al., 2023; Heylen, 2023). Social housing represents a small share of the housing stock, with long waiting lists and stringent eligibility requirements (Housing Europe, 2021). Beneficiaries of international protection face numerous obstacles in the private housing market, including discrimination and financial barriers (Beeckmans & Geldof, 2024; El Moussawi, 2024; Verstraete, 2024). As formal housing options dwindle, squats have become a precarious solution for many forced migrants.

Since 2022, the Belgian federal government has taken measures to increase reception capacity and streamline asylum procedures. However, the reception network remains strained. Recent housing policy measures include rent regulation, tenant protection, and financial support, but challenges persist.

3.2. Community sponsorship in Belgium

CS in Belgium takes three forms:

Figure 1. Community sponsorship and adjacent initiatives in Belgium



1. Resettlement-centred community sponsorship: Coordinated by Fedasil and Caritas International, this programme supports provision of accommodation through CS to vulnerable resettled refugees;
2. Humanitarian corridors: Facilitated by Sant'Egidio, this initiative provides safe and legal transfers for refugees and support in terms of reception and integration into Belgian society;
3. Higher education pathway: A programme ran by Fedasil, Caritas International and Belgian universities, offering refugee students the opportunity to continue their studies in Belgium. The project provides comprehensive support for refugee students, including housing.

Additionally, several solidarity practices like BELRefugees and private accommodation initiatives for displaced Ukrainians play vital roles in supporting refugees and other forced migrants.

3.3. Findings from the quantitative research

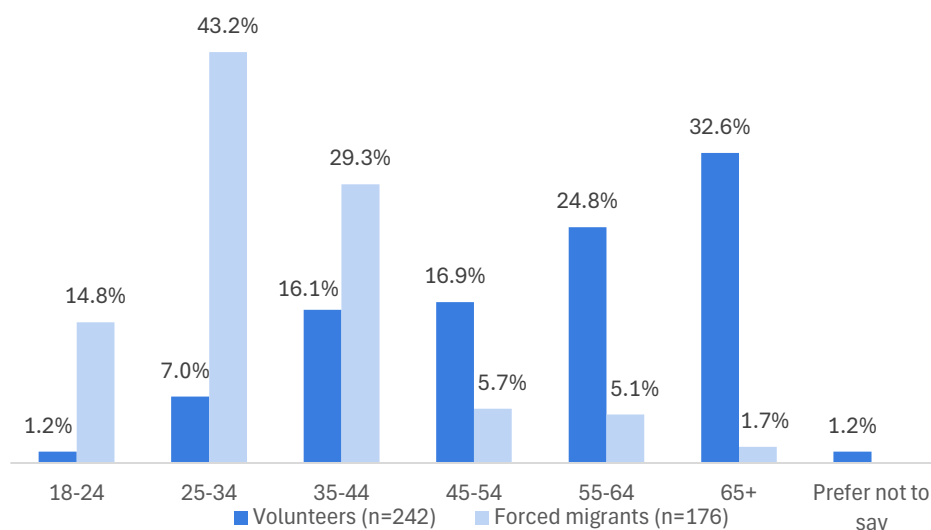
The quantitative findings from the survey conducted in Belgium among volunteers and forced migrants, respectively, are presented in this section.

3.3.1. Profile of the respondents

This section outlines the demographic profile of 418 respondents who participated in the surveys. The analysis is based on responses from 242 volunteers and 176 forced migrants who reside in Belgium. Most respondents of the volunteer survey are female (56.2%), while males represent 41.3 per cent and others 2.4 per cent, referring to diverse gender identities. Most of the respondents are aged 45 years and above.

In the survey for forced migrants, the majority (51.7%) of the respondents were male, 45.5 per cent were female, and 1.7 per cent identified as other. Contrary to the volunteers, most of the forced migrants are aged 44 years and below.

Figure 2. Respondents by age and by survey in Belgium

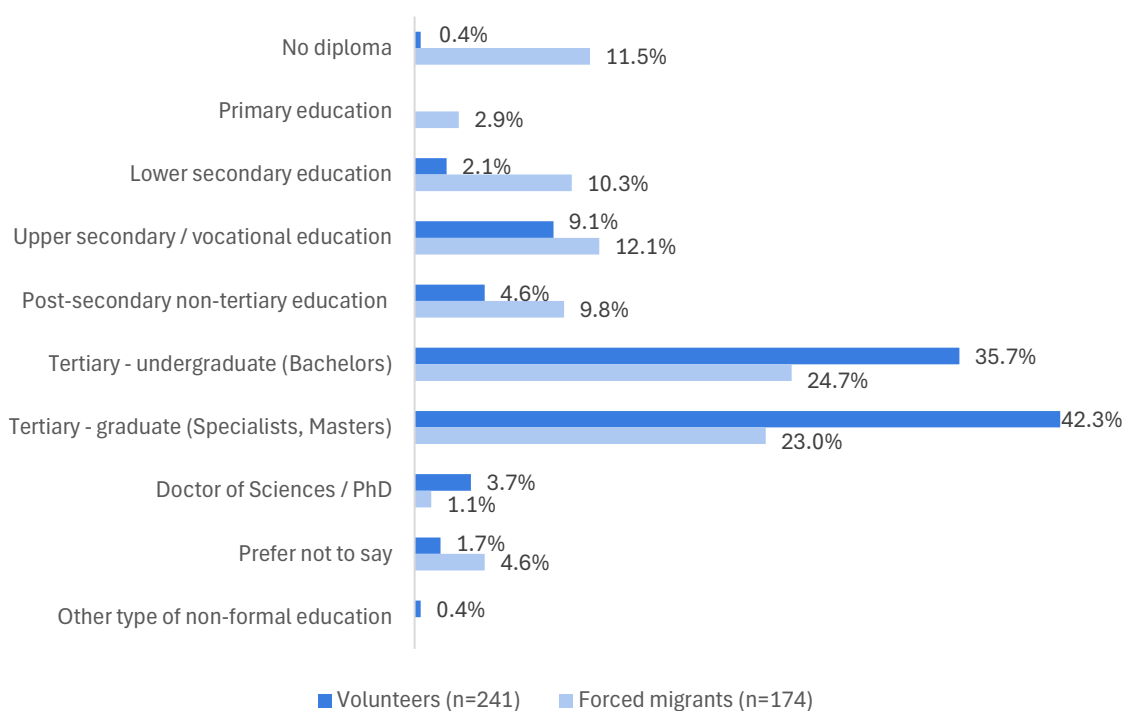


Education, work and income

Among volunteers, there is a strong over-representation of individuals with a higher education degree, comprising 81.7 per cent of the respondents. Additionally, 9.1 per cent of the respondents had an upper secondary school diploma as their highest attained level of education, while just over 2 per cent had a lower secondary school diploma as their highest attained level of education.

Among forced migrants, individuals with a higher education degree comprise 47.7 per cent of the respondents. Almost one quarter (24.7%) of respondents have attained a tertiary undergraduate degree (Bachelor's), making it the most common educational level. This is closely followed by those with a tertiary graduate degree (Master's or Specialist), who constitute 23 per cent of the respondents. A smaller proportion of respondents, 11.5 per cent, reported having no degree, while 10.3 per cent completed lower secondary education and 12.1 per cent have completed upper secondary or vocational education.

Figure 3. Highest attended level of education of respondents by survey in Belgium (%)



Regarding work situation of the volunteers (n=242), over 43.8 per cent are employed, 9.1 per cent are self-employed, while another 40 per cent are retired. This implies that they are volunteers in their free time, while they are in employment or retired. More than 80 per cent of the volunteers indicate that they can cope with their expenses very well to extremely well. In contrast, less than 13 per cent reported that they can get by only slightly well to not well at all. This suggests that the majority of the volunteers participating in the survey are financially comfortable.

Among the forced migrants (n=174), almost half (49.4%) are currently employed, with 12.6 per cent of these working irregularly, 1.7 per cent of the respondents to this question preferred not to answer, and another two people did not respond to the question at all. This might imply that the share of irregular workers may be slightly underestimated. Additionally, 6.9 per cent are students and 39.7 per cent are currently unemployed. Only 1.7 per cent of the forced migrants are retired. Most indicate that they find it very difficult to rather difficult (72.9%) to cope with their expenses, while less than 23.5 per cent reported that they can get by rather easily to very easily.

Nationality and place of residence in Belgium

The majority (83%) of the volunteers have Belgian nationality. The remaining 17 per cent represent a diverse range of nationalities, with no single nationality being significantly more represented than others.

Among the forced migrants surveyed, the majority are either Afghan (37.5%) or Ukrainian (26.7%), followed by Palestinian (22.2%), Syrian (4%) and Belgian (2.8%).

Respondents among volunteers and forced migrants are residing all across Belgium.

Table 3. Locations of residence of the volunteers and forced migrants in Belgium (absolute numbers)

Province	Volunteer respondents	Forced migrant respondents
Antwerp	37	17
Brussels Capital Region	29	56
East-Flanders	65	54
Flemish Brabant	24	4
Hainaut	3	4
Liège	11	6
Limburg	16	1
Luxembourg	2	0
Namur	1	3
Walloon Brabant	1	4
West-Flanders	38	21
Unknown	15	6
Total	242	176

Forced migrants' arrival in Belgium

Most forced migrants arrived in Belgium between one and three years before filling out the survey (63.4%). While 17.4 per cent arrived between four and five years before the survey, 13.4 per cent arrived more than five years ago. Only 5.8 per cent arrived during the year prior to filling out the survey (n=176).

A big share of forced migrants arrived in Belgium alone (40.8%). About one fifth arrived with one or more children (minors under the age of 18) from their core and/or extended family (21.8%); another fifth arrived with other adults from their core and/or extended family (20.4%). Approximately one in ten forced migrants (11.7%) arrived in Belgium with other adults who are not family members, for instance a friend. Only 1.9 per cent arrived here with children who are not family members (n=176).

Although the reasons for leaving their country vary, most respondents came to Belgium seeking international protection (79.5%). For others, having family already living in Belgium was a reason for coming (13.1%). A few respondents refer to coming to Belgium for studies (4%) or to join a partner

(0.6%). For some (2.8%), the reasons were more complex. For instance, they arrived with combined reasons of asylum and work or studies; or they were in Belgium for vacation when a war had started in their home country and returning suddenly became difficult.

3.3.2. Volunteers' path to offering support

This section provides a comprehensive overview of the various aspects of volunteer engagement in supporting forced migrants. It begins by examining the motivations behind the decision to volunteer, to then exploring how volunteers become involved and how they were selected and trained.

Motivations of volunteers to support forced migrants

The motives of volunteers in the field of migration and asylum were examined with reference to ten items, based on previous research (Schrooten et al., 2022). For each item an average score was calculated.

The data reveal that a strong sense of moral duty is evident, with more than half (58.5%) of respondents feeling a great extent of moral duty to provide humanitarian assistance. A majority (54.4%) reported feeling better about themselves to some extent as a reason for getting engaged in support with forced migrants, and 24.5 per cent felt this to a great extent. When it comes to feeling connected to forced migrants in general, for nearly half (49.6%) of the respondents, feeling connected was somewhat a reason for them to supporting forced migrants, while for 25.6 per cent this was the case to a great extent. Also, 42.6 per cent of respondents somewhat wanted to learn about asylum, migration, and other cultures through first-hand experience, while 27 per cent felt this to a great extent.

For 50.6 per cent of respondents, their support for forced migrants was a critical act against the treatment of refugees in their country. Additionally, 34.4 per cent indicated that the government's call for help influenced their decision to volunteer, showing the impact of governmental appeals on volunteer participation.

At the same time, a significant majority (83.7%) did not view volunteering as a way to open doors for their future professional careers, suggesting that career advancement is not a primary motivator for most volunteers. Similarly, 78.8 per cent indicated that a personal connection with the specific individuals they supported before starting their volunteer work or having experienced similar suffering themselves (82.5%) was not the main motivation for them to support forced migrants. Additionally, more than half

(59.7%) of respondents noted that people close to them encouraging them to get involved in volunteering, was no reason at all to start supporting.

About 53 participants also noted down some qualitative comment on their motives to become a volunteer, with reasons ranging from the desire for social integration to values such as empathy, a sense of justice, and the encouragement of their local communities. They seek to help forced migrants integrate, combat prejudice, and contribute meaningfully to society.

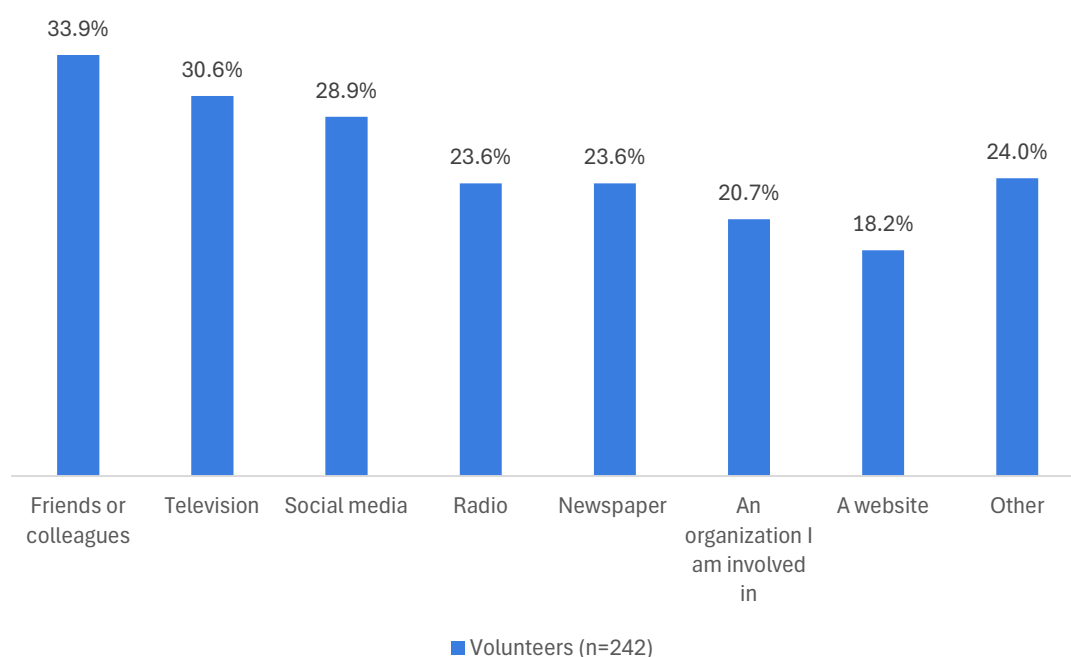
Table 4. Motivation for supporting forced migrants in Belgium (score and %)

Motive of volunteers	Average score (max. score is 4)	Not at all (1)	Very little (2)	Somewhat (3)	To a great extent (4)	n
I feel a moral duty to provide humanitarian assistance to people in need	3.51	1.3%	5.1%	35.2%	58.5%	236
Thanks to this experience, I feel better about myself	2.96	7.6%	13.5%	54.4%	24.5%	237
I feel connected to forced migrants in general	2.92	8.4%	16.8%	49.6%	25.6%	238
I want to learn about asylum, migration and/or other cultures through concrete, first-hand experience	2.84	12.2%	18.1%	42.6%	27.0%	237
My choice to support forced migrants is a critical act against the way refugees are treated in this country	2.41	33.5%	15.9%	27.0%	23.6%	233
The government has called for help	1.99	51.5%	14.0%	18.7%	15.7%	235
People close to me have encouraged me to get involved in this volunteering work	1.68	59.7%	18.6%	15.7%	5.9%	236
I already had a personal connection with the forced migrants I support before starting to support them	1.44	78.8%	5.9%	7.6%	7.6%	236
I have experienced similar suffering myself in the past	1.32	82.5%	7.3%	5.6%	4.7%	234
I want to open doors for my future professional career	1.27	83.7%	8.6%	4.7%	3.0%	233
Other	2.63	39.5%	5.4%	8.9%	46.4%	56

How do people get involved as volunteers?

The most common way volunteers (n=242) heard about the opportunity to welcome forced migrants was through friends or colleagues (33.9%). Television was also a significant source (30.6%), and social media (28.9%). Traditional media like radio and newspapers were equally influential (23.6% each). Websites (18.2%) and organizations that individuals are involved in (20.7%) were less common sources. Other sources of information mentioned (24%) include personal encounters, such as meeting a Syrian couple after a Catholic mass, and involvement in local government or community initiatives. Some learned about volunteering through nearby reception centres, municipal announcements, libraries, and churches. Family and friends also played a role, as did personal experiences and motivations. Various media, including newsletters, apps, and town meetings, were cited, along with calls from the government and organizations like the Public Centre for Social Welfare (PCSW)² Additionally, some respondents were influenced by their own experiences with refugees or their professional backgrounds in education and social services.

Figure 4. Sources of information for involvement in welcoming forced migrants in Belgium (multiple answers possible, %)



Of all respondents (n=241), most became involved in supporting forced migrants by directly contacting the organization which coordinates support (41.5%). Others reached out to forced migrants themselves

² A PCSW – Openbaar Centrum voor Maatschappelijk Welzijn (OCMW) in Dutch, Centre Public d'Action Sociale (CPAS) in French – ensures a number of social services, including social assistance.

(17.4%), or they were already involved in an organization that provides such support (12.4%). Only a few were contacted by an organization with a request to help (8.7%).

Government-sponsored organizations played the most significant role in involving people as volunteers, with 55.7 per cent of respondents citing them. Informal networks were also notable, accounting for 10.7 per cent of involvement. NGOs influenced 7.4 per cent of respondents, while faith-based organizations (4%) and diaspora organizations (2.7%) played smaller roles. Additionally, 19.5 per cent of respondents mentioned other types of organizations, including local government bodies, educational institutions and various non-profits and community groups.

Those who became involved via participation in organizations (n=30) predominantly engaged with other organizations (30%) or government-sponsored organizations (26.7%). Among those who initiated contact (n=99), the vast majority connected with government-sponsored organizations (69.7%), with smaller proportions engaging informal networks (8.1%) or NGOs (7.1%). Individuals approached by organizations (n=20) displayed a broader distribution, with 30 per cent involved in government-sponsored organizations, 25 per cent in other organizations, and 20 per cent in informal networks.

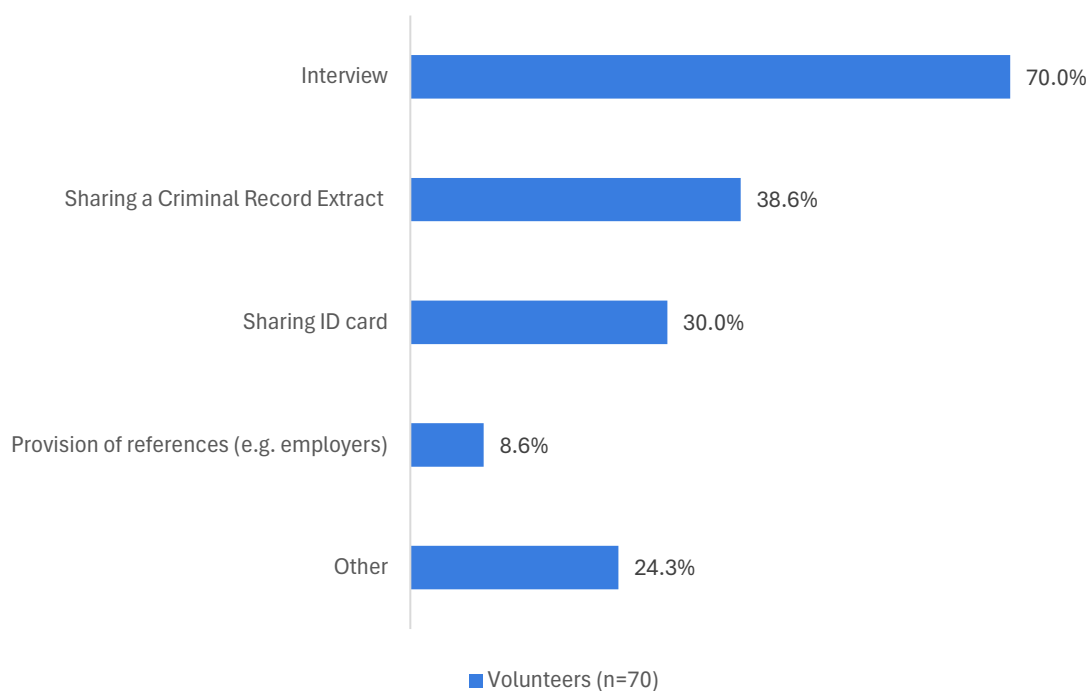
Other entree points include working at a refugee centre, being asked by a mutual friend or family member, attending municipal meetings, and responding to government campaigns for refugees from Ukraine. Personal motivation, professional roles, and community connections also played significant roles, with some individuals reaching out directly to offer support or being referred by official agencies.

Screening and preparation process

Of all valid responses (n=241), the majority of respondents (55.6%) was not screened before becoming a volunteer and 15.4 per cent were unsure if they had undergone any screening process. This suggests that more than half of the volunteers began their roles without a formal screening, which could have implications for the training and support provided to both volunteers and forced migrants.

Only 29 per cent of the volunteers indicated that they were screened (n=70). Most of them mentioned interviews as the most common screening method (70%). Sharing a criminal record extract was the next most frequent process (38.6%), followed by sharing an ID card (30%). Only 6 respondents provided references, such as from employers. Additionally, 24.3 per cent of the volunteers mentioned other types of screening processes, such as attending conversational sessions, signing charters, filling out surveys, and following safeguarding training, but also home inspections, informal visits or formal visits by social workers, long-term involvement with the organization, and municipal inspections were mentioned.

Figure 5. Screening processes of volunteers in Belgium (multiple answers possible, %)



Remarkably, only 35.5 per cent of volunteers in Belgium who offered private accommodation to forced migrants had their accommodation screened by an external organization, while 64.5 per cent did not undergo any screening.

Of all respondents (n=242), a significant majority (77.7%) did not receive any training or mentorship before their first contact with forced migrants and a small percentage (2.9%) did not remember if they had received any training. Only 19.4 per cent of the respondents had received training, which may include background information on international protection and migration procedures, trauma-informed care, and/or cultural background of the forced migrants. Among the respondents who received training or mentorship before their first contact with forced migrants, the majority found it rather relevant (45.7%) or highly relevant (37%), while only 10.9 per cent considered the training rather irrelevant, and 6.5 per cent highly irrelevant.

3.3.3. Forced migrants' path to support

Of all forced migrants who responded (n=176), one fourth stated that the support they received for housing or integration was provided by a government-sponsored organization (25.6%). Others referred to NGOs (14.8%) and informal networks (10.8%). Some also received support from faith-based organizations (2.3%), international organizations (2.3%), and diaspora organizations (1.1%). Additionally,

9.7 per cent of forced migrants specified other personalised and community-driven sources of support, such as neighbours or acquaintances, or important community members, like a priest.

How do people become beneficiaries of housing or integration support?

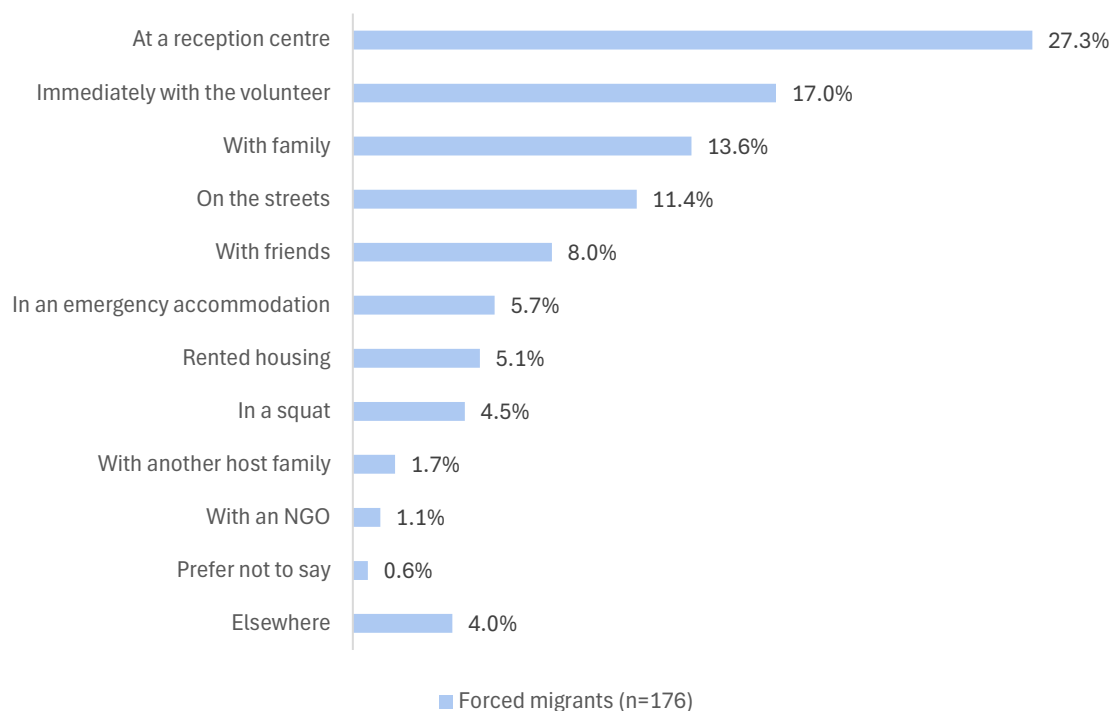
Forced migrants in Belgium (n=176) learned about the organization where they found housing or integration support through the standard pathway or procedure as resettled refugee (16.5%), social media (11.4%), governmental partners (9.7%), diaspora (8%), NGOs (2.8%) or embassies (0.6%). Some respondents were unsure (6.8%) about how they got in contact with the organization that supported them.

It is notable that the majority of the respondents (44.3%) indicated other sources or pathways on how they got in contact with the organization that provided housing or integration support. Many mentioned personal connections, such as friends, family, and relatives. Some specific examples include learning about the programme through friends who had previously travelled, and receiving information from volunteers in their country of origin. Others mentioned connections through educational or community networks, such as teachers or local organizations. This diversity in responses underscores the significant role that personal and community networks play in disseminating information about housing or integration support, often more so than formal channels.

Initial place of stay upon arrival

Upon arrival in Belgium, most respondents stayed at a reception centre (27.3%). Seventeen per cent stayed immediately with the volunteers, whereas 1.7 per cent of the respondents first stayed with another host family, before residing with current volunteers. Family support was also significant, with 13.6 per cent of forced migrants immediately staying with family members upon arrival. Friends provided accommodation for 8 per cent of the respondents, and 5.7 per cent stayed in emergency accommodation. However, a notable 11.4 per cent of forced migrants reported staying on the streets, indicating a concerning level of initial homelessness among new arrivals. Another 4.5 per cent stayed in squats.

Figure 6. Forced migrants' place of stay upon arrival in Belgium (%)



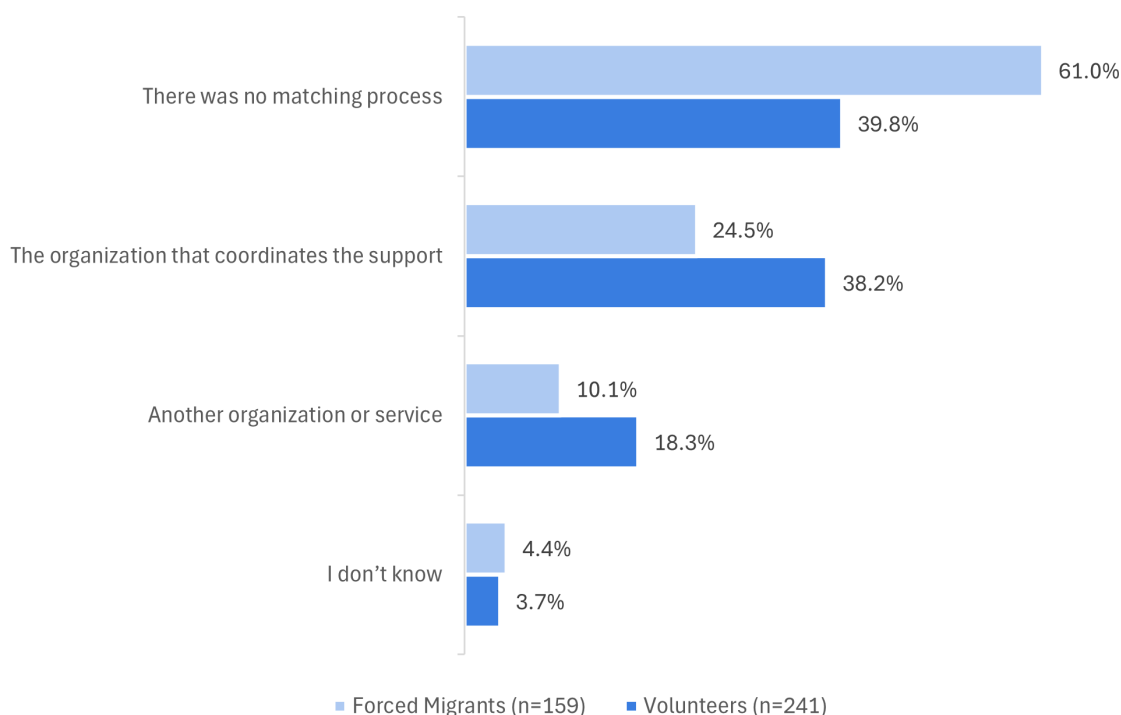
3.3.4. Matching process and criteria

In most cases, respondents – both volunteers (n= 241) and forced migrants (n=159) – state that there was no formal matching process (39.8% of the volunteers and 61% of the forced migrants). A few volunteers were unsure of how the matching was done (3.7%). Some forced migrants were matched through friends or acquaintances, or other individuals like guardians. Almost one fourth (24.5%) of the forced migrants indicated that the organization which provided support also coordinated their match with the volunteers, as is the case for 38.2 per cent of the volunteers. For 10.1 per cent of the forced migrants and 18.3 per cent of the volunteers, another organization did the matching. These ranged from local government bodies such as municipalities and social services (e.g., PCSW), to educational institutions (e.g., school directors), and non-profits like the Red Cross. Personal networks also played a significant role, with some respondents being contacted by family members, friends, or acquaintances. Additionally, some volunteers were connected through social media or directly by individuals living in Belgium.

Among forced migrants matched by the coordinating organization (n=39), the majority reported positive experiences, with 43.6 per cent as very positive, 35.9 per cent rating the support as rather positive and 20.5 per cent as rather negative. No one rated the experience as very negative. Those matched by

another organization (n=16) had an even higher percentage of very positive experiences (81.3%) and 18.8 per cent rather positive. From the individuals without a matching process (n=97), 58.8 per cent indicated very positive experiences and 34 per cent rather positive.

Figure 7. Matching actor in Belgium (%)

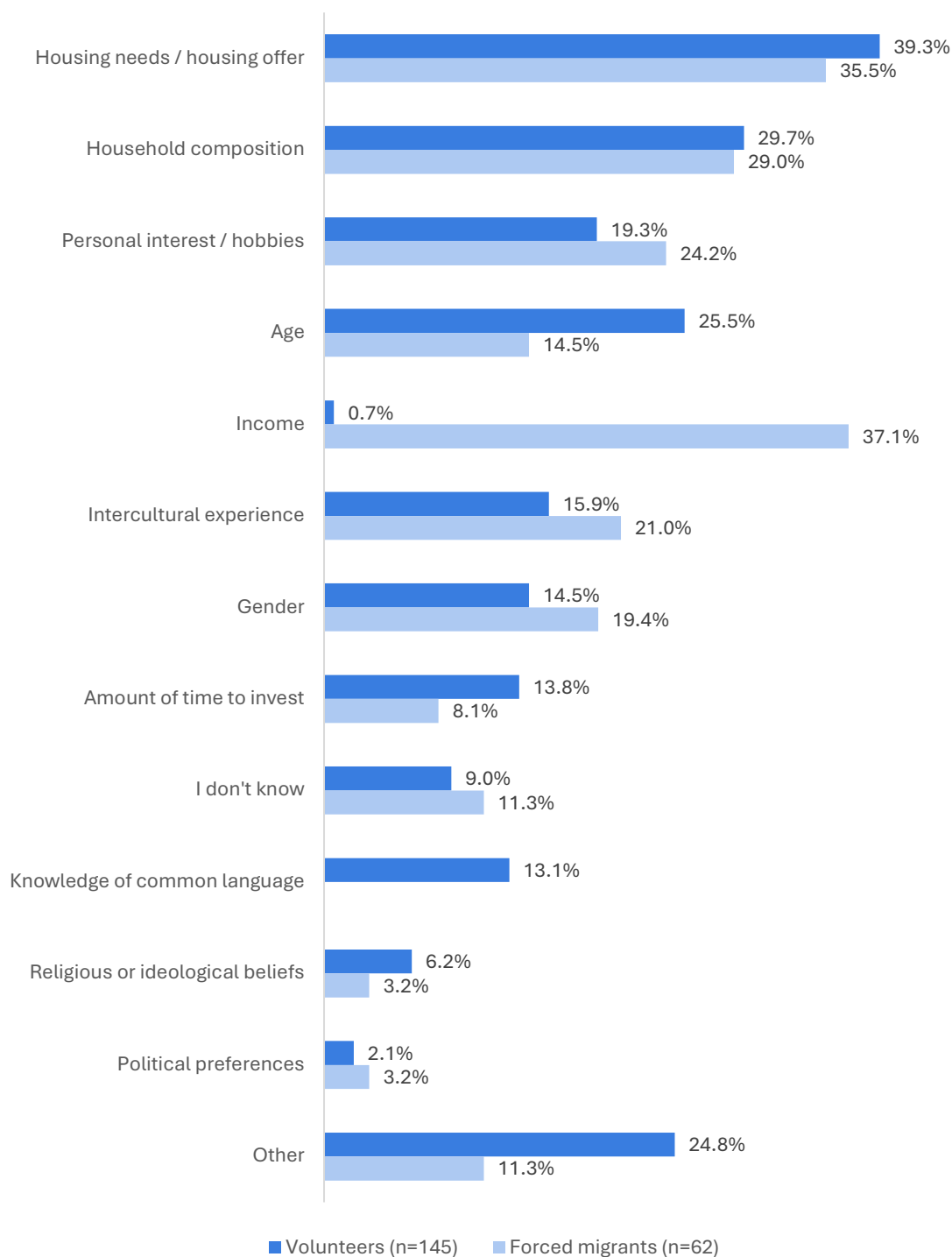


Both volunteers (n=145) and forced migrants (n=176) identified various criteria for matching. For volunteers, the most significant factors included housing needs or offers (39.3%), household composition (29.7%), age (25.5%), personal interests or hobbies (19.3%), and intercultural experience (15.9%). Gender (14.8%), the amount of time volunteers could invest (13.8%), and knowledge of a common language (13.1%) were also considered, while religious or ideological beliefs (6.2%) and political preferences (2.1%) were less influential. Practical considerations such as available space, personal and professional backgrounds, shared values, empathy, and proximity also played roles.

Forced migrants similarly emphasised housing needs and offers (40.3%), household composition (28.4%), and income (27.3%) as key factors. Personal interests or hobbies (24.4%) and intercultural experience (19.9%) were important, along with gender (15.3%), age (14.2%), and the amount of time to invest (8%).

Religious or ideological beliefs (5.7%) and political preferences (2.8%) were less commonly used. Additional criteria for forced migrants included family relations, language skills, shared nationality, and the presence of pets.

Figure 8. Matching criteria for volunteers and forced migrants in Belgium (multiple answers possible, %)



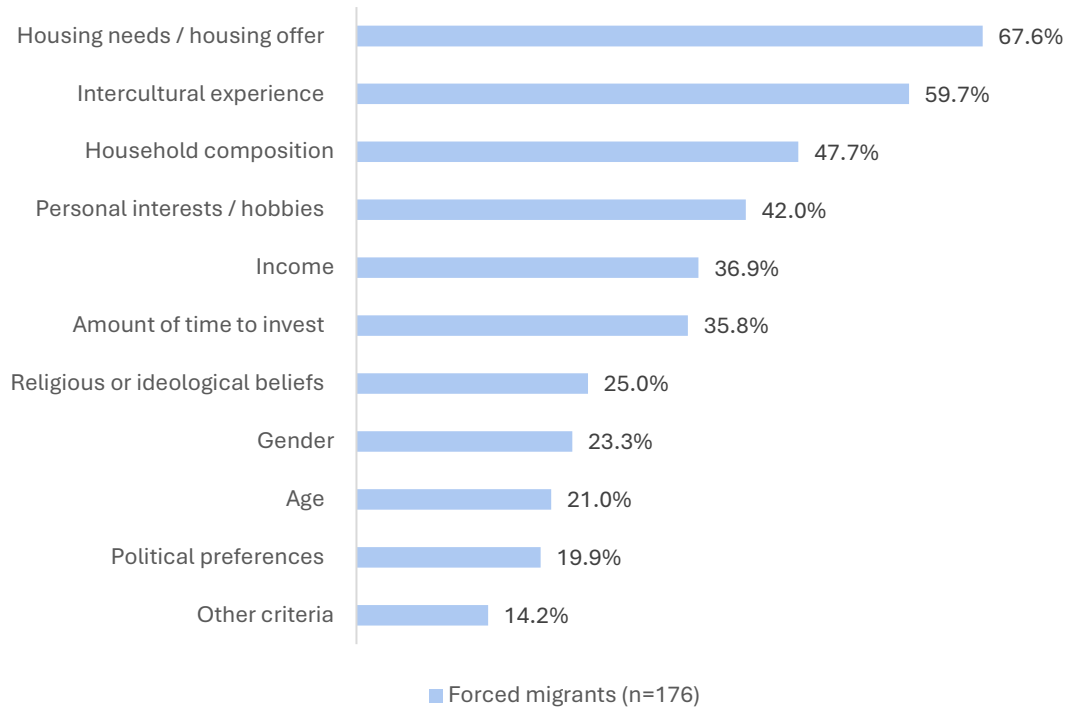
Of the 144 volunteers who declared there was a matching process, the majority state that the matching happened after the forced migrants had been in the country for a certain period (53.5%), as is the case for 69 per cent of forced migrants (n=105). For about one in four volunteers (26.4%) and forced migrants (23.8%), matches were made directly upon arrival. Only 13.2 per cent of the volunteers and 9.5 per cent forced migrants were matched before the forced migrants arrived in Belgium. Few volunteers (6.9%) or forced migrants (1%) were unsure about the timing of their matching.

With regards to the criteria used in the matching process, 35.5 per cent of the forced migrants and 39.3 per cent of the volunteers mentioned 'housing needs / housing offer' as a criterium in the matching process. Forced migrants also frequently mentioned (29%) the household composition. For volunteers this was 29.7 per cent. Personal interests / hobbies was another notable criterium for the forced migrants (24.2%) and the volunteers (19.3%). Intercultural experience was a criterium for 21 per cent of the forced migrants and 15.9 per cent of the volunteers. Other reported criteria are age (respectively 14.5% for forced migrants and 25.5 % for volunteers), gender (forced migrants 19.4%, volunteers 14.5%) and amount of time to invest (8.1% for forced migrants and 13.8% for volunteers). Criteria such as political preferences (forced migrants: 3.2%; volunteers: 2.1%) and religious or ideological beliefs (forced migrants: 3.2%; volunteers: 6.2%) were rarely considered. Some (11.3% of the forced migrants and 9% of the volunteers) were unsure about the criteria used.

Forced migrants were also asked which criteria they found important themselves for a good match. Their answers highlighted several key factors, with housing needs/housing offer being the most significant (67.6%). Intercultural experience (59.7%) is highly valued as well. Household composition (47.7%) and personal interests/hobbies (42%) are important for ensuring compatibility in daily life and fostering positive relationships. Also practical considerations such as income (36.9%) and the amount of time to invest (35.8%) are often mentioned.

Religious or ideological beliefs (25%), gender (23.3%), age (21%), and political preferences (19.9%) are less frequently mentioned but still important for some respondents. Twenty-five respondents point to additional criteria for a successful match with volunteers, such as respect, humanity and kindness, as well as language skills and mutual understanding, shared values or similar lifestyles, thereby emphasising the importance of personal qualities.

Figure 9. Criteria forced migrants in Belgium deem important for a successful match with volunteers (multiple answers possible, %)

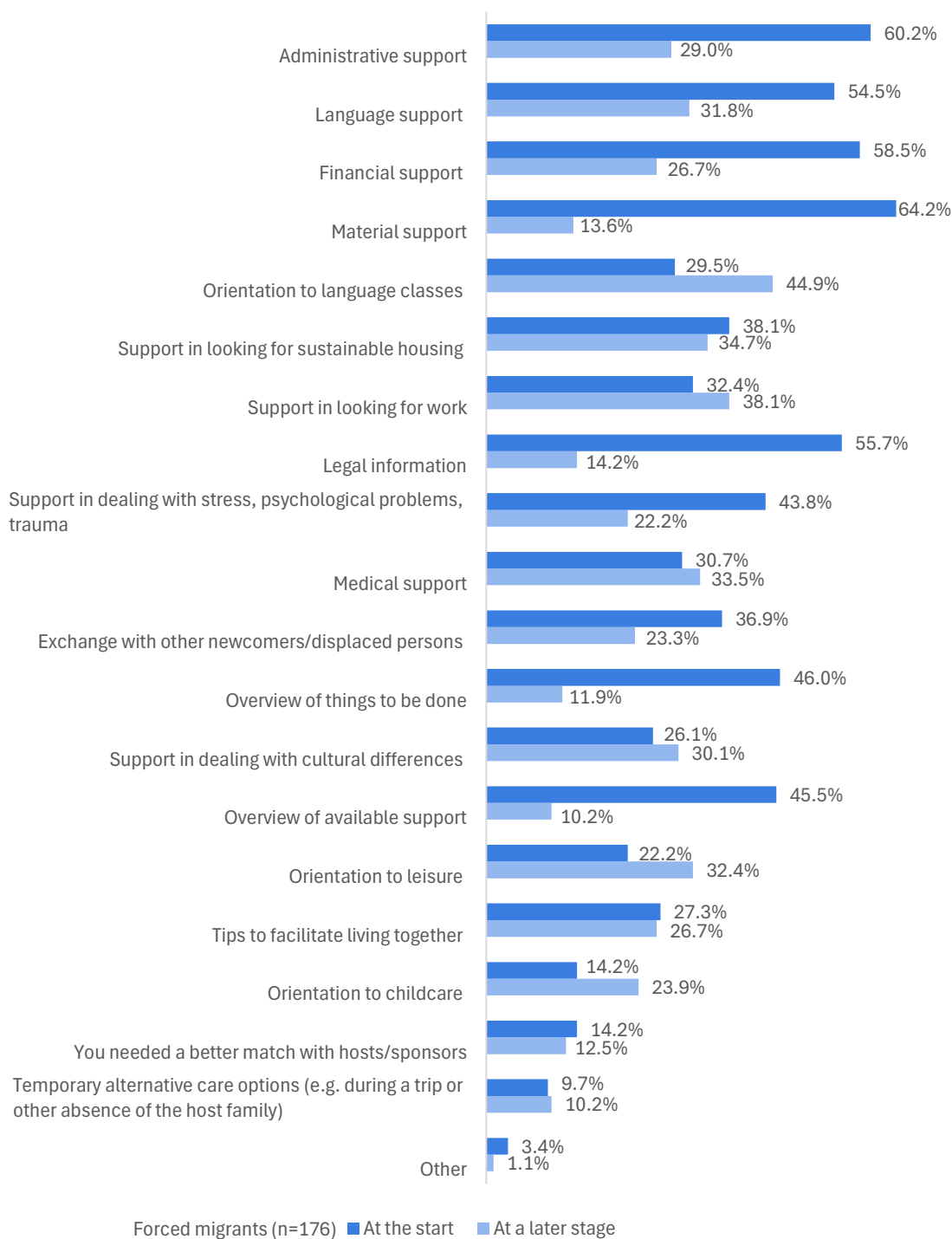


3.3.5. Support

Support needs of forced migrants

The needs of forced migrants (n=176) evolved between the start of their support period to a later stage. Initially, the most critical needs reported by forced migrants included material support (64.2%), financial support (58.5%), and administrative support (60.2%). Legal information (55.7%) and language support (54.5%) were also significant early on. Over time, the need for financial and material support decreased significantly, while the importance of medical support (33.5%) and support in dealing with cultural differences (34.7%) and sustainable housing (34.7%) remained high. The need for support in looking for work increased to 38.1 per cent, and orientation to language classes became more crucial at 44.9 per cent.

Figure 10. Needs experienced by forced migrants in Belgium (%)



Support offered by volunteers and received by forced migrants

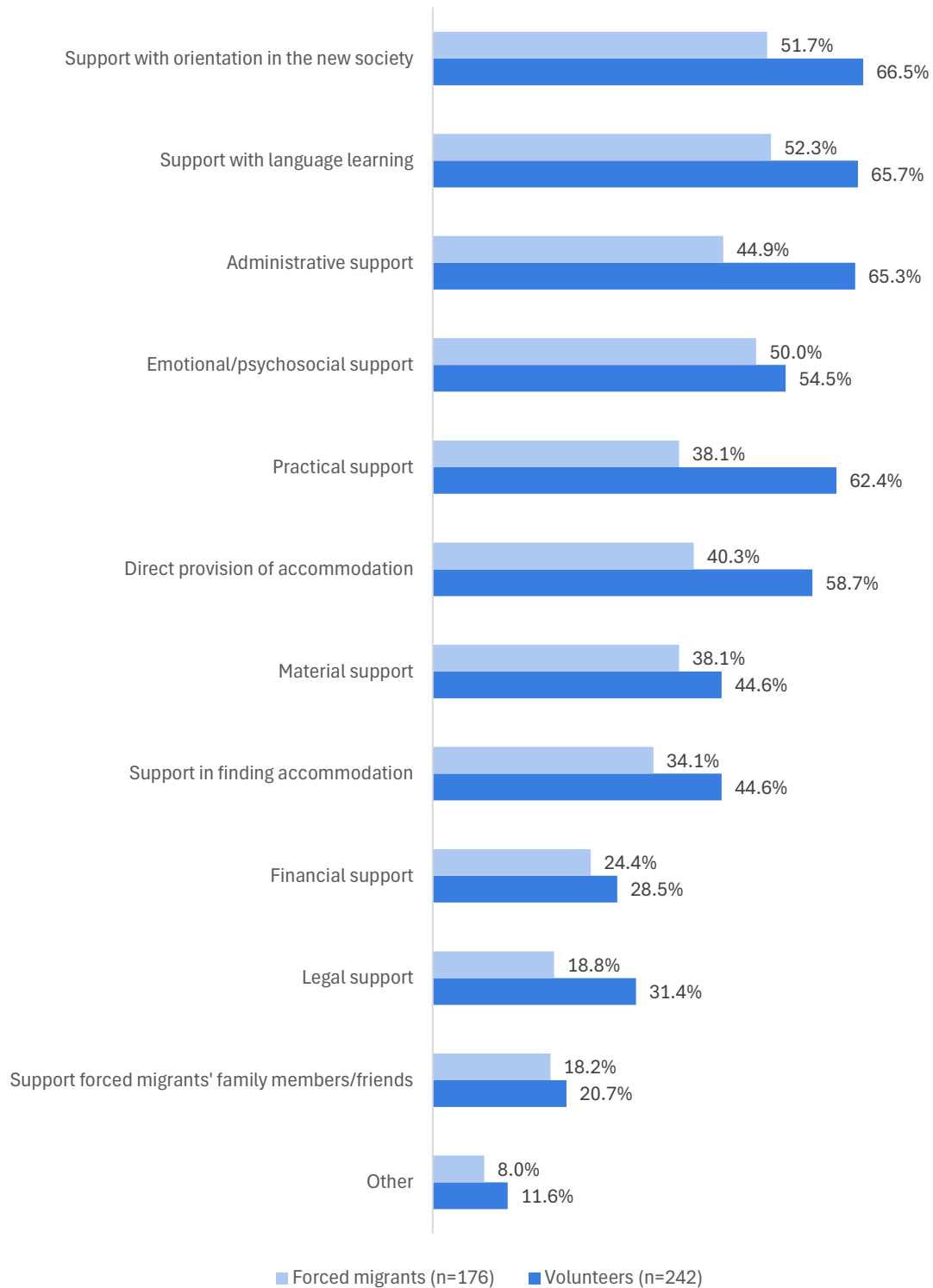
Volunteers provided different forms of support to forced migrants. Most commonly, they provided orientation in the new society (66.5%), language learning (65.7%), and administrative support (65.3%). Practical support, such as transport and orientation to services, was provided by 62.4 per cent of the volunteers, while 58.7 per cent directly provided accommodation. Emotional and psychosocial support was given by 54.5 per cent of volunteers, and both material support and help in finding accommodation were provided by 44.6 per cent. Legal support was offered by 31.4 per cent, and financial support by 28.5 per cent. Additionally, 20.7 per cent of volunteers supported family members or friends of the forced migrants, and 11.6 per cent provided other types of support – referring, for instance, to being a point of contact for all types of support, offering various small helps, act as buddies, and participate in group activities.

Similar to the volunteers, the main forms of support mentioned by forced migrants were language assistance (52.3%), support with orientation in the new society (51.7%) and emotional/psychosocial support (50%), administrative support (44.9%) and volunteers providing accommodation (40.3%). These figures suggest that in general, there is a good match between the needs of forced migrants and the support offered by volunteers.

At the time of the survey, of the 242 volunteers, 56.2 per cent reported they had supported forced migrants in the past and continued to do so currently. Meanwhile, 37.2 per cent of the volunteers indicated they had supported forced migrants in the past but no longer do so. Additionally, 6.6 per cent of the volunteers were supporting forced migrants for the first time.

Similarly, of the 176 forced migrants, 5.7 per cent were receiving support for the first time, 35.2 per cent of the forced migrants had previously received support and were still being supported, and 59.1 per cent of the forced migrants had received support in the past but were no longer receiving it. The majority of the respondents were residing in rented housing (64.8%). Other recurrent housing situations were 'staying with family or friends' (16.5%), 'staying in an emergency accommodation' (8.5%) and 'staying with a host family' (5.7%).

Figure 11. Support received by forced migrants and offered by volunteers in Belgium (%)



3.3.6. Private accommodation as a specific form of support

Among the types of support offered, private accommodation was also mentioned. A notable 40 per cent (71 out of 176) of the forced migrants mentioned that they were supported with private accommodation, while almost 59 per cent of the volunteers (142 out of 242) mentioned that they provided accommodation directly. Different types of living arrangements were mentioned:

- Volunteers and forced migrants are sharing one or more rooms in the same accommodation (64.1% in the survey of volunteers and 57.7% in the survey of forced migrants);
- Forced migrants are accommodated in separate accommodations (12.7% in the survey of volunteers, 19.7% in the survey of forced migrants);
- Forced migrants are accommodated in completely separate units within the same accommodation as the volunteers (12.7% in the survey of volunteers, 15.5% in the survey of forced migrants);
- Forced migrants are accommodated elsewhere, e.g. in forms of collective housing (6.2% in the survey of volunteers, 7% in the survey of forced migrants).

Duration and termination of accommodation period

In comparing the data from volunteers and forced migrants regarding the duration of accommodation, notable differences and similarities are evident. Among the volunteers (n=142), 43.7 per cent provided accommodation for more than one year, while of all forced migrants (n=71), only 14.1 per cent reported staying for this duration. While the most common hosting period for forced migrants was two to six months (56.3%), only 35.2 per cent of the volunteers reported the same duration. Additionally, 14.1 per cent of volunteers accommodated for seven to twelve months, closely matching the 16.9 per cent of forced migrants who reported this duration. Short-term stays of one week to one month were less common among volunteers (6.3%) compared to forced migrants (11.3%). Very short stays of less than one week were rare for both groups, with 0.7 per cent of volunteers and 1.4 per cent of forced migrants reporting such durations.

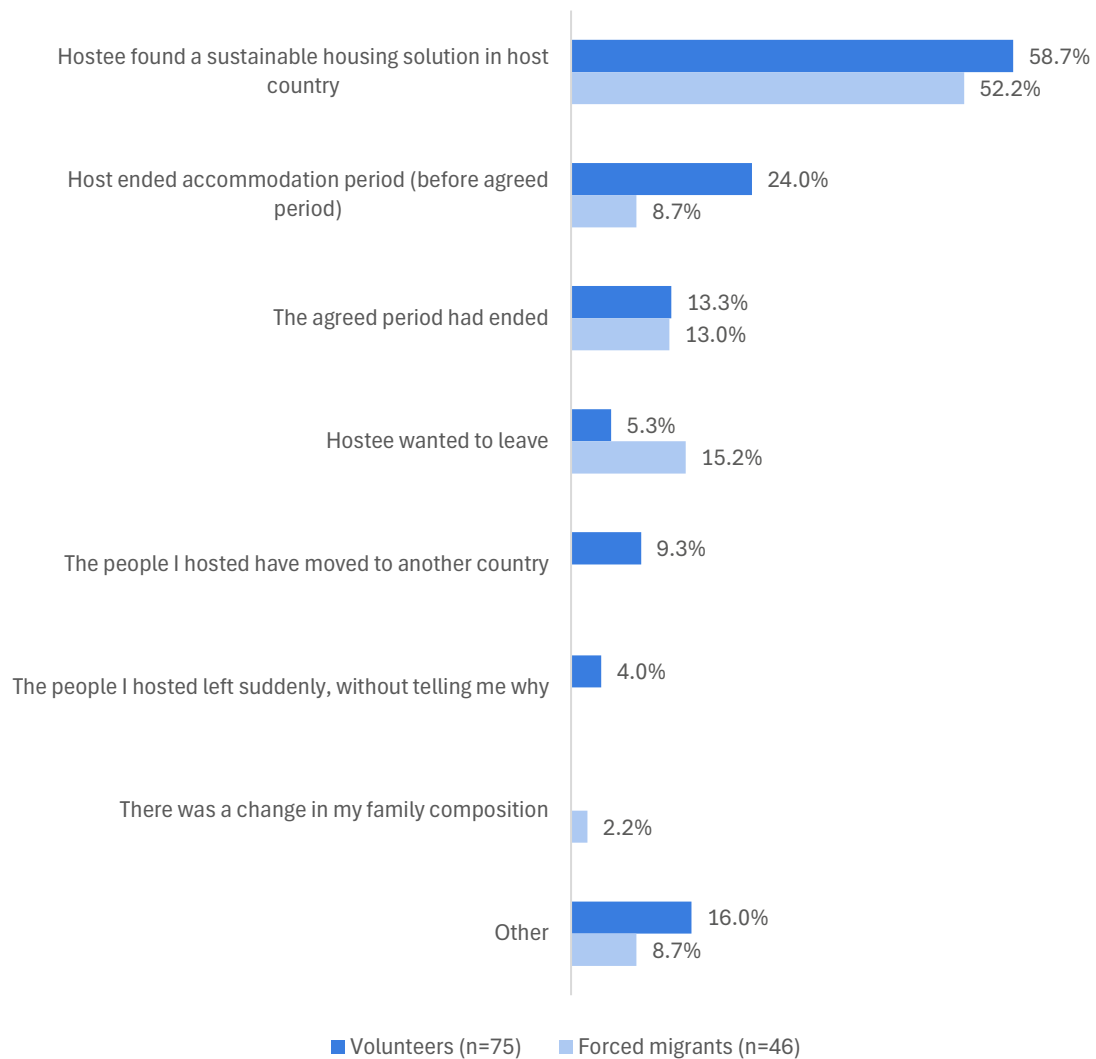
The most common reason for ending the accommodation period was that the people hosted found a sustainable housing solution in the country (58.7% of the volunteers and 52.2% of the forced migrants). Moving to another country was cited by 9.3 per cent of the volunteers but not by forced migrants.

However, while 24 per cent of the volunteers ended the accommodation period on their initiative, only 8.7 per cent of the forced migrants reported the volunteers ending the accommodation period as the

reason. Additionally, 5.3 per cent of the volunteers stated that the people they hosted wanted to leave themselves, compared to 15.2 per cent of the forced migrants who chose to leave on their own accord. The agreed period ending was cited by 13.3 per cent of the volunteers and 13 per cent of the forced migrants, showing some alignment. Other reasons include volunteers reporting that the people they hosted left suddenly without explanation (43 of the volunteers) and various other reasons (16% of the volunteers). Among forced migrants, one respondent mentioned a change in family composition (2.2%). 8.7 per cent of the forced migrants cited other reasons: either they found other, however temporary, accommodation or they moved to an emergency reception centre that was set up. In one case, the forced migrants' group of twelve people was too large to prolong the stay with the volunteers.

Of all forced migrants hosted in private accommodation (n=47), the majority continued to receive support from the volunteers after the accommodation period ended (55.3%). Another 19.1 per cent of forced migrants reported that support and follow-up were provided by an organization or service – mostly a PCSW or the local municipality. However, 23.4 per cent of forced migrants indicated that the support ended completely.

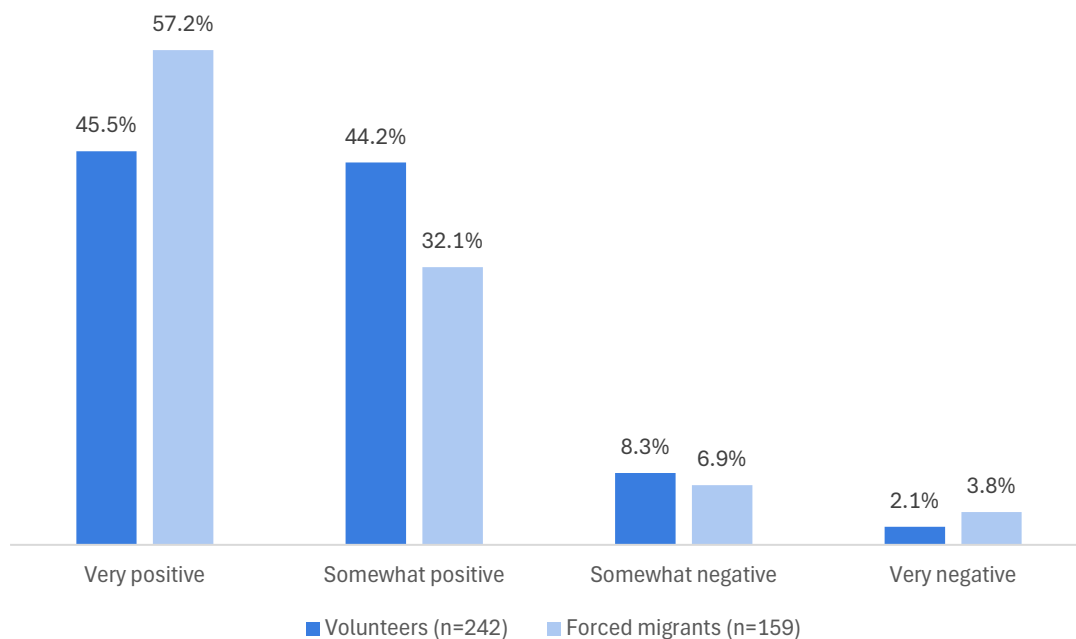
Figure 12. Reason for termination of hosting period according to volunteers and forced migrants in Belgium (%)



3.3.7. Overall experience

Comparing the overall experiences of volunteers and forced migrants in Belgium reveals some interesting insights. A significant majority of both groups had positive experiences. Among volunteers (n=242), 45.5 per cent reported their experience as very positive and 44.2 per cent as somewhat positive, totalling nearly 90 per cent positive feedback. Forced migrants (n=159) also had a high rate of positive experiences, with 57.2 per cent rating their experience as very positive and 32.1 per cent as rather positive, totalling 89.3 per cent. On the negative side, experiences are quite similar as well: 8.3 per cent of volunteers had somewhat negative experiences and 2.1 per cent had very negative experiences, while 6.9 per cent of forced migrants had rather negative experiences and 3.8 per cent had very negative experiences. As discussed later (3.3.9 Future engagement of volunteers), most volunteers demonstrate a high willingness to engage again in the future.

Figure 13. Overall experience of volunteers and forced migrants in Belgium (%)



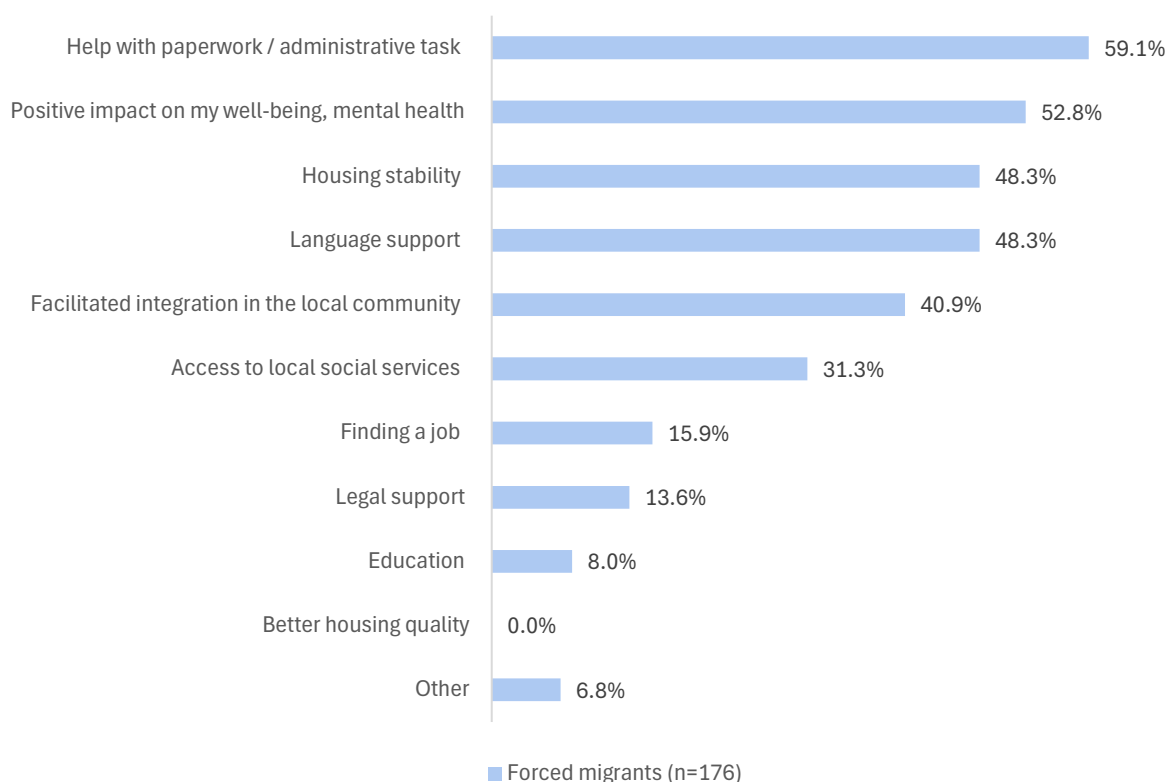
Respondents living in separate accommodations solely for their use (n=14) reported the highest levels of satisfaction, with 64.3 per cent rating their experience as very positive and 28.6 per cent as rather positive. Those living in a completely separate unit within the host's accommodation (n=11) also expressed high satisfaction, with 54.5 per cent rating their experience as very positive and 27.3 per cent as rather positive, though 18.2 per cent described it as very negative. Respondents sharing one or more rooms with their hosts (n=41) showed relatively balanced satisfaction levels, with 56.1 per cent rating their experience as very positive and 36.6 per cent as rather positive. However, individuals accommodated elsewhere (n=5) reported mixed experiences.

Among the volunteers, those providing separate accommodations exclusively for the forced migrants reported the highest percentage of positive experiences, with 33.3 per cent describing their experience as somewhat positive and 55.6 per cent as very positive. Similarly, when hosting in a separate unit within the host's living space, 27.8 per cent reported somewhat positive experiences and 61.1 per cent very positive. In contrast, hosts who shared accommodations and rooms with forced migrants had a mixed distribution, with 56 per cent expressing somewhat positive experiences and only 27.5 per cent reporting very positive outcomes. Lastly, hosts who accommodated forced migrants elsewhere reported a high percentage of positive experiences as well, with 20 per cent somewhat positive and 60 per cent very

positive. Overall, hosting arrangements that allow for greater privacy and separation for both parties seem to correspond with more positive experiences for the volunteers.

Forced migrants were asked about the most helpful aspects of being supported and/or hosted. The top three aspects mentioned were: help with paperwork and administrative tasks (59.1%), positive impact on well-being and mental health (52.8%), and housing stability (48.3%). Language support is also significant, with 48.3 per cent of forced migrants finding it helpful. Facilitated integration into the local community (40.9%) and access to local social services (31.3%) are also important. Finding a job (15.9%) and legal support (13.6%) are less frequently mentioned but still valuable. Education support is noted by 8 per cent of forced migrants.

Figure 14. Most helpful aspects of being supported and/or hosted according to forced migrants in Belgium (multiple answers possible, %)



3.3.8. Challenges encountered

Although most experiences appear to be positive, volunteers and forced migrants also faced different challenges during their support trajectory. Both groups identified communication and language barriers as a significant challenge, reported by 66.9 per cent of volunteers and 54 per cent of forced migrants. Perceived differences in socialisation patterns were noted by half (50%) of the volunteers, while cultural differences were mentioned by 35.2 per cent of forced migrants. Social issues such as other people's reactions and prejudices were reported by 32.2 per cent of volunteers and 15.9 per cent of forced migrants.

Property maintenance was a concern for 21.9 per cent of volunteers and 16.5 per cent of forced migrants. Similarly, managing expectations was a challenge for 27.7 per cent of volunteers and 11.4 per cent of forced migrants. Health and mental health issues of forced migrants were a significant challenge for 40.1 per cent of volunteers, while financial issues were noted by 28.1 per cent. Forced migrants did not report these specific challenges in the same way, but 13.6 per cent mentioned that the support was not tailored to their situation, and another 13.6 per cent felt the volunteers lacked the necessary knowledge or experience.

Figure 15. Challenges encountered by volunteers in the support provided in Belgium (multiple answers possible, %)

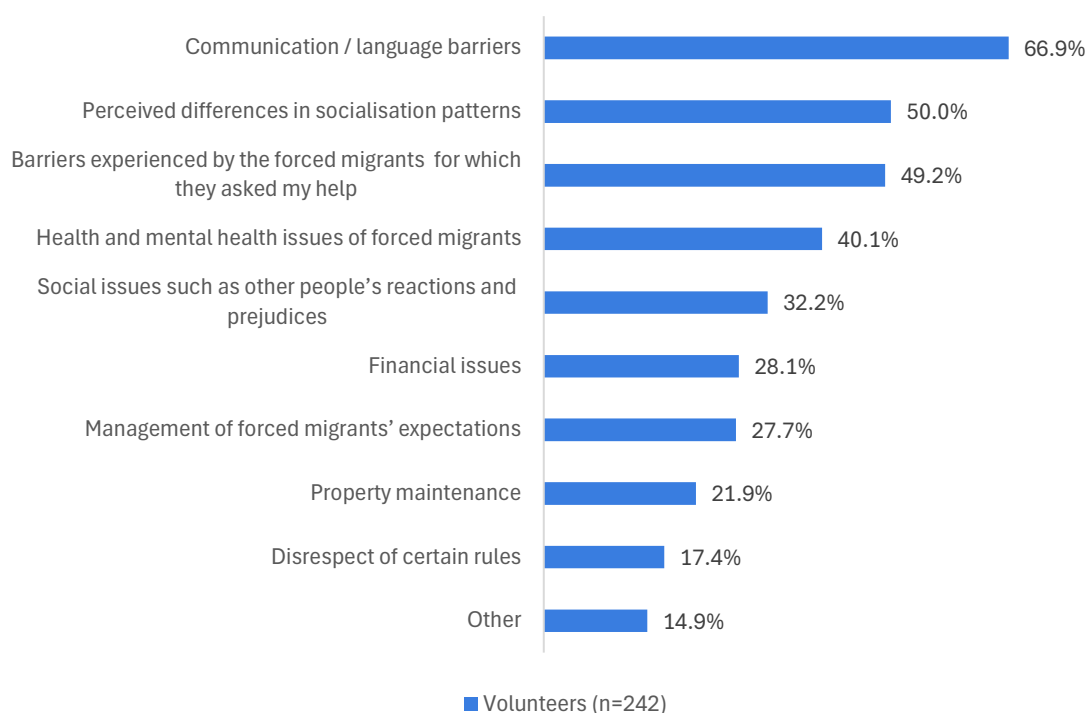
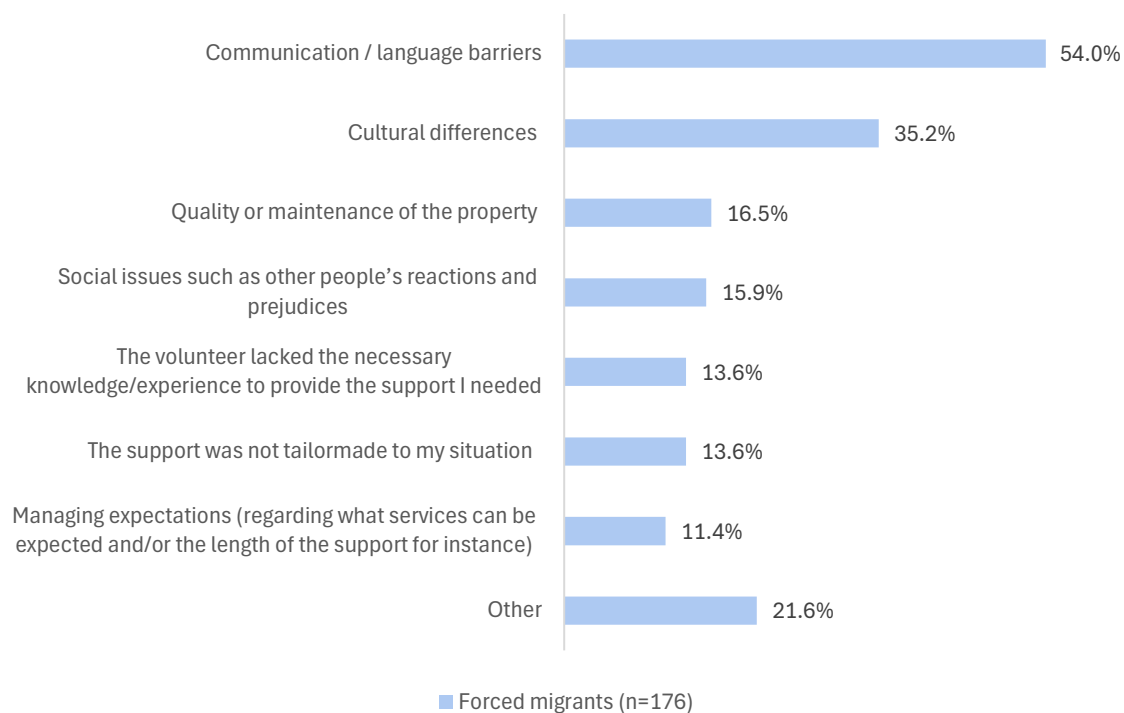


Figure 16. Challenges encountered by forced migrants in the support received in Belgium (multiple answers possible, %)



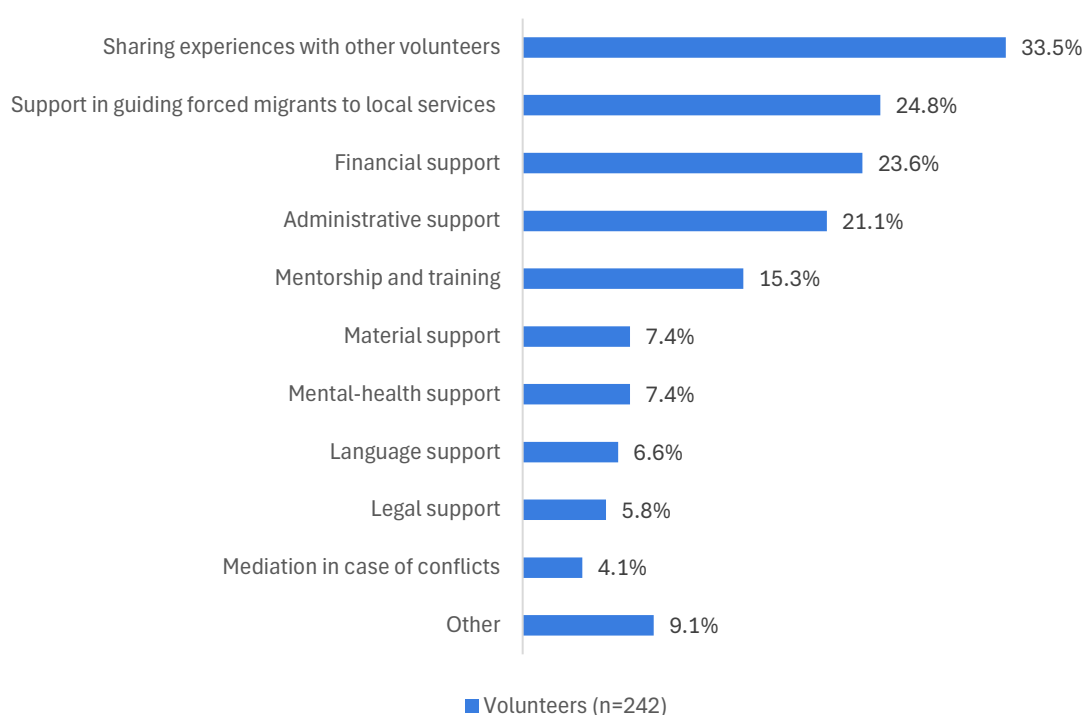
Addressing these challenges

Both volunteers and forced migrants have several ideas on how to overcome the challenges they encountered. Both groups identified the need for better institutional guidelines (38.6% of forced migrants and 22.3% of volunteers). Access to a helpdesk was also highly valued, mentioned by 36.9 per cent of forced migrants and 24.4 per cent of volunteers. Financial support was important, especially for forced migrants (34.1%) compared to volunteers (18.2%). Efficient collaboration with local administration was emphasised by 35.1 per cent of volunteers, reflecting their need for better coordination. Better housing quality was a notable need for 28.4 per cent of forced migrants. Cultural sensitivity training was seen as beneficial by 27.3 per cent of forced migrants and 15.3 per cent of volunteers. Access to specialised protection services was more crucial for volunteers (28.9%) than for forced migrants (18.8%), indicating volunteers' need for additional support in managing health and psychosocial issues.

Many volunteers reported receiving support themselves during their volunteer engagement. The most common form of support was sharing experiences with other volunteers (33.5%), emphasising the value of peer support and community among volunteers. Support in guiding forced migrants to local services (24.8%) and financial support (23.6%) were also significant, reflecting the practical and financial challenges volunteers face. Administrative support (21.1%) and mentorship and training (15.3%) were important

for helping volunteers navigate bureaucratic processes and improve their hosting skills. Smaller percentages reflect the diverse forms of support volunteers received: mental-health support (7.4%), material support (7.4%), language support (6.6%), legal support (5.8%), and mediation in case of conflicts (4.1%). On top of that, 9.1 per cent of the volunteers emphasised, for instance, the friendship and appreciation received from other volunteers, or the emotional and moral support from partners, family, and friends. Some volunteers also stressed the benefits from regular group activities and social gatherings.

Figure 17. Support volunteers received during their engagement in Belgium (multiple answers possible, %)



Half of the volunteers in Belgium experienced the support they received as ‘rather relevant’ (50.5%), and another 30.8 per cent even said this support was ‘highly relevant’. Nevertheless, 15.4 per cent and 3.3 per cent found the support ‘rather irrelevant’ or even ‘highly irrelevant’, respectively.

Volunteers and forced migrants identified various additional challenges for which more support would have been needed. For volunteers, better matching processes, platforms for sharing experiences, improved cooperation with local authorities, cultural training for forced migrants, better screening, clear guidelines, access to trauma and psychological support, more flexible working hours, quick translation services, as well as easier and faster bureaucratic procedures could improve the experience.

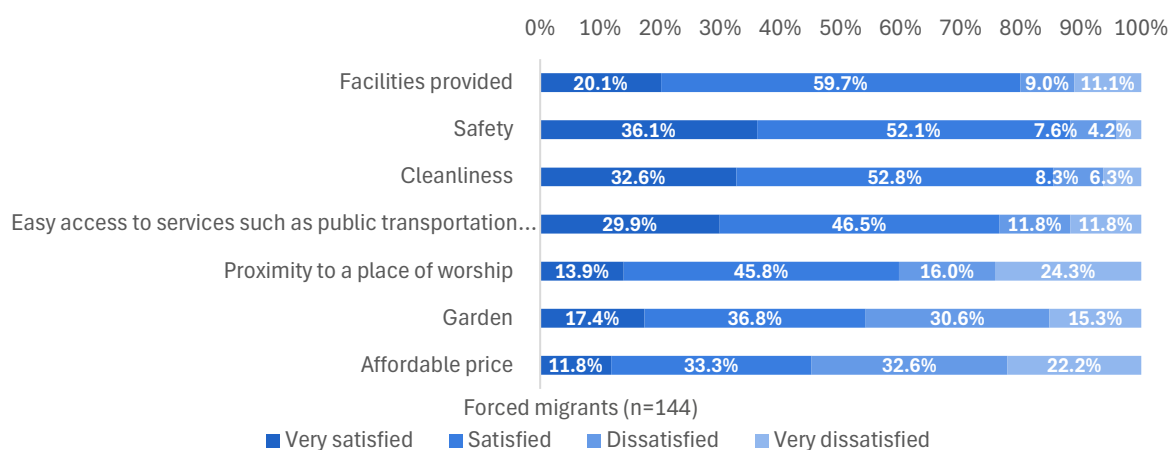
Forced migrants emphasised the need for less prejudice in society, better access to personalised language classes, improved matching with host families, more cultural activities, and better communication. They also noted that more accessible government and NGO services would have helped, though they also mentioned some challenges were due to culture shock, which only time and experience could alleviate.

Challenges related to housing

Because of its relevance in the literature and in CS schemes (Van Dam & Schrooten, 2025), special attention was given to housing challenges encountered by forced migrants.

Forced migrants (n=144) were asked how satisfied they were with their current housing situation. Their levels of satisfaction varied regarding different aspects of their current housing situation. The highest satisfaction was with safety (88.2% very satisfied or satisfied), cleanliness (85.4% very satisfied or satisfied), the facilities provided (79.8% very satisfied or satisfied) and easy access to services such as public transportation (76.4% very satisfied or satisfied). Proximity to a place of worship had lower satisfaction, with almost three fifth (59.7%) very satisfied or satisfied, but high dissatisfaction (40.3% dissatisfied or very dissatisfied). Affordable price had the lowest satisfaction, with 45.1 per cent very satisfied or satisfied, but high dissatisfaction (54.8% dissatisfied or very dissatisfied).

Figure 18. Satisfaction of forced migrants with their current housing situation in Belgium (%)



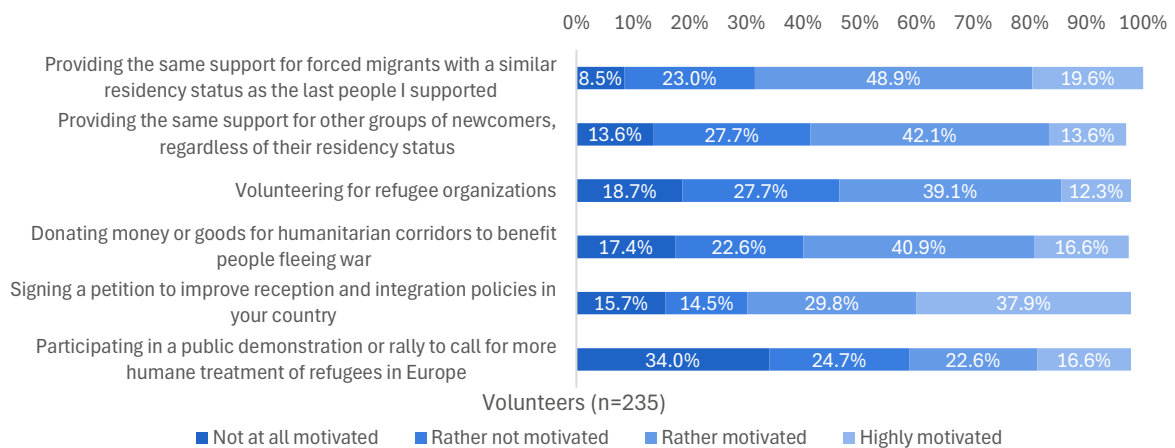
For the forced migrants who no longer live with the hosts (n=166), when looking for housing, the most significant barrier is high prices, making it difficult for 81.3 per cent of forced migrants to afford rent. Other financial constraints, such as the inability to pay a deposit, impact 37.3 per cent of forced migrants. Lack of availability of properties is another major issue, with 63.9 per cent struggling to find suitable housing. Language difficulties (58.4%) and lack of support from externals in the search for housing

(51.8%) further complicate the process, as forced migrants often lack the necessary network and communication skills. Racial discrimination was reported by 42.2 per cent of forced migrants, while lack of employment (42.8%) limits their ability to secure housing. Some forced migrants face owners unwilling to rent to families with minors (24.1%), adding another layer of difficulty. Additionally, no housing available with nearby work opportunities (10.2%), supermarkets/services (7.2%), public transport (8.4%), and schools (12.7%) create logistical challenges. Other unspecified issues (18.7%) forced migrants mentioned are for instance, age-related difficulties, as being near retirement made it harder to secure housing. The prevalence of student housing limited options for non-students. Single parents and those with pets faced additional discrimination from landlords. The high competition for apartments, especially in cities like Brussels, further complicated the search. Some forced migrants also struggled with bureaucratic hurdles and delays in receiving deposits from social services.

3.3.9. Future engagement of volunteers

Volunteers (n=235) were asked about their willingness to engage again in the future for refugee related support. Overall, the data suggests a greater willingness to provide direct support and engage in advocacy compared to participating in other activities such as public demonstrations. The highest motivation is seen in providing the same type of support for forced migrants with a similar residency status as those previously hosted, with 48.9 per cent rather motivated and 19.6 per cent highly motivated. Conversely, participating in public demonstrations or rallies has the lowest motivation, with 34 per cent not at all motivated and only 16.6 per cent highly motivated. Activities like volunteering for refugee organizations and donating to humanitarian corridors show moderate motivation, with around 40 per cent rather motivated. Signing petitions to improve policies has a notable 37.9 per cent highly motivated respondents.

Figure 19. Motivations of volunteers to participate in the future activities in Belgium (%)



3.4. Findings from the qualitative research

In this section, the findings from the qualitative research conducted in Belgium are discussed. Two FGDs were organised: one with representatives from civil society organizations and governmental institutions in Belgium (six participants: three men, three women) and one with forced migrants (eight participants: three men, five women, all beneficiaries of temporary protection). Additionally, nine volunteers (four women, five men) and four landlords/real estate agencies (three men, one woman) were interviewed. By integrating insights from both in-depth interviews and FGDs, a comprehensive, topic-clustered analysis is offered.

In this section, quotations from various respondents will illustrate the research findings. Each quotation is followed by a unique code that identifies the respondent. The code consists of an abbreviation representing the respondent's profile and a number to differentiate between respondents with the same profile:

- CSO: representatives of civil society organization
- FM: forced migrants
- GO: representatives of governmental organizations
- LL: landlords
- REA: operators from real estate agencies
- V: volunteers

3.4.1. The path to private accommodation

Upon arrival in Belgium, some forced migrants initially stayed briefly with distant acquaintances or family members. These arrangements were usually short-lived due to limited space.

It is notable that respondents who had experience with private accommodation, either as a host or a hostee, indicated that there was often no prior contact between the host family and the hostee. Some volunteers mentioned receiving limited information shortly before the forced migrants' arrival, usually via a brief phone call (for example from the PCSW). In most cases, the hostee and volunteer met for the first time upon arrival.

Two volunteers had a prior conversation with the forced migrant they were going to host. One volunteer noted that such conversations could help the volunteer gain a better understanding of the person's background and situation. However, he added that this could also discourage volunteers if they feel the situation is too challenging. The other volunteer compared the conversation to a mutual interview process, where the forced migrant also had the option to decline the volunteer's offer.

Forced migrants interviewed indicated that they were simply relieved to have a place to stay. If they later felt that the accommodation or host was not a good fit, they typically began looking for alternative housing after some time.

Selection procedure

Volunteers typically applied as potential volunteer through an organization, a civic platform, or a call via social media. The only example of a formal screening was a volunteer who had to provide a certificate of good conduct because the organization worked with children. In all other cases, screening appeared to be minimal or even non-existent, which surprised some volunteers. This was particularly noted among volunteers hosting Ukrainians, as this form of housing was facilitated and encouraged by the authorities. Volunteers had expected more government-led screening, such as background checks or an interview to assess their suitability for hosting forced migrants. However, according to them, such measures were rarely, if ever, implemented.

Regarding the screening of forced migrants, some volunteers indicated preferences or limitations, such as non-smokers, no pets, or only single-parent families, based on the belief that they are the most vulnerable group. The primary limiting factor, however, was the practical constraints of the accommodation, such as the number of rooms available, which determined the number of people a

volunteer could or wanted to host. Still, volunteers offering accommodation through civic platforms often had little to no prior information. Forced migrants were brought directly to their homes without the volunteers receiving any details beforehand.

The forced migrants, on the other hand, reported having no opportunity to screen their accommodations or host families. They did not know the volunteers or where they would be placed exactly. In the #FreeSpot campaign³, a central registration point matched volunteers and forced migrants, after which forced migrants were either picked up by a volunteer and dropped off at the host's door or given the address to which to go. Beyond this, they had no information about the host family or volunteer. Some forced migrants stayed with someone they knew through acquaintances, but even in those cases, they had very limited information about where they would end up.

“ We came to Brussels and applied for a host family, which agreed to take us in. We stayed there for four months; We hadn't met them before arriving at their house. My father was calling them on the way there. Only when we arrived did we get to know them. We didn't know them personally; we only had their address. (FM4)

The first contact

For volunteers hosting through #FreeSpot, the PCSW or a civil servant would call to inform them that the people they would host would arrive within a few hours. In some cases, the volunteer was able to have a brief phone conversation with the hostee.

“ I received a call from the organization, and then the migrant also came on the line. She briefly introduced herself and said that she was here with her mother, that they had fled the war in Ukraine, and were looking for shelter. So, I agreed, and two hours later, they were at my door. (V7)

³ After the Russian large-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Belgian State Secretary for Asylum and Migration at the time, Sammy Mahdi, launched the #FreeSpot campaign, which called upon invited private citizens to open their homes to Ukrainian refugees. This is documented in more detail in a previous RISE report (Van Dam & Schrooten, 2025).

However, forced migrants who spoke only Ukrainian were simply dropped off. One volunteer described a situation where a van arrived with a staff member who presented a document for the volunteer to sign and forced migrants were brought to the doorstep. The first introduction between the volunteer and the forced migrant were brief, conducted in English or with the help of translation apps and included a tour of the house. Rarely, a formal introductory meeting took place; in most cases, it did not.

The first contact was reported to be an intense and nerve-wracking moment for both the volunteer and the forced migrant. Forced migrants did not know who would be hosting them, while volunteers were unsure about who they were welcoming into their homes. Volunteers, especially those accommodating people for the first time, often felt uncertain or even somewhat anxious. Those with prior hosting experience were less nervous, relying on their positive past experiences.

Forced migrants stated that volunteers often provided a warm reception. However, they still felt uncertain—first, about whether they would be accepted to stay in the house, and second, about how long they would be allowed to remain, as in most cases, there was no clear agreement made about the length of stay before the start of the hosting. Many forced migrants mentioned that they took on household tasks as a way of giving something back to the volunteer.

Training and information for volunteers

In the Belgian #FreeSpot programme, the preparation of host families was generally very limited and largely informal. Most host families received no formal training or comprehensive preparation. Some municipalities organised information sessions or newsletters within the framework of #FreeSpot, covering practical matters such as taxes, insurance, and discounts for gas or electricity. These initiatives provided some basic information and were perceived as useful. Other municipalities did not offer any kind of structured information.

Despite this, volunteers generally felt welcome to ask questions at the municipality, the PCSW and other local services. However, several volunteers mentioned that those services were often not able to provide answers and referred them to other departments.

Finding appropriate answers to their specific questions required much effort from the volunteers.

“
At the municipality, they did their best to help us, but they often didn't know themselves. Sometimes, they sent us from pillar to post. (V3)
”

Some volunteer networks, such as the civic platform BELRefugees⁴, organised meetings and developed documents with practical tips for new volunteers. These contained practical advice and guidelines. Furthermore, volunteers could turn to the volunteer network for support with questions or difficulties.

Accommodation

The experiences of the forced migrants regarding accommodation varied. Some forced migrants had a completely separate apartment or an entire separate floor with a toilet and shower but shared the kitchen with the host family. Others had only a single room, with the kitchen, living room, and bathroom shared.

“ I had a separate bathroom, and we had a separate floor with two rooms. I was in one room with my father, and my siblings in the other room with their mother. The kitchen and all the other facilities were shared. (FM4) ”

“ We had a separate room, but everything else was shared. It was a two-bedroom apartment for six people, and it was not spacious enough. (FM1) ”

The main challenges forced migrants reported were insufficient space for the number of people and shared facilities such as the bathroom and kitchen, resulting in limited privacy. Another challenge appeared when a volunteer did not allow people to register their address, leading to administrative difficulties. Many forced migrants could only stay temporarily with host families. Some had to leave due to a lack of space. Some forced migrants moved after staying with host families to emergency shelters, while others found their own housing.

From the interviews with the volunteers, two main arrangements emerged. Some volunteers accommodated people in a separate living unit. The advantage of this setup is that it provides sufficient privacy, which contributed to the success of hosting. Other volunteers reported that the accommodation they provided consisted of one or more rooms or a finished attic, where the kitchen, bathroom, and laundry room were shared. This setup offered limited privacy, which often led to forced migrants withdrawing to their rooms and having less interaction with the volunteer.

⁴ The citizens' platform BELRefugees originated during the 2015 reception crisis, in response to the large numbers of forced migrants who had to seek refuge in a parc in Brussels due to a quota on daily asylum registrations. In the meanwhile, BELRefugees has grown to a nationwide network. This is documented in more detail in a previous RISE report (Van Dam & Schrooten, 2025).

Duration of hosting and support

The volunteers provided accommodation and support for several months, with some hosting for several years. Almost all the volunteers were still actively hosting, with some continuing to support the same family, while others had hosted multiple families or individuals sequentially. In the latter cases, reasons for leaving included returning to their country of origin, continuing their journey to another country, or moving into their own home. Many host families maintained contact with the people they hosted after their stay, visiting them or continuing to support them with practical matters. When the hosting and support lasted longer, a strong bond often developed between volunteers and forced migrants. Host families reflected positively on their hosting experiences and expressed a willingness to host again in the future if needed.

The forced migrants interviewed had moved from hosting to independent housing or government-run accommodation. The duration of hosting varied from very short (a week) to several months. Most forced migrants looked back positively on the accommodation and support they received.

Hosting and support offered

Both volunteers and forced migrants indicated that although the initial request was about housing, there are many other practical matters in which forced migrants need support. Consequently, a wide range of support beside housing was provided. When a forced migrant first arrives in Belgium, the volunteer provides a temporary address so that the forced migrant can register in Belgium. In this early stage of hosting, volunteers help forced migrants settle in. They assist with finding furniture, registering with the local municipality, paying for food, and providing practical and material support.

“ I was so grateful for their help because, during the first few months, we didn't receive any financial support from the government. The host installed all the necessary apps, paid for the bus and parking, and bought tickets for the zoo. (FM6) ”

After these first weeks, during which forced migrants are accommodated and have their administrative matters sorted, they receive an income through the PCSW. After this initial period, there remain numerous areas where volunteers continue to provide support. This includes helping to find appropriate education or employment, translating and interpreting correspondence, looking for leisure activities, explaining how Belgian society works, informing about available services, searching for housing, communicating with schools for children, practicing one of the national languages with adults, reviewing rental contracts, finding suitable job vacancies, preparing visits to organizations etc. Both volunteers and forced migrants agree that support is needed for nearly everything encountered in daily life, and therefore the support covers a wide range of life domains.

“
They need help with so many things. It includes finding an eye doctor, dealing with taxes, enrolling in a football club, and registering at a school. It's truly a very broad task.
”
(V1)

Agreements

During the initial period, when many forced migrants had not yet received financial support, the costs were often fully covered by the host family. Forced migrants mentioned that they helped with household tasks, such as cooking, cleaning, or taking care of flowers, as a gesture of gratitude. However, there were no specific expectations or rules regarding household chores.

“
So, when the woman was working all day, I would cook. There wasn't much to do, so I cleaned because there was a lot of hair from the dog. The host said, 'You don't have to do it,' but I had nothing else to do, and I wanted to contribute. (FM2)
”

Once forced migrants started receiving an income, most of them signed a contract with the host family, outlining financial contributions, the duration of the stay, and the maintenance of the house. This initiative was often taken by the PCSW, which emphasised that forced migrants should make a financial contribution. In some

cases, forced migrants offered to contribute to costs such as rent, gas, and electricity themselves once they started receiving financial support from the government.

Interviews with volunteers also revealed that many used agreements that could not be considered rental contracts, to avoid legal and tax-related complications. Volunteers said that the PCSW recommended such contracts. These agreements usually covered expenses and certain behavioural rules (such as 'good housekeeping'). Some PCSWs provided guidelines or tables to determine the amount of contribution.

The financial contribution was usually set at a level that covered only the costs, with no intention of generating additional income. In most cases, a contribution was agreed upon, typically covering costs (e.g., 150-500 euros), including utilities like electricity, water, and internet. Contracts were mostly without deposits and allowed the hostee to leave without a notice period.

Volunteers mentioned that informal agreements were about household matters, such as the use of the kitchen, bathroom, and bedrooms. These were based on trust, without strict rules. Most volunteers set only a minimum of rules, such as no smoking indoors, taking off shoes, ventilating the house, and providing practical instructions regarding rooms or spaces and equipment (e.g., the washing machine) that the hostee could use.

3.4.2. The perspective of volunteers

The volunteers interviewed were unanimously positive about hosting forced migrants. Those who had provided accommodation for an extended period described the forced migrants as family. Some volunteers felt fortunate to have had the opportunity to host the people they did. They believed that by providing accommodation, they were doing something concrete to address global issues. While they acknowledged that offering this kind of support required effort, they were happy to do it, viewing it not as a burden but as a way to make a meaningful difference in someone's life.

Volunteer motivation and satisfaction

Volunteers reported that they started providing accommodation due to a sense of injustice and anger. These feelings, combined with having the space and/or time, motivated them to act.

Volunteers with children noted that hosting was a way to teach their children important values, such as the idea that one can do something for others, not to fear the unknown, and recognising that not everyone in the world has it equally well.

“We have the space. We don't have children, and we often work from home. Well, if we don't want to take people in, then who will? (V2)”

The interviews highlighted various forms of appreciation and satisfaction that volunteers experienced through hosting. Volunteers felt fulfilled by the difference they could make in the lives of the forced

“

Even now, we still keep in touch. I consider them my daughters. We celebrate Christmas together. I would find it strange if they weren't here for Christmas. (V5)

”

migrants. This satisfaction ranged from supporting studies or career choices, such as helping young people pursue their passions, to seeing their efforts contribute to the successful integration of people into society. Many volunteers developed a strong bond with the forced migrants, often describing it as a friendship or even a familial relationship. They found it enriching to learn more about the culture of the forced migrants.

Volunteers mentioned that, although not necessary, they appreciated small gestures such as receiving a traditional gift or practical help. Additionally, volunteers derived satisfaction from the idea that they were 'doing what is right', contributing to a solution for a larger problem in a personal, impactful way.

Support for volunteers

The interviews revealed that receiving information before hosting forced migrants was desirable. They did not so much refer to information about the individuals themselves, but more general information to help volunteers be better prepared. This could include legal aspects, insurance issues, or practical matters relevant to hosting. Concrete guidelines could be helpful in this regard.

Host families received support from various sources, including the PCSW, citizen platforms, and local initiatives. Many volunteers found the support from the PCSW helpful, especially when it came to drafting more formal agreements. However, volunteers still had to figure out many things on their own. This could be problematic for people without the necessary experience, time, or knowledge. Often, the PCSW or the local municipality service did not have the answers to very specific questions, meaning that the volunteer had to search for answers themselves.

Some volunteers noted that central, accessible structures were lacking. Accessible information sources were essential for volunteers. They suggested that this could be provided in various ways, such as through a central point of contact where volunteers could ask questions, an interactive website, an extensive FAQ section, or a helpline offering answers to a variety of practical, legal, and cultural questions. Online communities, such as active Facebook groups, were also considered valuable because they provided swift responses and tips from other volunteers or experts.

Volunteers engaged through citizen platforms appreciated the support from these networks, which created an informal but valuable support system. This network offered legal advice and expertise, a space to share experiences and support one another, and practical help with specific issues. This could serve as an inspiring model for further support for volunteers.

Many volunteers took an active role in supporting forced migrants in different life domains, such as personally helping with language lessons or complex administrative procedures. However, there was concern that not every volunteer had the resources, time, or skills to provide this intensive support. Therefore, complementarity with professional support appeared to be necessary.

Recommending the volunteering experience to others

When asked whether they would recommend hosting to others, volunteers indicated that they would, provided the individuals hosted had the right circumstances and motivation. They described it as an enriching and valuable experience that not only helped forced migrants but also positively impacted the lives of the volunteers themselves. It broadened their worldview, offered cultural and human insights, and provided a sense of fulfilment and pride.

“ I would definitely recommend it. It is the best thing I have ever done in my life. The boy who came here didn't speak Dutch at all, and now I have helped him enroll in college. I could cry from happiness. (V3) ”

“ Just seeing that they are doing well here is truly amazing. Then you know that you have really made a difference in that person's life. (V5) ”

They described it as a unique experience: learning about different cultures, being a support for others, making a difference in others' lives, and the mutual friendship were considered particularly valuable. Some even described it as one of the best things they had ever done, despite the challenges that came with it.

Volunteers emphasised that it was important to have sufficient mental and physical space when hosting. While they strongly recommended the experience, some cautioned about the challenges involved. They stated it required commitment, patience, and sometimes 'guts', as it was not always an easy journey.

3.4.3. The perspective of forced migrants

Most forced migrants looked back positively on the shelter and support they received, expressing their gratitude for everything the volunteers did. If they had a negative experience, they did not stay long in that particular accommodation.

From the interviews with forced migrants, it was clear that those who did not receive a living allowance due to having their own income faced greater difficulty accessing support in handling documents and legal information. They also did not know which services to approach for assistance. Even those who did receive support from the PCSW faced various practical problems, such as understanding official letters, finding medical help, or assistance with school. For many of these questions, they relied on volunteers or people from their own network.

All forced migrants unanimously mentioned the mental strain of life following displacement. They lived in two worlds (for example, Ukraine and Belgium), and they expressed a need for support to process their new reality.

“ We live two lives: one in Ukraine and one in Belgium. It is very important to have mental health support for people. We already had some life achievements in Ukraine, and then this life as a refugee makes it very difficult to accept a new life. (FM3) ”

Finding housing was challenging due to the high requirements from landlords (such as two incomes, a permanent employment contract, and a rental deposit). Many forced migrants sought help from other Ukrainians and local volunteers. This resulted in valuable contacts, such as recommendations for housing and other help with integration.

3.4.4. Challenges in integration

Observations from volunteers

Volunteers stated that language was a crucial bridge for integration. Without basic knowledge of the language, it was difficult for forced migrants to apply for jobs, understand rental contracts, and function

independently in society. Some forced migrants were afraid of making mistakes, which prevented them from actively using the language. While focusing on learning one of the local languages was essential, combining language lessons with full-time work was often not feasible. Volunteers noted that this was often expected of those they hosted. Additionally, there were few flexible starting points in educational programmes or during the summer holidays, leading to wasted time.

The interviews with volunteers also highlighted many practical issues that forced migrants encountered. Often, volunteers took on these tasks because organizations and services were unable to provide answers to such specific questions. Additionally, many volunteers noted the emotional burden carried by forced migrants. They needed time to adjust to the idea that their lives would develop here, worried about family and friends back home, and struggled with processing past trauma. These issues complicated integration, and volunteers expressed uncertainty about where to refer forced migrants for this type of support.

Traumas from the past and accepting the new living situation had a significant impact on mental health and integration. The lack of access to psychological help in their native language was identified as a gap.

Furthermore, volunteers highlighted that the temporary status of forced migrants made employers hesitant to invest in them through training or permanent contracts. Highly educated forced migrants were often referred to low-skilled jobs, such as cleaning. Cultural differences, trauma, or other personal issues could affect job performance, leading to additional difficulties in maintaining employment.

Volunteers also observed that uncertainty about status hindered long-term planning. Housing was often not fully furnished or adapted for long-term stays, increasing the feeling of uncertainty. Furthermore, forced migrants were mostly connected with people with similar backgrounds, making integration into the broader community difficult.

Several interviewed volunteers stated that people who opposed migrants often had a mistaken impression of who they were and what they contributed. Personal conversations could help correct this perception. Political communication played a strong role in shaping public opinion. Strict measures and rhetoric created a hostile atmosphere, while structural solutions for integration were often lacking.

Experiences from forced migrants

From the focus group with Ukrainian forced migrants, it emerged that language was a significant challenge for many. Insufficient knowledge of the national languages hindered access to work and integration. Without sufficient knowledge of Dutch or French, only low-skilled jobs, such as cleaning work, were attainable. Highly educated people, such as doctors and university staff, faced issues with diploma recognition and the high language requirements in Belgium. The labour market in Belgium was seen as less flexible, and many sectors required knowledge of Dutch or French.

“ You can easily find a job from day one – I could start cleaning, for example – but in Ukraine, I worked at the university, so I would like to find a job similar to what I had there. Integration for highly educated professionals is very difficult in Belgium. So that is difficult for me. (FM5) ”

Many forced migrants experienced stress and uncertainty due to the need to rebuild their lives in an unfamiliar country. They needed time to envision a future in the new country. The feeling of temporary stay and uncertainty about the future made integration more difficult. Temporary protection status strengthened this uncertainty. People were unsure whether to invest in integration, such as learning the language or applying for diploma recognition, if they might have to return. Temporary reception centres, such as emergency shelters, also contributed to the feeling of uncertainty.

Many forced migrants found housing through their networks or volunteers. High rental prices for apartments and the risk of losing the rent deposit if they had to return to Ukraine made the situation even more challenging.

3.4.5. Housing

Housing barriers

The interviews with volunteers and housing actors revealed several barriers. Firstly, there was a lack of affordable and quality housing, affecting both forced migrants and other vulnerable groups. This was accentuated by an overheated rental market, with dozens of candidates competing for each property, making it difficult for vulnerable groups to compete. Moreover, housing actors noted that many landlords had conservative preferences, such as seeking tenants with two incomes, stable jobs, no children, or no pets, and they preferred older couples. Young men with a migration background or large families were

often rejected. Forced migrants receiving a living allowance were often viewed as risky tenants, despite this income being more secure than other forms of income.

“Nowadays, landlords have so many candidates for their properties. Moreover, landlords are still quite conservative in their choice of tenants. We have to be honest about this: there are still many landlords who prefer renting to a couple, both with an income, preferably older people, without children or pets. This is highly discriminatory, we know, and we have to explain to property owners every day that what they want is actually discriminatory. And we haven't even mentioned people of foreign origin yet. (REA3)”

Cheaper housing options often did not meet modern standards, and landlords were not always willing or able to carry out renovations. If landlords did undertake renovations, the property was often re-listed

“In general, it is very difficult, especially for the target group of refugees, especially with the language barrier. Certainly when it comes to young men, who have not yet mastered the Dutch language, we notice that it is difficult. (REA4)”

at a much higher rental price, making it unaffordable for people with limited income. When searching for housing, forced migrants often relied on their own networks within the community. They might know a landlord willing to rent to forced migrants, but this did not always result in quality housing.

The interviewed real estate agents report that most real estate agencies and landlords are becoming increasingly inaccessible for personal contact, further limiting opportunities for forced migrants. Initial contact with real estate agencies often happened through online platforms, excluding people who were not digitally literate or proficient in the language. Furthermore, a lack of knowledge of Dutch and/or French made communication with landlords and real estate agencies difficult, adding another barrier.

Rent guarantee and rent subsidy programmes were reported by interviewees as often slow and stigmatising, discouraging both tenants and landlords. Local and regional initiatives lacked a coordinated approach and sufficient resources. There was also a lack of flexibility in procedures; the speed of the rental market was in stark contrast to the slowness of administrative processes.

Housing support and good practices

Many forced migrants found housing through acquaintances, volunteers or other forced migrants. The interviews with volunteers and housing actors highlighted several key aspects, particularly the importance of support in accessing housing. Volunteers, social initiatives, and organizations played a significant role in guiding forced migrants to secure quality and

affordable housing. This involved active assistance with searching for and viewing properties, providing language support, and offering help with administrative matters such as rental agreements. Landlords were more willing to rent to forced migrants when introduced by a trusted intermediary. Personal contact with landlords reduced the barriers to renting, as a personal story or support from an organization or volunteer could persuade landlords to rent to this target group.

A good practice was seen in organizations that supported vulnerable groups by collaborating with real estate agencies. In such cases, the real estate agency only needed to notify the organization when a property became available. The organization then selected suitable candidates from their database and arranged the viewings themselves. This working method saved the agency time, as they did not need to take photos or schedule viewings, making them more willing to cooperate with the organization.

Furthermore, many forced migrants needed information to understand the rental market and their rights and obligations. Workshops, interpreters, and targeted guidance (such as around overcrowding regulations) could help bridge the gap between the rental market and forced migrants. It was also emphasised that follow-up and support should continue even after the housing was rented. An organization that could address any questions that arose would encourage landlords to rent to this group.

According to interviewees, there were also initiatives from the landlord side that could lower barriers. Landlords wanted assurance that they would receive rent payments, and that the property would be well-maintained without losing value. They also wanted the property to be easily rented out again without additional costs. There were already insurance products, such as income guarantees for landlords, that reduced the risks and uncertainties related to rent payments. This was a popular product among real estate agencies for regular landlords. Expanding this system could help guarantee income for

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We see that it helps when an organization is involved that can provide additional clarification and also stay involved for any questions or issues once the property is rented. (REA4)

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landlords. However, a caveat was that if such initiatives were offered by the government, they tended to take a long time to implement, which was detrimental given the fast-paced housing market. Moreover, this could have a counterproductive effect, as landlords might think the tenant was potentially unreliable if an insurance product was offered. Nonetheless, rent guarantee funds or subsidies remained an important avenue to refine. Currently, these were often limited to local initiatives with scarce resources.

Another respondent suggested that tax incentives, such as those for renovation or renting to forced migrants, could motivate landlords to make available spaces. There were also initiatives for owners who were unwilling to renovate, where organizations relieved them of this burden but required them to rent the property through their housing association. Other respondents advocated for the use of vacant buildings or unused plots to house forced migrants temporarily. An example of this practice was seen in the Netherlands, where 'flexible housing' had been implemented (Schilder et al., 2024). In this model, private owners were persuaded to place housing on their land for a few years, often to accommodate forced migrants, but also for other groups such as students to create a social mix. Furthermore, that way, a derelict site is used, which can reduce vandalism or decay and generate rental income.

3.4.6. Community sponsorship

The term 'community sponsorship' was only known to participants in the FGD with representatives from NGOs and governmental bodies. Other respondents indicated that they were unfamiliar or only slightly aware of the concept. However, they recognised the value of volunteers in the integration of forced migrants. The proximity of a volunteer involved in hosting forced migrants provided an opportunity to closely monitor their well-being. Several volunteers expressed critical concerns as they saw hosting forced migrants as a primary responsibility of the government, with volunteers playing a supporting role, such as through buddy systems. They argued that structural housing and food provision should not depend on volunteers. In their view, volunteers stepped in because they felt the government was failing to meet its responsibilities. Furthermore, several volunteers indicated that there was greater willingness in society to support forced migrants from Ukraine than those from other parts of the world. They attributed this to the Russian large-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and the Ukrainians' similar cultural background.

Respondents from the FGD with NGOs and governmental agencies, who were familiar with CS, explained that this initiative was introduced in Belgium in 2019, but they felt it was still in the pilot phase. In Belgium, the model currently is defined as necessitating commitment by at least five volunteers to form a CS group that will provide reception for one year to assist resettled refugees as they search for housing and integrate into society, as part of the Belgian resettlement programme.

There were also discussions in Belgium to expand the CS model to groups other than resettled refugees, such as to vulnerable individuals transitioning out of the reception system, who would need additional support during this phase.

Additionally, there was interest in collaborating with various associations within the Belgian civil society landscape, such as LGBTQI+ organizations, diaspora associations, and others with specific missions to expand use of the model. Some FGD participants believed it could be beneficial to explore whether these organizations could participate in a CS programme for specific profiles of individuals they were willing to receive. These individuals could echo vulnerability criteria for resettlement but would have a distinct profile.

3.5. Conclusions

The research in Belgium reveals distinct demographic and socio-economic profiles of volunteers and forced migrants. Most volunteers are Belgian nationals (83%) aged 45 years or older (74.3%). They are predominantly well-educated, with 81.7 per cent holding higher education degrees. Financially, volunteers are relatively stable, with more than 80 per cent coping with their expenses very well or extremely well. In contrast, forced migrants are younger, with 58.6 per cent under the age of 35. The largest group of migrants surveyed for this study comes from Afghanistan (37.5%), followed by Ukrainians (26.7%) and Palestinians (22.2%). Educational backgrounds are diverse, with 47.7 per cent holding higher education degrees. Financial challenges are pronounced, with 72.9 per cent of migrants finding it very difficult or rather difficult to cope with their expenses.

Personal and community networks play a significant role in disseminating information about housing or integration support, often more so than formal channels. A large share of the forced migrants indicated they got in contact with the organization that provided housing or integration support through personal connections, such as friends, family, and relatives.

Volunteers are mostly motivated by personal benefits, moral duty, and their personal social networks. Many feel a sense of moral duty to provide humanitarian assistance. Among volunteers, only 29 per cent

underwent any form of screening before engaging, with interviews (70%) and criminal record checks (38.6%) being the most common methods. For those volunteers who offered private accommodation, in most cases, their property was not screened either.

A large proportion of respondents (39.8% of volunteers and 61% of forced migrants) reported no formal matching process. When matching occurred, the primary criteria included housing needs, household composition and personal interests, while factors such as intercultural experience and language skills were less commonly considered. These findings were confirmed in the qualitative research, that also pointed to the desire of volunteers to receive some basic information about hosting forced migrants, such as legislation, organizations to turn to, and insurance.

Volunteers who hosted forced migrants could most often indicate some preferences around hosting, such as the number of people they can accommodate, whether or not they can host a pet, and whether they prefer smokers or non-smokers. The qualitative data did not reveal similar options to express preferences for forced migrants, although this could be helpful for them as well. From the qualitative research, it also became clear that the first contact between volunteers and forced migrants is often intense and stressful for both parties.

Besides providing accommodation, the volunteers support the forced migrants in many other domains, such as administration, education, employment, and social integration. Despite the challenges and engagement this entails, both the survey and the interviews show that volunteers are generally positive about their experiences and feel fulfilled by the difference they can make in the migrants' lives. Forced migrants shared similarly favourable perceptions, appreciating the support the volunteers provide. The results from the survey show migrants particularly valued administrative support (59.1%), positive impact on well-being and mental health (52.8%) and housing stability (48.3%).

Housing emerged as a critical area of concern for forced migrants, with challenges ranging from affordability, availability, accessibility and discrimination. High rental prices were the most significant barrier, affecting 81.3 per cent of respondents, while financial constraints such as the inability to pay deposits further compounded the issue for 37.3 per cent. Additionally, 63.9 per cent of forced migrants reported difficulties finding suitable housing, often exacerbated by language barriers (58.4%), lack of support networks (51.8%) and racial discrimination (42.28%). The qualitative data highlight the high landlord requirements, discrimination, high rental prices, and a shortage of affordable and quality housing. They also reveal that landlords are more willing to rent to forced migrants when introduced by a trusted intermediary, as they help to give a personal face to the forced migrant in need of housing.

Additionally, both volunteers and forced migrants face communication and language barriers, cultural differences, and social issues. The most significant need identified by both groups was better institutional guidelines. Additionally, a need for a helpdesk and more efficient collaboration with local administrations is necessary. Forced migrants need material, financial, administrative, and legal support initially, with evolving needs for medical support, cultural integration, and sustainable housing over time. Dealing with the health and mental health issues of forced migrants was flagged by volunteers as being a significant challenge for them.

Many volunteers reported receiving support themselves during their volunteer engagement. The most common form of support was sharing experiences with other volunteers (33.5%). Support in guiding forced migrants to local services (24.8%) and financial support (23.6%) were also significant, reflecting the practical and financial challenges volunteers face. Administrative support (21.1%) and mentorship and training (15.3%) were important for helping volunteers navigate bureaucratic processes and improve their hosting skills. Smaller percentages reflect the diverse forms of support volunteers received: mental-health support (7.4%), material support (7.4%), language support (6.6%), legal support (5.8%), and mediation in case of conflicts (4.1%). On top of that, 9.1 per cent of the volunteers emphasised the friendship and appreciation received from other volunteers, or the emotional and moral support from partners, family, and friends. Half of the volunteers in Belgium experienced the support they received as 'rather relevant' (50,5%), and another 30,8 per cent even said this support was 'highly relevant'.

4. INSIGHTS FROM ITALY

Before presenting the research findings for Italy, it is worth contextualising the pressures and challenges Italy faces in the reception and housing of beneficiaries of international protection and present the current state of CS in the country. To do so, the next paragraph summarises the chapter *Refugee reception and housing in Italy* from a previous RISE report (Portelli et al., 2025).

4.1. RECEPTION AND HOUSING CHALLENGES

The management of human mobility has become a crucial field of tension in public and political debates in Italy, with laws and policies constantly changing towards increasing selectivity and restriction on mobility. Italy, traditionally a country of emigration, began receiving significant numbers of forced migrants during the 1990s Balkan wars. Despite civil society's efforts, the government did not establish a coherent reception system. The influx of forced migrants from the 2011 Arab Spring and subsequent conflicts forced the Italian administration to manage reception through an emergency logic. Reception centres (CARA) and extraordinary reception centres (CAS) were set up, managed by the Civil Protection Service and private firms, with limited resources compared to the numbers of migrants hosted. At least 100 000 people are currently hosted in these facilities, which currently face increasing budget cuts (Italian Ministry of Interior, 2024).

In 2002, civil society pressure led to the creation of a parallel system aimed at integrating forced migrants locally, initially called S.P.R.A.R. (Sistema di Protezione Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati) and now SAI (Sistema di Accoglienza e Integrazione). This system includes smaller facilities managed by local municipalities and professional staff, focusing on vulnerable forced migrants' needs and aiming for their empowerment. Currently, around 37 000 forced migrants are hosted in these facilities, which also suffer from budget cuts.

The dualism between CAS and SAI, along with public/private partnerships and budget cuts, frames the challenges faced by forced migrants in Italy. The emergency-focused approach of CAS does not align with the ongoing structural influx of migrants, and may cause challenges such as marginalisation, infrastructure strain, and overcrowding. Budget cuts to SAI hinder its inclusion efforts, making it difficult for forced migrants to achieve autonomy and emancipation (Accorinti & Giovannetti, 2023; Avallone, 2019; Tavolo Asilo Nazionale, personal communication, 2022).

Scholars argue that the SAI system is embedded in a 'workfare' logic, focusing on job acquisition regardless of conditions, rather than overcoming structural discrimination and ensuring forced migrants' rights (Carbone et al., 2018; Marchetti, 2018; Martorano, 2023). The abolition of 'humanitarian protection' in 2018, confirmed in 2024, increased the marginality of many migrants, exposing them to deportation or detention in facilities reported for human rights violations (Borlizzi & Santoro, 2021; F. Esposito et al., 2022; RiVolti ai Balcani, 2024).

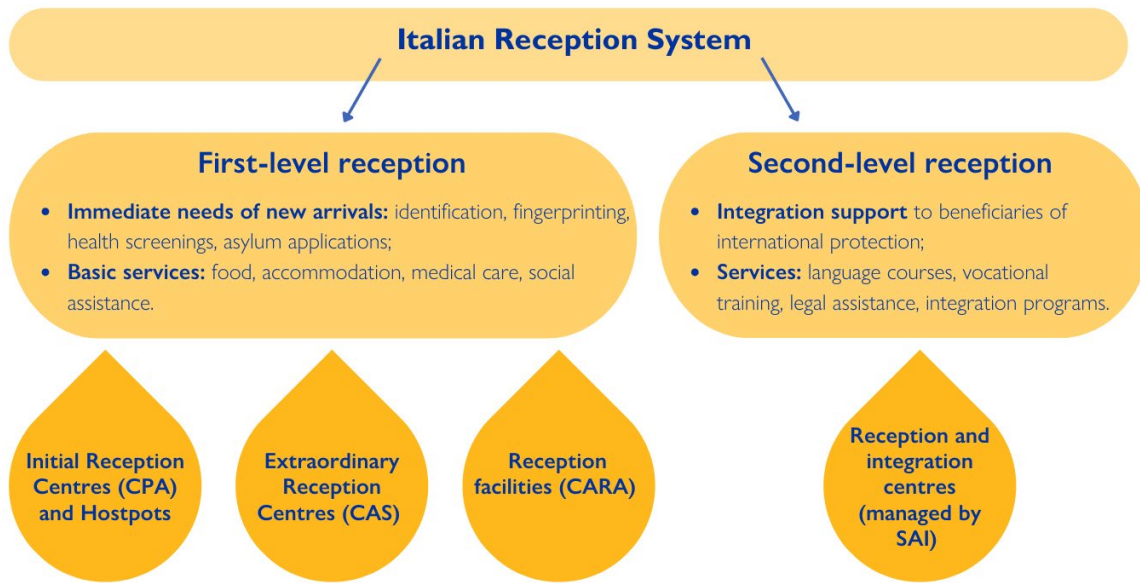
Despite Italian law guaranteeing equal treatment and housing availability for all legally residing workers (Fravega, 2022, p. 57), the official system fails to meet this requirement, exposing forced migrants to housing shortages. The Italian reception system lacks clear access procedures, a common waiting list, and monitoring of available beds (Rossi, 2022).

Moreover, Italy is experiencing an unprecedented homelessness and housing crisis, exacerbated by the 2008 financial crisis, reduced social expenditure on housing, and a bias towards homeownership (A. Esposito, 2024). Mega-events and short-term rentals further reduce long-term housing availability (Celata & Romano, 2020). Forced migrants face housing discrimination, lack of savings, and reduced social networks. In 2021, 65 per cent of foreign citizens lived in privately rented apartments, with limited access to public housing (Fravega, 2022, p. 56).

Discrimination includes denial of residence to those in informal housing solutions, making it difficult to renew permits and access healthcare and education (Colucci et al., 2023). Eviction threats also affect migrants in rented apartments. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights recommended preventing evictions of vulnerable tenants, but many families have been evicted, breaching UN measures (Davoli & Portelli, 2022).

The 2022 Ukrainian war strained the Italian reception system but also demonstrated the potential for effective shelter and welfare provision. Ukrainian forced migrants benefited from smoother access to housing, education, and healthcare compared to previous forced migrants.

Figure 20. Reception facility types in the Italian reception system



4.2. Community sponsorship in Italy

Given the challenges of the official refugee reception system in Italy, private or grassroots-based forms of sponsorship offer a promising alternative for better living conditions. Involving local communities in migrant reception can reduce strain on the public system and foster solidarity and cooperation. However, the concept of CS is not well-known in Italy and lacks an equivalent translation. The term ‘community’ itself has different connotations in Italian, complicating its application (Sabetti, 1995; Scaglioni & El Bahlawan, 2024).

Civil society organizations are introducing CS in Italy (Benucci et al., 2021; FCEI & Mediterranean Hope, 2021), but the term ‘network’ might be more appropriate to describe decentralised refugee reception efforts. Defining social groups as ‘communities’ can imply cohesion and shared values, overlooking economic and political differences and power imbalances. Scholars note that existing accounts of CS often ignore these hierarchies and fail to contextualise host-guest relations within broader discriminatory policies (Ghebremariam Tesfau, 2023).

Historical examples of CS in Italy include homestay accommodations for Balkan refugees in the 1990s and post-WWII care for Southern Italian children. More recent grassroots reception efforts emerged after the Syrian Arab Republic and Libyan crises, with some groups formalising as SAI projects for state support.

In 2015, Christian organizations initiated humanitarian corridors with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, providing visas and accommodation for Syrian refugees (Borgonovo Re, 2019; Morozzo Della Rocca, 2017). This initiative expanded to include sub-Saharan asylum seekers and non-religious organizations and supported the relocation of approximately 5 000 people to Italy in ten years. These corridors offer a safer alternative to Mediterranean crossings and promote solidarity and openness towards forced migrants.

Other solidarity networks support forced migrants already in Italy, often with a focus on anti-racism and anti-discriminations. While some organizations receive donor funding, others engage in direct action, such as squatting in vacant buildings, to provide housing. Despite facing challenges from state administrations, these initiatives may demonstrate the potential of CS in Italy (Cacciotti, 2024; Dadusc et al., 2019).

Thus, the idea of CS in Italy may currently be applied to these set of practices:

- Official humanitarian corridors;
- Empowerment pathways from SAI facilities;
- Grassroots 'homestay accommodation';
- Self-managed and autonomous housing solutions.

4.3. Findings from the quantitative research

The quantitative findings from the survey conducted in Italy among volunteers and forced migrants, respectively, are presented in this section.

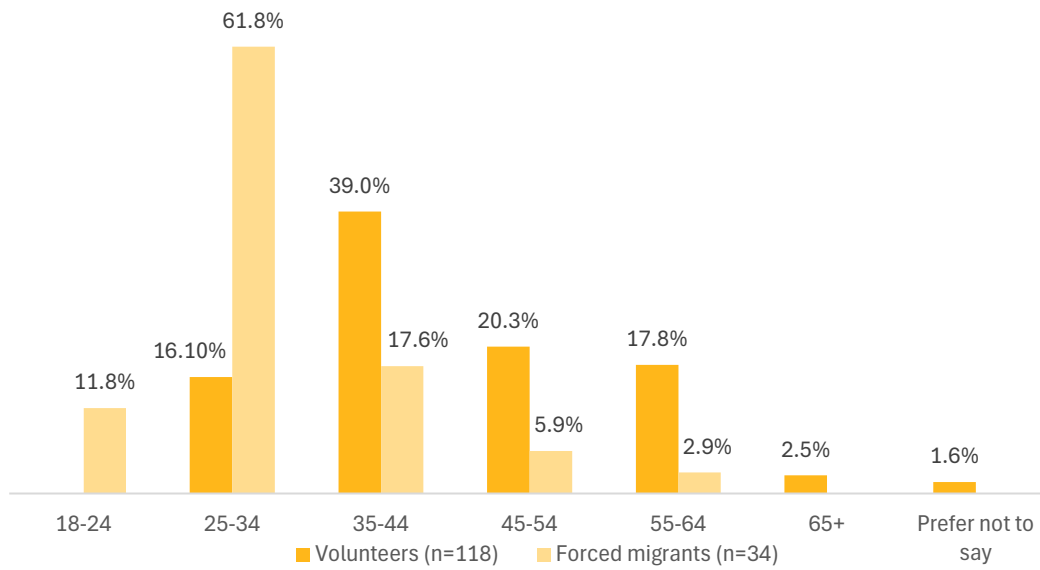
4.3.1. Profile of the respondents

This section outlines the sociodemographic profile of 153 respondents who participated in the surveys. The analysis is based on responses from 119 volunteers and 34 forced migrants who reside in Italy.

The majority of respondents who completed the survey for volunteers are female (58%), while males represent 28.8 per cent and others 12.7 per cent, referring to diverse gender identities. Most of the respondents are aged 35 years and above.

In the survey for forced migrants, most (58.8%) of the respondents were male, 29.4 per cent were female, and 11.8 per cent prefer not to answer this question. Most forced migrants are between 25 and 34 years old (61.8%).

Figure 21. Age of respondents of the survey in Italy (%)

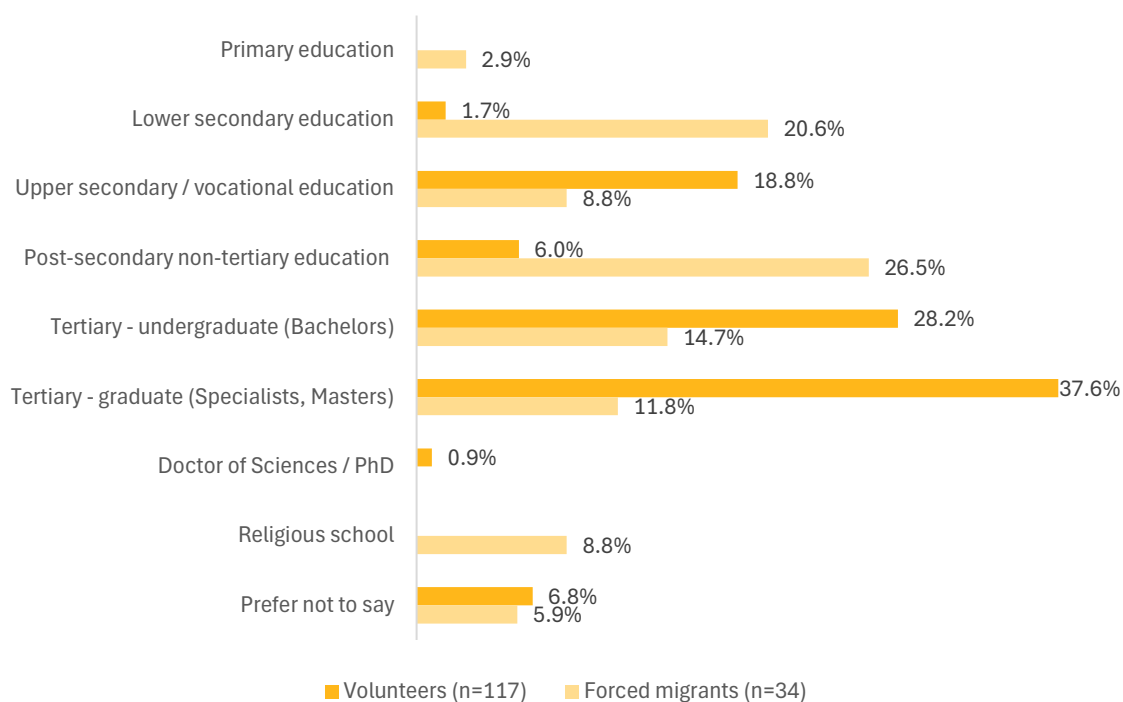


Education, work and income

Within the respondent group of the volunteers (n=117), there is a strong over-representation of individuals with a higher education degree, comprising 66.7 per cent of the respondents. Additionally, 18.8 per cent of the respondents had an upper secondary school diploma as their highest attained level of education, while 1.7 per cent had a lower secondary school diploma as their highest attained level of education.

For the forced migrants (n=34), the highest level of education is more diverse. About one fourth (26.5%) of the respondents have attained post-secondary non-tertiary education (e.g. professional training) and 20.6 per cent completed lower secondary education. Another 14.7 per cent of the respondents have attained a tertiary undergraduate degree (Bachelor's). This is closely followed by those with a tertiary graduate degree (Master's or Specialist), who constitute 11.8 per cent of the respondents. A smaller proportion of respondents reported having completed vocational education (8.8%), a religious school (8.8%) and primary education (2.9%).

Figure 22. Highest attended level of education of respondents to the study in Italy (%)



Regarding the respondents' work situation, the majority (81.9%) of the volunteers are employed (10.3% self-employed included) and 6 per cent are retired. Most of the volunteers indicate that they can cope with their expenses very well to extremely well (51.7%). In contrast, 32.4 per cent reported that they can get by only slightly well or not well at all.

Among the forced migrants, 38.3 per cent are currently unemployed, 17.6 per cent are employed and 14.7 per cent are self-employed. More than one quarter (26.5%) of the respondents preferred not to answer this question. Additionally, 1 respondent reported to be an irregular worker. Most forced migrants indicate that they find it very difficult to rather difficult to cope with their expenses (91.2%). None of the respondents indicated that they could get by rather easily to very easily.

Nationality and place of residence in Italy

Almost 90 per cent of the volunteers have the Italian nationality. Among the forced migrants surveyed, the main nationalities represented are Afghan (44.6%) and Ukrainian (14.5%). The other respondents represent a variety of nationalities.

Regarding residential locations, the respondents hail from all across Italy.

Table 5. Residential locations of the volunteers and forced migrants in Italy (absolute numbers)

Regions	Volunteer respondents	Forced migrant respondents
Abruzzo	5	1
Basilicata	3	
Calabria	25	2
Campania	5	
Emilia-Romagna	2	3
Lazio	9	20
Lombardia	7	3
Marche	1	2
Piemonte	6	
Puglia	7	
Sardegna	1	
Sicilia	7	1
Toscana	13	
Umbria	2	
Veneto	2	1
Total	95	33

Forced migrants' arrival in Italy

Most of the forced migrants arrived in Italy between one and three years before filling out the survey (79.3%), while 17.8 per cent arrived between four and five years before the survey. Only one respondent (2.9%) arrived more than ten years ago.

Most forced migrants arrived with other adults from their core and/or extended family (55.9%) or one or more children from their core and/or extended family (55.9%). Another 29.4 per cent arrived with other adult(s) who are not family members. A further 29.4 per cent arrived in Italy alone and 20.6 per cent arrived here with children who are not family member. All but one respondent, who came to Italy for work, arrived in the country seeking asylum.

4.3.2. Volunteers' path to offering support

This section provides a comprehensive overview of the various aspects of volunteer engagement in supporting forced migrants. It begins by examining the motivations behind the decision to volunteer, to then exploring how volunteers become involved and how they were selected and trained.

Motivations of volunteers to support forced migrants

The motives of volunteers in the field of migration and asylum were examined with reference to ten items, based on previous research (Schrooten et al., 2022). For each item, an average answer score was calculated.

A major motivator for volunteers is a strong sense of moral duty, with 61.7 per cent of the volunteers feeling this to a great extent. This is further supported by the fact that advocacy against the treatment of refugees is a strong motivator for many, with 31.6 per cent seeing their support somewhat as a critical act of activism, and 41.2 per cent to a great extent. The government's call for help did not significantly influence respondents' decision to volunteer, though, with 49.5 per cent of the volunteers not influenced by it at all.

When it comes to feeling connected to forced migrants in general, a large number of volunteers (52.1%) are motivated because they feel a strong connection. This is further supported by the 40.2 per cent of the volunteers who are motivated because they feel somewhat connected, showing that a general sense of connection is a quite common motivator.

Many volunteers (36.8%) were not encouraged by close ones. However, combined, six out of ten volunteers (21.9% very little, 26.3% somewhat, and 14.9% to a great extent) did receive some level of encouragement from their social circles that inspired them to engage.

The data also reveal that many volunteers are motivated by personal benefits from their experiences. A considerable number of volunteers (53%) are motivated because they feel that their volunteering experience helps them feel better about themselves. Regarding motivations related to learning and career, many volunteers are somewhat motivated (35.4%) or to a great extent motivated (33.6%) by the desire to learn about asylum, migration, and other cultures through first-hand experience. At the same time, more than half of the respondents (54% combined) view volunteering as a way to open doors for their future professional careers.

Table 6. Motivation for supporting forced migrants in Italy (score and %)

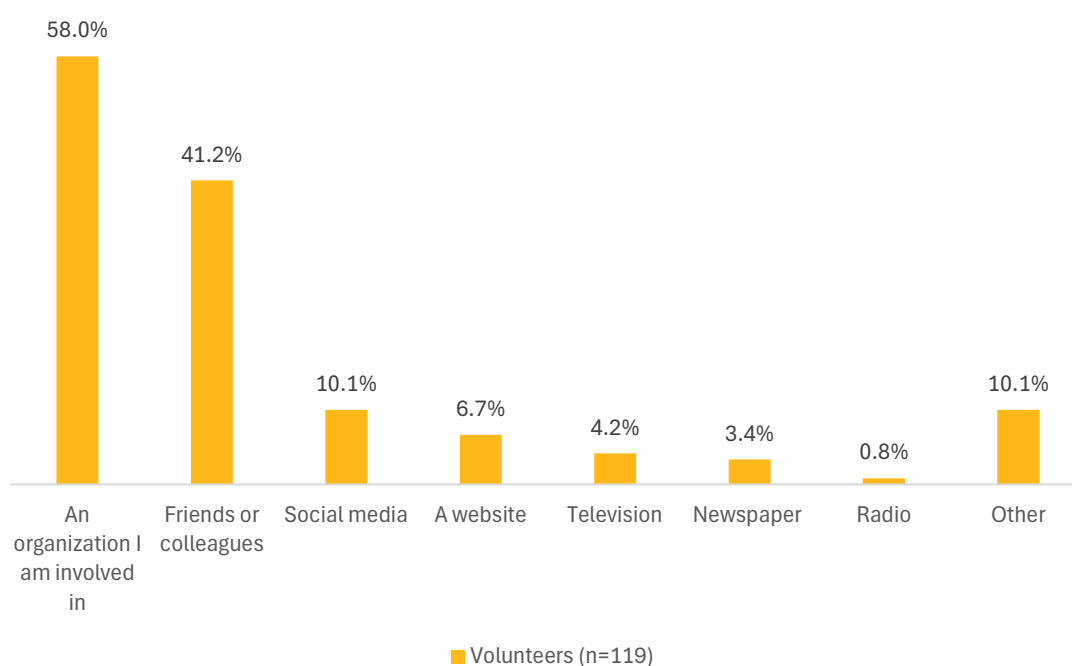
Motive of volunteers	Average score (max score is 5)	Not at all (1)	Very little (2)	Somewhat (3)	To a great extent (4)	N
I feel a moral duty to provide humanitarian assistance to people in need	3.48	3.5%	7.0%	27.8%	61.7%	115
I feel connected to forced migrants in general	3.41	3.4%	4.3%	40.2%	52.1%	117
Thanks to this experience, I feel better about myself	3.36	5.1%	6.8%	35.0%	53.0%	117
My choice to support forced migrants is a critical act against the way forced migrants are treated in this country	2.96	17.5%	9.6%	31.6%	41.2%	114
I want to learn about asylum, migration and/or other cultures through concrete, first-hand experience	2.85	17.7%	13.3%	35.4%	33.6%	113
I want to open doors for my future professional career	2.57	30.6%	15.3%	20.7%	33.3%	111
People close to me have encouraged me to get involved in this volunteering work	2.19	36.8%	21.9%	26.3%	14.9%	114
The government has called for help	1.95	49.5%	16.5%	22.9%	11.0%	109
I already had a personal connection with the forced migrants I support before starting to support them	1.54	75.7%	3.5%	12.2%	8.7%	115
I have experienced similar suffering myself in the past	1.4	72.4%	17.2%	8.6%	1.7%	116
Other	1.92	61.5%	7.7%	7.7%	23.1%	26

About three out of four volunteers (75.7%) were not motivated by a personal connection with the forced migrants before starting their support or because of having experienced similar suffering themselves (72.4%).

How do people get involved as volunteers?

The most common way volunteers (n=119) learned about the opportunity to support forced migrants was through organizations in which volunteers are already involved in, with 58 per cent of the volunteers citing this source. Friends or colleagues were also a significant source (41.2%). Social media accounted for one in ten (10.1%), while websites were noted by 6.7 per cent of the volunteers. Traditional media like television, newspapers, and radio were less influential, with 4.2 per cent, 3.4 per cent, and 0.8 per cent. Other sources mentioned by 10.1 per cent of the volunteers include a variety of personal and professional experiences. For instance, some individuals learned about involvement opportunities through their work, such as those employed by cooperatives participating in SAI projects (*Sistema di Accoglienza e Integrazione*) or working in the third sector. Educational settings also played a role, with university studies and specific courses like mediation being cited. Additionally, some people became aware of these opportunities simply by observing the needs of people in their city.

Figure 23. Sources of information for involvement in welcoming forced migrants in Italy (multiple answers possible, %)



From all Italian volunteers (n=118), most became involved in supporting forced migrants through organizations or initiatives coordinating such support (44.1%). Directly contacting these organizations was the second most frequent method, accounting for 28.8 per cent. Some respondents (16.1%) were approached by organizations to provide support. A smaller percentage (2.5%) took the initiative to reach out to forced migrants themselves. Lastly, 8.5 per cent cited other methods of involvement, such as through their jobs – such as those working in SAI projects or second reception centres – or through universal civil service or university internships. Additionally, family members sometimes provided guidance on how to get involved.

One in five organizations through which volunteers got involved in supporting forced migrants were faith-based organizations (20.4%) or government-sponsored organizations (20.4%). In 17.3 per cent of the cases, it concerned an NGO. In two cases each, volunteers became involved through a diaspora organization or an informal network, respectively. Four in ten volunteers named other organizations through which they became involved in support for forced migrants. Examples include social cooperatives, social enterprises, and specific projects like the SAI.

For those who participated in organizations (n=49), the most common affiliations were with other organizations (40.8%), followed by government-sponsored organizations (20.4%), an NGO (18.4%) and faith-based organizations (18.4%). Respondents who directly contacted organizations (n=31) had a broader distribution, with 35.5 per cent engaged with faith-based organizations, 32.3 per cent with other organizations, and smaller proportions with NGOs (16.1%) and government-sponsored organizations (12.9%). Among those approached by organizations (n=18), the majority worked with government-sponsored organizations (33.3%) and other organizations (38.9%), while smaller percentages were involved with NGOs (16.7%), 1 respondent with a diaspora organization and 1 respondent with informal networks.

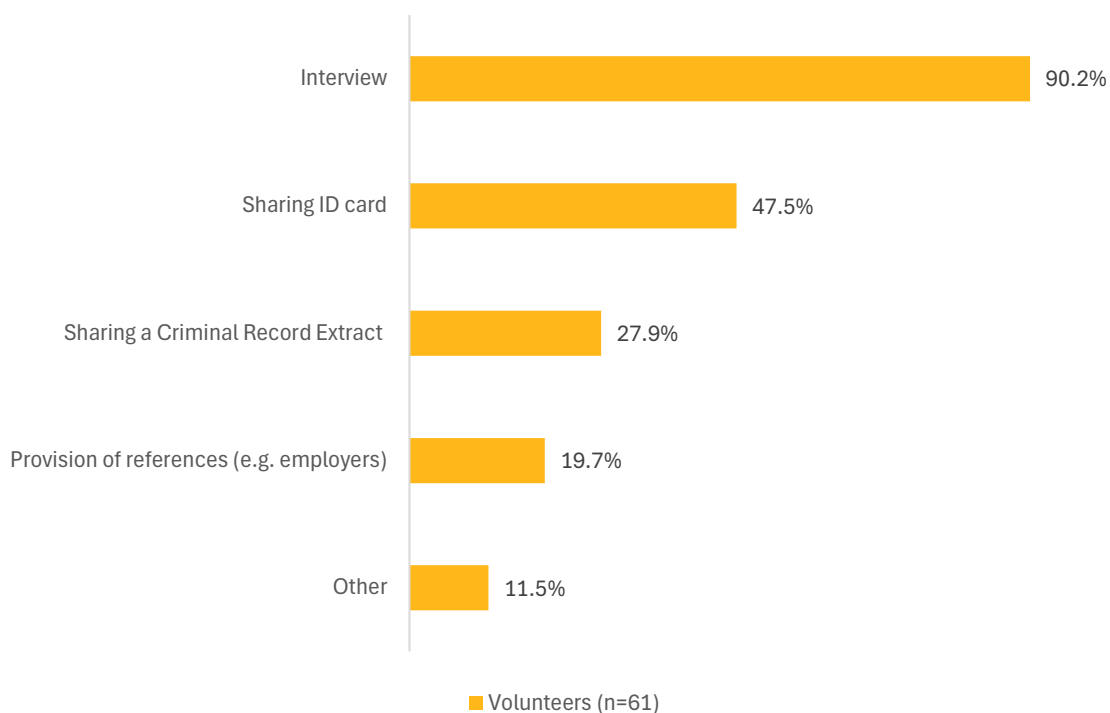
Screening and preparation processes

The majority of the volunteers (n=118) were screened before becoming a volunteer (51.7%). About 29.7 per cent reported not being screened, while 18.6 per cent were unsure if they had undergone any screening process.

The screening processes that respondents underwent entailed a variety of methods. The most common method was an interview, experienced by 90.2 per cent of the 61 respondents who reported that they were screened before becoming a volunteer. Sharing an ID card was also prevalent, with 47.5 per cent undergoing this process. A smaller portion (27.9%) had to share a criminal record extract, while 19.7

per cent provided references from employers or other sources. Additionally, 11.5 per cent mentioned other unspecified screening methods. Examples are undergoing a course or submitting a curriculum vitae. Additionally, some were screened based on requirements from public tenders or through a public selection process.

Figure 24. Screening process of volunteers in Italy (multiple answers possible, %)



In Italy, the majority (82.1%) of the accommodation volunteers (n=39) provided was screened by an external organization before being put at the disposal of forced migrants, while 15.4 per cent did not undergo any screening.

Three out of four volunteers (n=119) received training or mentorship before the first contact with the forced migrants (75.6%). However, one in five did not (20.2%). The majority of respondents found this training or mentorship they received prior to their first contact with forced migrants to be relevant to their needs. Specifically, 53.9 per cent rated it as 'rather relevant', and 38.2 per cent as 'highly relevant'. Only a small percentage found the training less useful, with 4.5 per cent considering it 'rather irrelevant' and 3.4 per cent 'highly irrelevant'.

4.3.3. Forced migrants' path to support

Six out of ten forced migrants (n=34) received housing or integration support from faith-based organizations (61.8%). NGOs provided support to 20.6 per cent of respondents, while government-sponsored organizations assisted 5.9 per cent. Informal networks accounted for 2.9 per cent of the support. Additionally, 8.8 per cent of respondents were unsure about the source of their support.

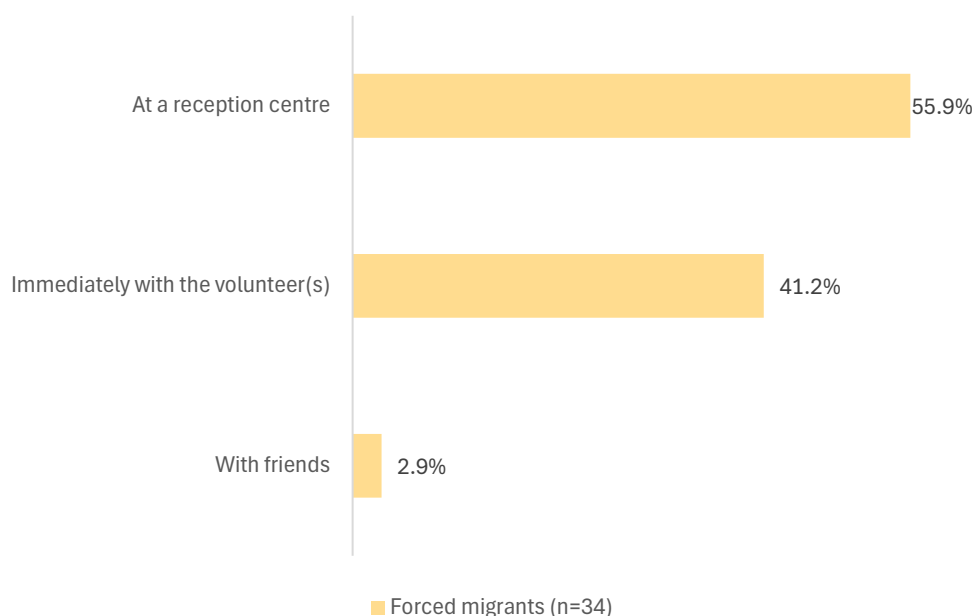
How do people become beneficiaries of housing or integration support?

Forced migrants in Italy (n=34) were mostly informed through standard pathways and procedures as resettled refugees (55.9%). Additionally, 8.8 per cent of the forced migrants found about the programme through diaspora, and another 8.8 per cent through social media. A further 5.9 per cent of the forced migrants entered the programme via a governmental partner, an NGO, or other organizations. Another 5.9 per cent did not know precisely.

Initial place of stay upon arrival

Upon arrival in the country, about half of the respondents (55.9%, n=34), stayed at a reception centre, while 41.2 per cent stayed immediately with the volunteers. Only one respondent stayed with friends. No other places of residence were mentioned.

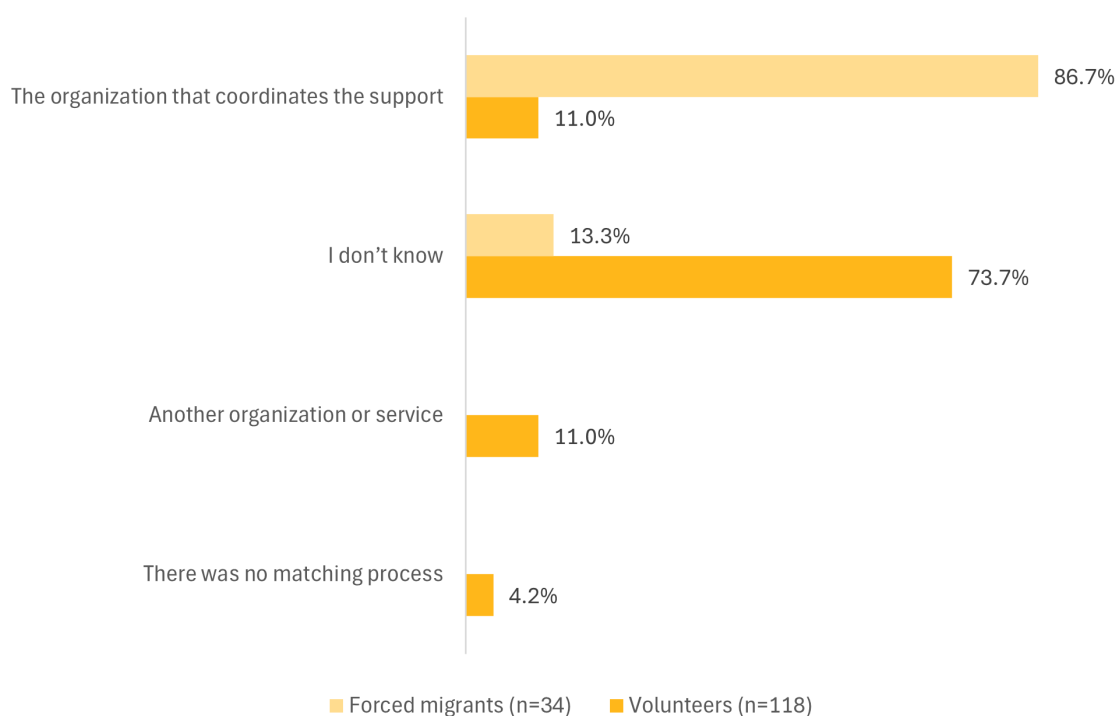
Figure 25. Forced migrants' place of stay upon arrival in Italy (%)



4.3.4. Matching process and criteria

Whereas 11 per cent of the 119 Italian volunteers mention there was no formal matching process, the majority of respondents, 73.7 per cent of the volunteers and 86.7 per cent of the 34 forced migrants, were matched with forced migrants by the organization coordinating the support. Another 11 per cent of the volunteers were matched by a different organization or service. Examples include local initiatives like the *Assemblea di autodifesa dagli sfratti di Roma* and *Comuna Seregno*, as well as municipal institutions. Some volunteers were matched through their work with humanitarian corridors or by national agencies such as the Ministry of Interior Affairs or Civil Protection. The SAI and its central service also played significant roles, along with volunteer services. A small portion, 13.3 per cent of the forced migrants and 4.2 per cent of the volunteers, were unsure about who facilitated the match.

Figure 26. Matching actor in Italy (multiple answers possible, %)



In the cases where there was a matching process, volunteers (n=105) and forced migrants (n=34) referred to various criteria underlying the matching. Both groups emphasised housing needs or housing offers and household composition as the most significant factors. For forced migrants, housing needs were mentioned by 52.9 per cent of respondents, and household composition by 47.1 per cent, while respectively 17.1 per cent and 1 per cent of the volunteers indicated these factors influenced the matching.

Gender was also notable for both groups, with 35.3 per cent of forced migrants and 16 per cent of volunteers mentioning it was considered. Intercultural experience was more significant for volunteers (21%) compared to forced migrants (14.7%). Age (15.1% of the volunteers and 8.8% of the forced migrants), personal interests or hobbies (3.4% of the volunteers and 8.8% of the forced migrants), and religious or ideological beliefs (1.7% of the volunteers and 8.8% of the forced migrants) were less frequently mentioned by both groups. Interestingly, income and political preferences were not considered by forced migrants but were minor factors for volunteers (0.8% and 2.5%, respectively). Additionally, a notable portion of both groups (19.3% of the volunteers and 44.1% of the forced migrants) were unsure of the criteria used, highlighting some uncertainty in the matching process.

Additional factors included the amount of time volunteers could invest (15.1% of the volunteers and 20.6% of the forced migrants), and knowledge of a common language (5.9% of the volunteers). Other matching criteria volunteers mention refer to a range of specific and practical considerations. For example, some matches were based on professional training or the coordinator's experience in managing reception projects. Additionally, the type of reception and the specific type of residence document were mentioned. Organizational issues and the profession of the volunteer were other criteria considered. Two forced migrants (5.9%) indicated there was no matching process.

Nearly half of the matches between volunteers (n=103) and the forced migrants they supported occurred upon the forced migrants' arrival in the country (49.5%), while this only occurred for 17.9 per cent of the forced migrants (n=34). Almost four in ten forced migrants (39.3%) were matched with their volunteers before entering the country, while only 13.6 per cent of the matches of volunteers were made beforehand. For 32 per cent of the volunteers and 17.9 per cent of forced migrants, the match was made after the forced migrants had been in the country for some time. A small percentage (4.9%) of volunteers, and one in four forced migrants (25%) were unsure about the timing of the match.

We also asked forced migrants (n=34) which criteria they found important themselves for a good match. The most frequently mentioned criterion is housing needs or housing offer, which was highlighted by all respondents (100%), followed by religious or ideological beliefs (67.6%), household composition (64.7%), intercultural experience (61.8%) and the amount of time volunteers can invest (58.8%). Gender (38.2%), age (20.6%) and personal interests or hobbies (14.7%) are considered to a lesser extent. Income (2.9%) and political preferences (5.9%) are rarely seen as crucial. Other unspecified criteria (8.8%) mentioned refer to language, open mindedness or the willingness to learn about different cultures.

Figure 27. Matching criteria for volunteers and forced migrants in Italy (multiple answers possible, %)

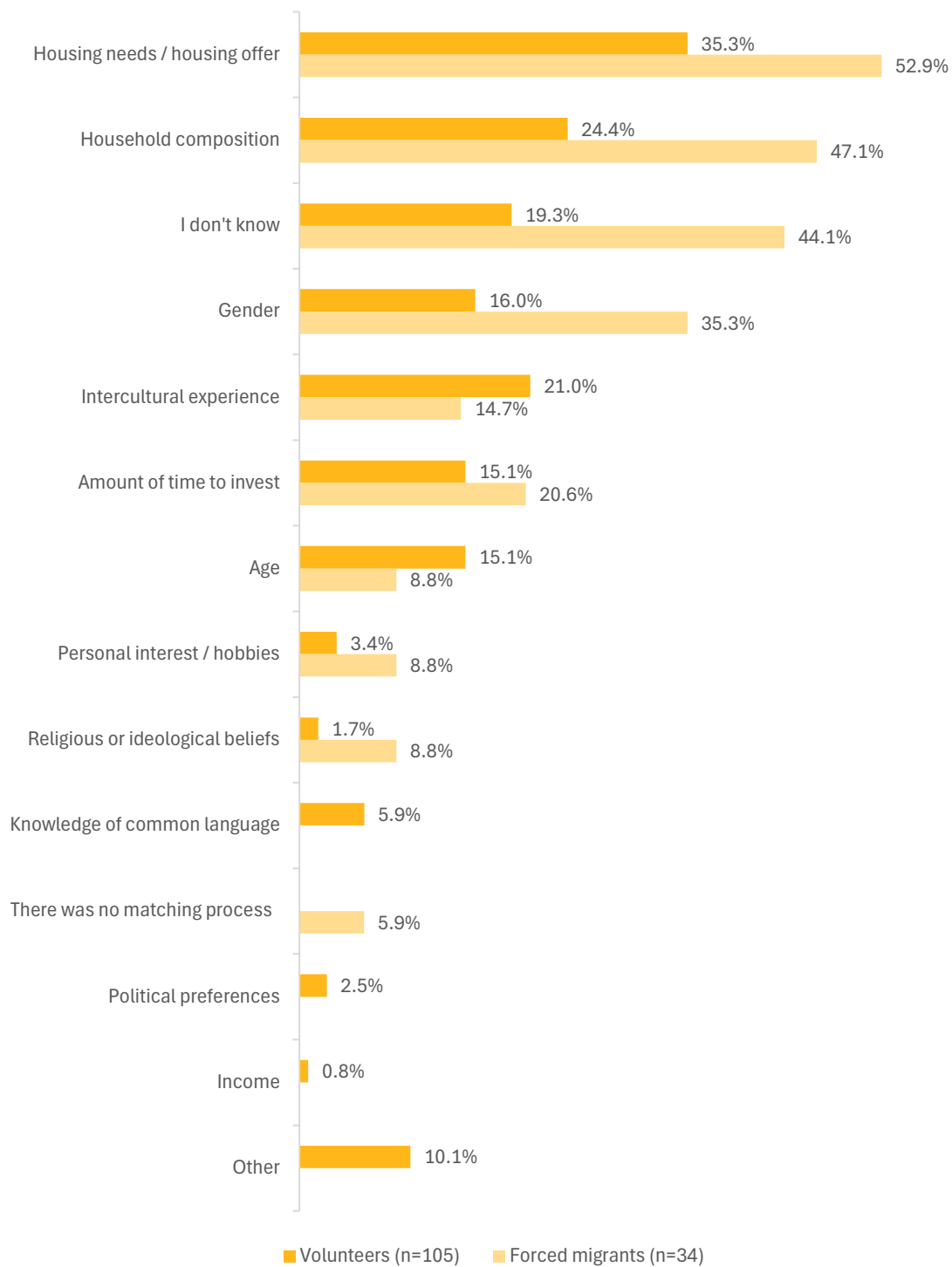
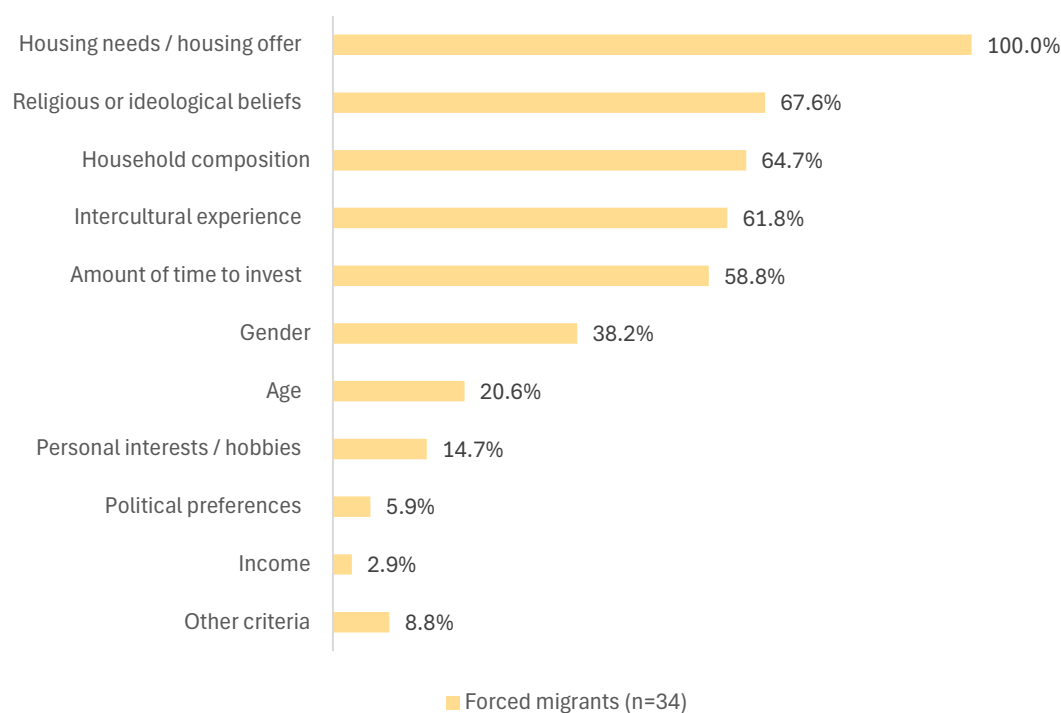


Figure 28. Criteria forced migrants in Italy deem important for a successful match with volunteers (multiple answers possible, %)

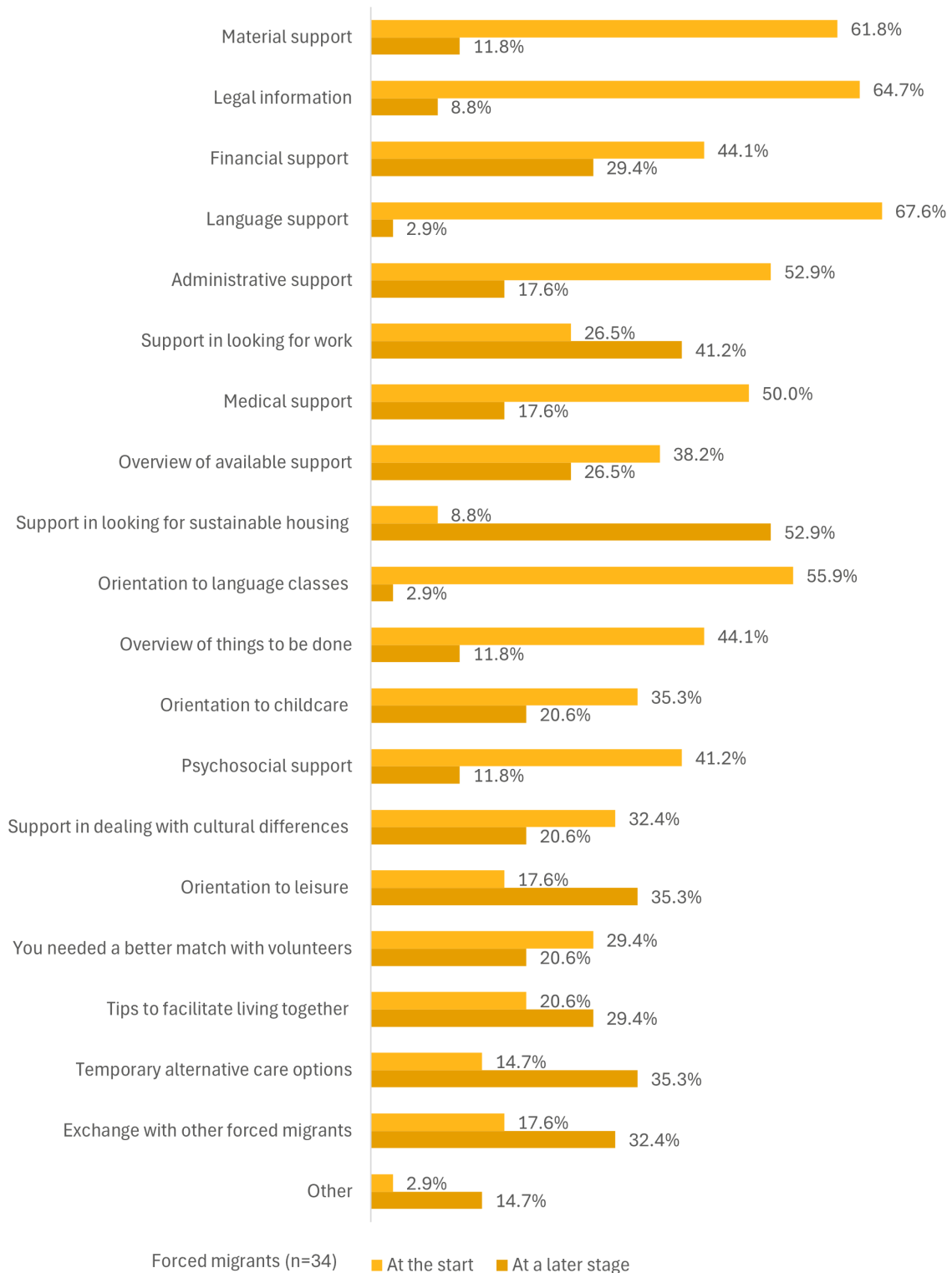


4.3.5. Support

Support needs of forced migrants

The needs of forced migrants in Italy (n=34) evolved between the start of their support period to a later stage. Initially, the most critical needs included material support (61.8%), legal information (64.7%), and language support (67.6%). Over time, the need for these types of support decreased significantly, indicating that these were either met or became less urgent. Conversely, the need for support in sustainable housing (8.8% initially, 52.9% later) and support in looking for work (26.5% initially, 41.2% later) increased, reflecting a shift towards long-term stability and integration. Additionally, the need for exchange with other forced migrants and orientation to leisure activities also grew, highlighting the importance of social integration and community building as forced migrants settled into their new environments.

Figure 29. Needs experienced by forced migrants in Italy (multiple answers possible, %)



Support offered by volunteers and received by forced migrants

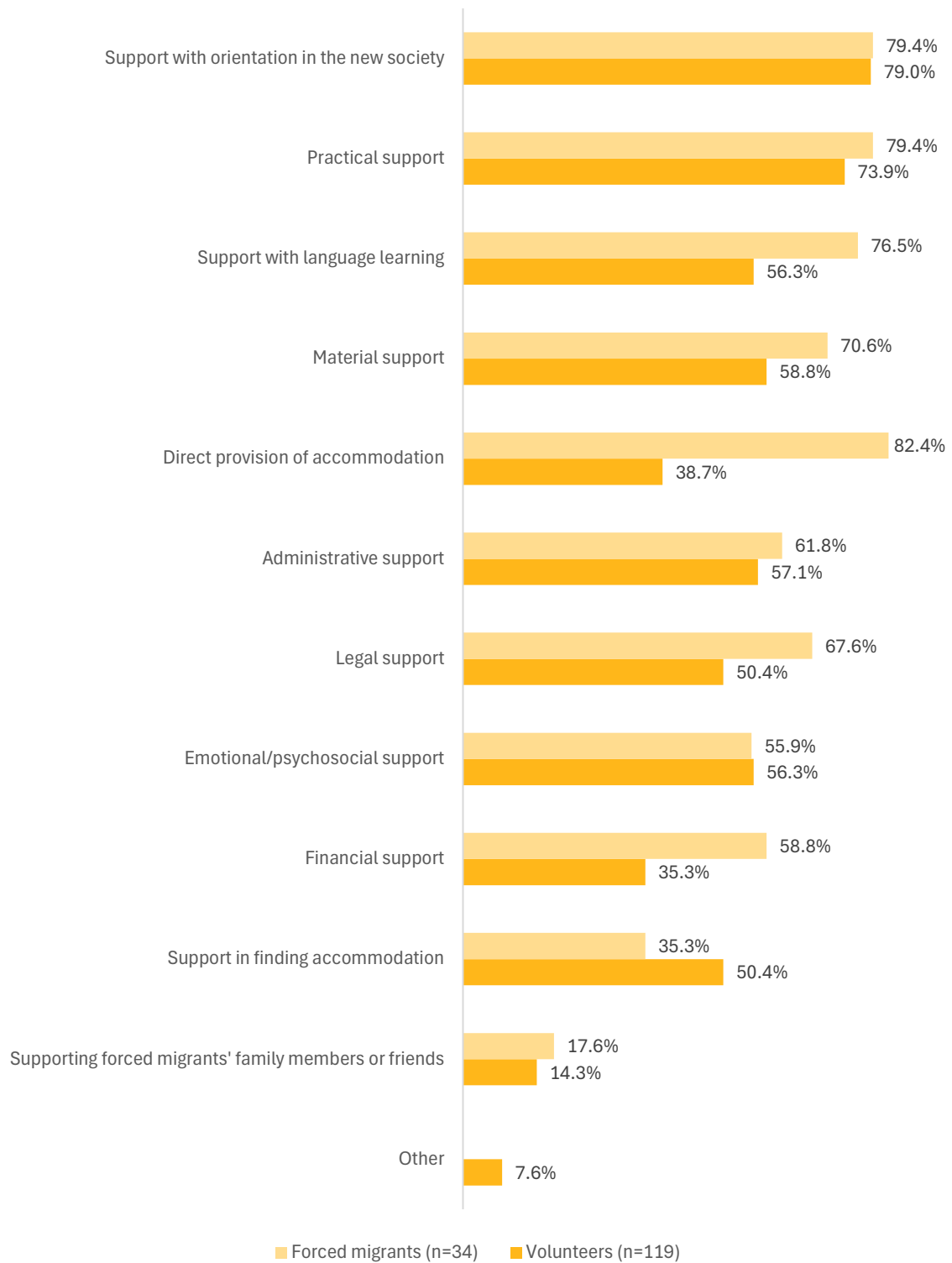
Volunteers (n=119) provided different forms of support to forced migrants. The most prevalent forms of support provided orientation in the new society (79%), practical support (73.9%), and administrative support (57.1%). Material support (58.8%), language learning (56.3%) and emotional/psychosocial support (56.3%) were also significant. Legal support and help in finding accommodation were provided by more than half (50.4%) of volunteers. Direct provision of accommodation was less common (38.7%), and support for family members or friends was relatively rare (14.3%).

Forced migrants (n=34) were also asked about the support they received. The most common forms of assistance included the direct provision of accommodation (82.4%), orientation in the new society (79.4%), practical support (79.4%), and language assistance (76.5%). Material support (70.6%), legal support (67.6%), administrative support (61.8%), financial support (58.8%) and emotional and psychosocial support (55.9%) were also significant. Support for family members or friends was less common (17.6%), indicating a focus on the primary forced migrants.

At the time of filling out the survey, 81.5 per cent of the volunteers reported that they had supported forced migrants in the past and continued to do so currently. Meanwhile, 13.4 per cent indicated that they had supported forced migrants in the past but no longer do so. Additionally, 5 per cent were supporting forced migrants for the first time.

Similarly, one forced migrant was receiving support for the first time (2.9%), 20.6 per cent of the forced migrants had previously received support and were still being supported, and 76.5 per cent of the forced migrants had received support in the past but were no longer receiving it. The majority of the respondents (23.5%) were staying in a reception centre. 17.6 per cent of the respondents were still residing with the volunteers. Another 17.6 per cent of the forced migrants in rented housing. 5.9 per cent stayed with family and 11.8 per cent with friends. One respondent was staying in an emergency accommodation (2.9%). One in five respondents preferred not to answer this question (20.6%).

Figure 30. Support received by forced migrants and support offered by volunteers in Italy
(multiple answers possible, %)



4.3.6. Private accommodation as a specific form of support

Among the types of support offered, private accommodation was mentioned as well. Further elaboration on this theme will be provided in the following section. Most of the forced migrants (82.4%) mentioned that they received this kind of support, while 32.8 per cent of the volunteers mentioned that they provided accommodation directly. Private accommodation referred to different types of living arrangements:

- Forced migrants are accommodated in separate accommodations (65.2% in the survey of volunteers, 50% in the survey of forced migrants);
- Forced migrants are accommodated in completely separate units within the same accommodation as the volunteers (10.9% in the survey of volunteers, 25% in the survey of forced migrants);
- Volunteers and forced migrants are sharing one or more rooms in the same accommodation (13% in the survey of volunteers, n=46, and 17.9% in the survey of forced migrants, n= 28);
- Forced migrants are accommodated elsewhere, e.g. in forms of collective housing (10.9% in the survey of volunteers, 7.1% in the survey of forced migrants).

Duration and termination of accommodation period

The majority of forced migrants stayed with a host family for seven to twelve months (42.9%), followed by 39.3 per cent who stayed for two to six months. A smaller portion (14.3%) stayed for more than a year, and only 3.6 per cent stayed for one week to one month. The cumulative percentages indicate that the majority (85.7%) of respondents stayed for up to twelve months.

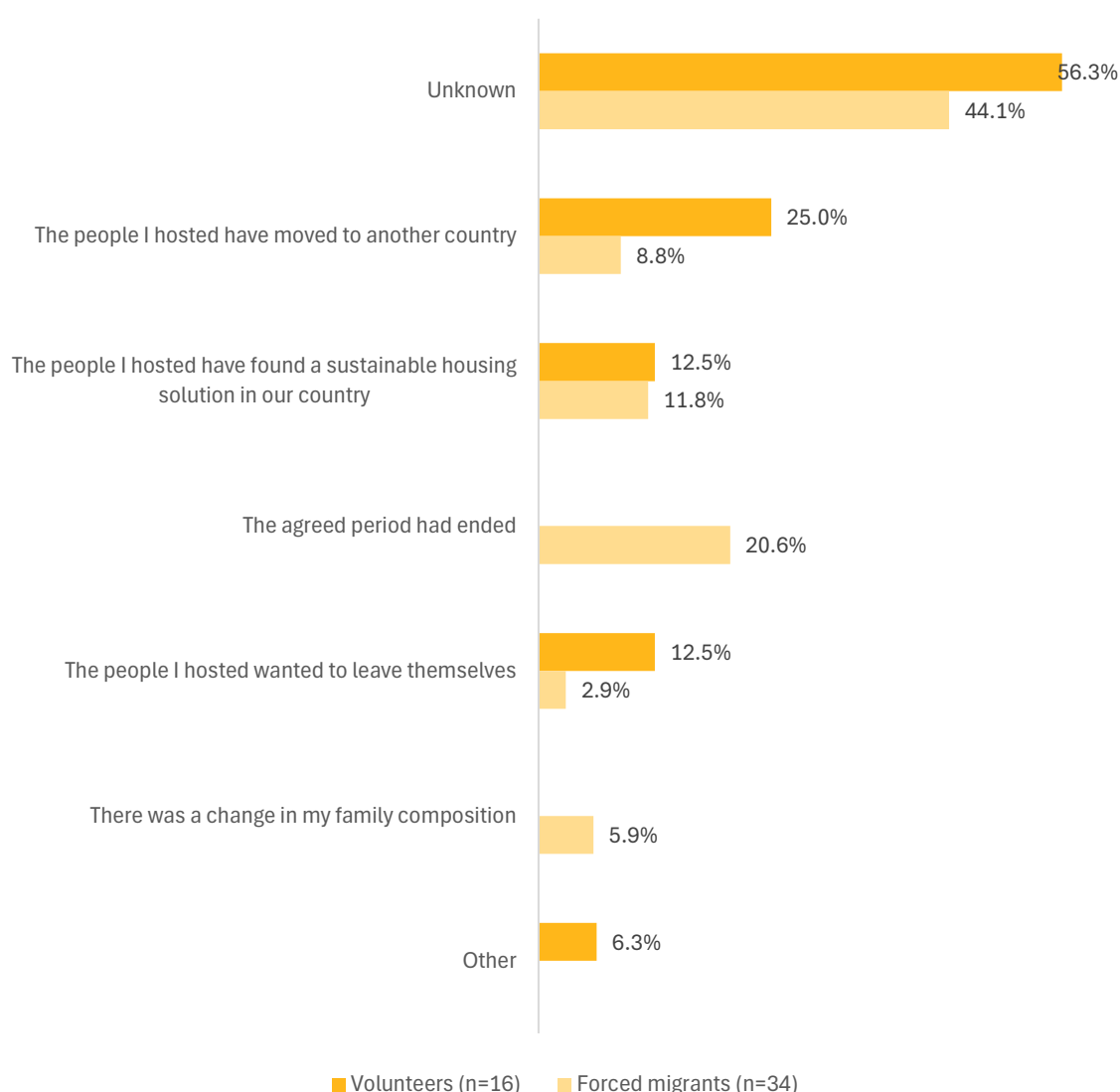
Looking at the duration of accommodation provided by volunteers in their most recent hosting experience, we see that most volunteers provided accommodation for more than one year (45.7%). About 30.4 per cent hosted for two to six months, while 17.4 per cent hosted for seven to twelve months. Short-term hosting was less common, with 4.3 per cent hosting for one week to one month and 2.2 per cent for less than one week.

In Italy, forced migrants (n=34) named various reasons why the private accommodation ended. About one fifth (20.6%) of the respondents indicated that the agreed period had ended, while 11.8 per cent found a sustainable housing solution in the country. While 8.8 per cent moved to another country, and 5.9 per cent of the forced migrants had a change in family composition that complicated staying in the accommodation. Additionally, one respondent left voluntarily (2.9%). The limited number of

responses to the same question in the survey for volunteers do not allow to make any significant statements.

Among the forced migrants who had been hosted in private accommodation (n=21), 42.9 per cent continued to receive support from their volunteers after the accommodation period ended. However, 52.4 per cent of the respondents reported that the support ended completely. For one respondent (4.8%), support and follow-up were provided by an external organization after the end of the accommodation period.

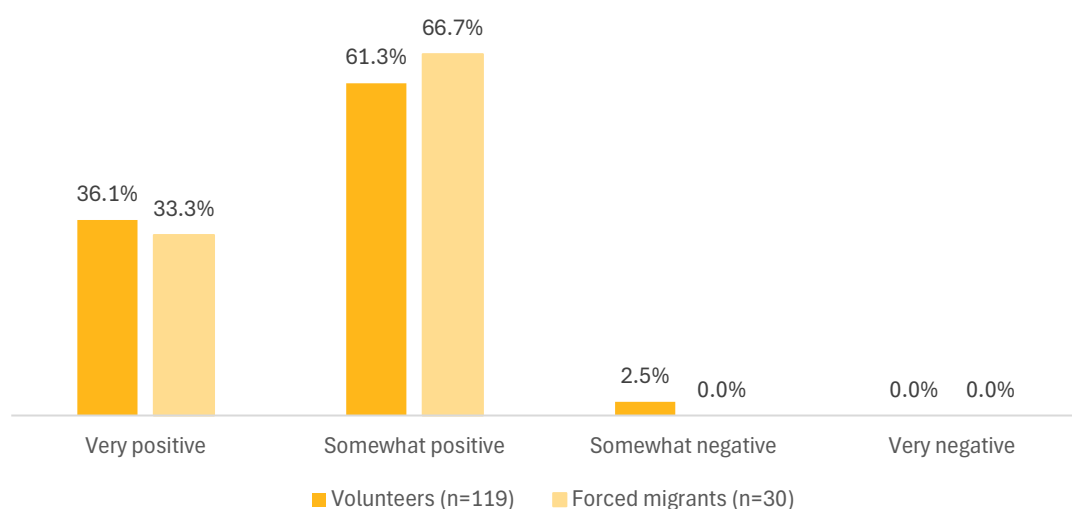
Figure 31. Reason for termination of the hosting period according to volunteers and forced migrants in Italy (%)



4.3.7. Overall experience

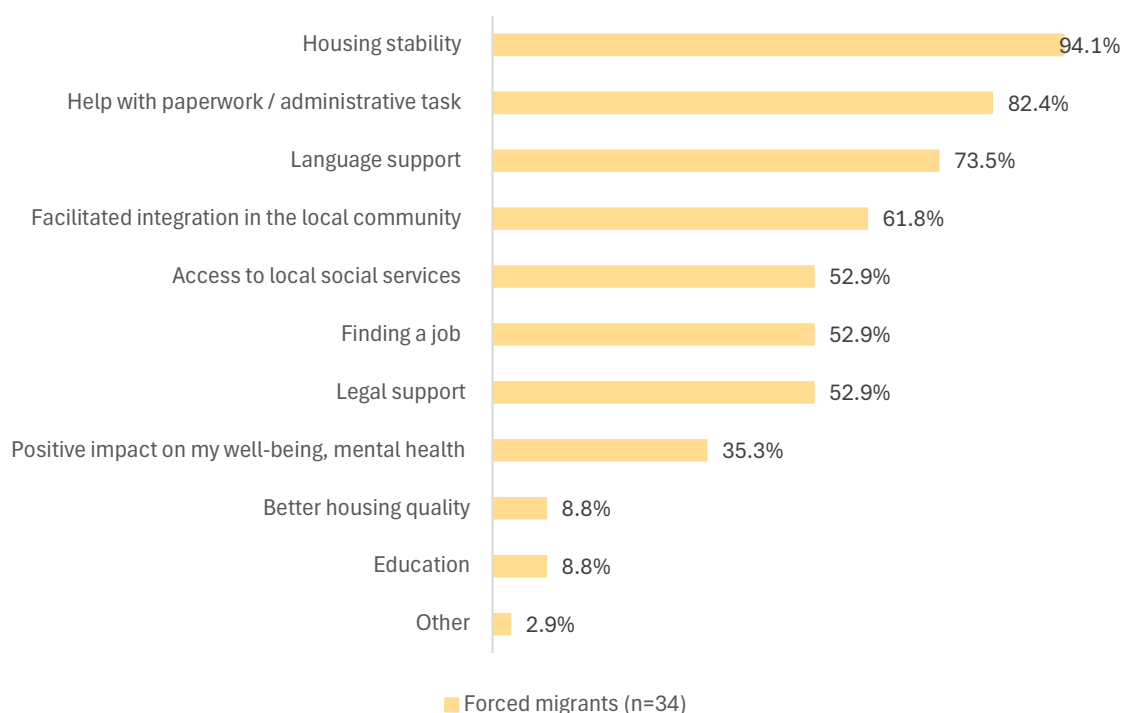
Among the volunteers (n=119), 61.3 per cent valued their overall experience as rather positive and 36.1 per cent as very positive. Forced migrants (n=30) also had a high rate of positive experiences, with the majority (66.7%) rating their experiences as rather positive and the remaining part (33.3%) as very positive.

Figure 32. Overall experience of respondents to the survey in Italy (%)



Forced migrants were asked about the most helpful aspects of being supported and/or hosted (n=34). The top three aspects that were mentioned were: housing stability (94.1%), help with paperwork and administrative tasks (82.4%) and language support (73.5%). Facilitated integration into the local community (61.8%), access to local social services (52.9%), finding a job (52.9%) and legal support (52.9%) are also important. Positive impacts on well-being and mental health were noted by 35.3 per cent of the respondents, while education and other reasons were only mentioned by 8.8 per cent of the forced migrants, respectively.

Figure 33. Most helpful aspects of being supported and/or hosted according to forced migrants in Italy (multiple answers possible, %)



4.3.8. Challenges encountered

Although most experiences appear to be quite positive, volunteers (n=119) and forced migrants (n=34) also faced different challenges during their support trajectory. Both groups identified communication and language barriers as a significant challenge, with 65.5 per cent of volunteers and 55.9 per cent of forced migrants reporting this issue. Perceived differences in socialization patterns were noted by 52.9 per cent of the volunteers, while cultural differences were mentioned by half of the forced migrants (50%). Social issues such as other people's reactions and prejudices were reported by both one in two volunteers and forced migrants (50.4% of volunteers and 50% of forced migrants).

Managing expectations was a challenge for 63.9 per cent of volunteers and 50 per cent forced migrants. Similarly, property maintenance was a concern for 31.9 per cent of volunteers and 14.7 per cent of forced migrants. Health and mental health issues of forced migrants were a significant challenge for 50.4 per cent of volunteers, while disrespect of certain rules was noted by 38.7 per cent and financial issues by 31.1 per cent. Among the forced migrants, 20.6 per cent mentioned that the support was not tailored to their situation, and another 5.9 per cent felt the volunteers lacked the necessary knowledge or experience.

Figure 34. Challenges encountered by volunteers in the support provided in Italy (multiple answers possible, %)

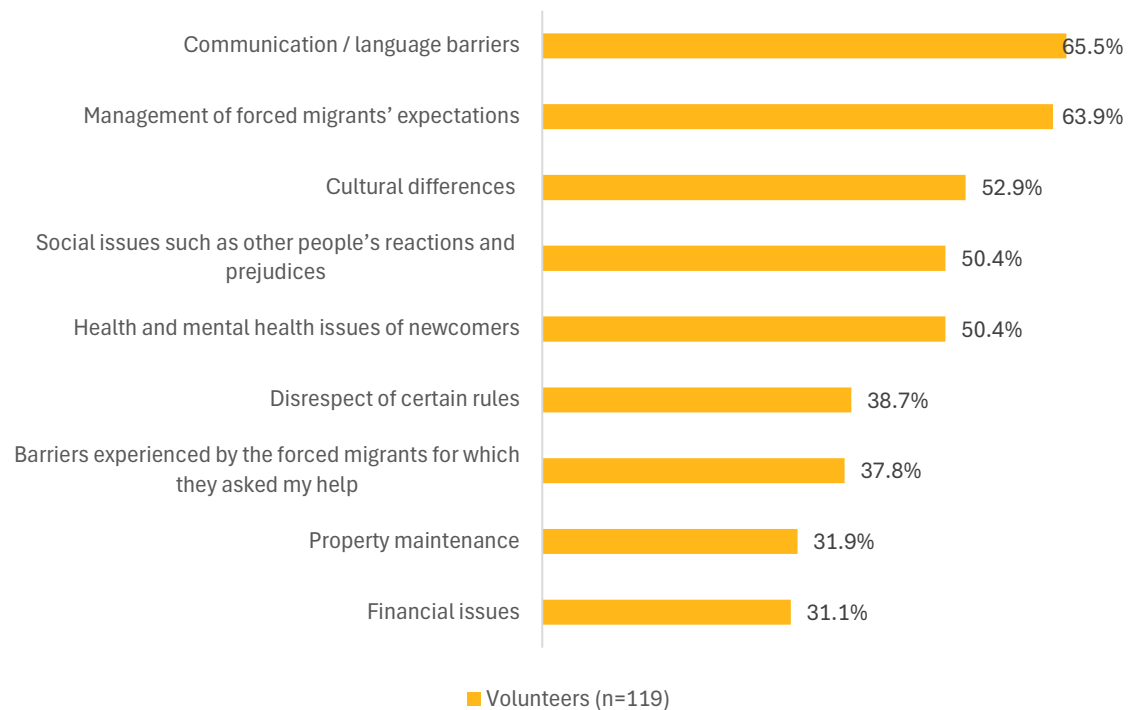
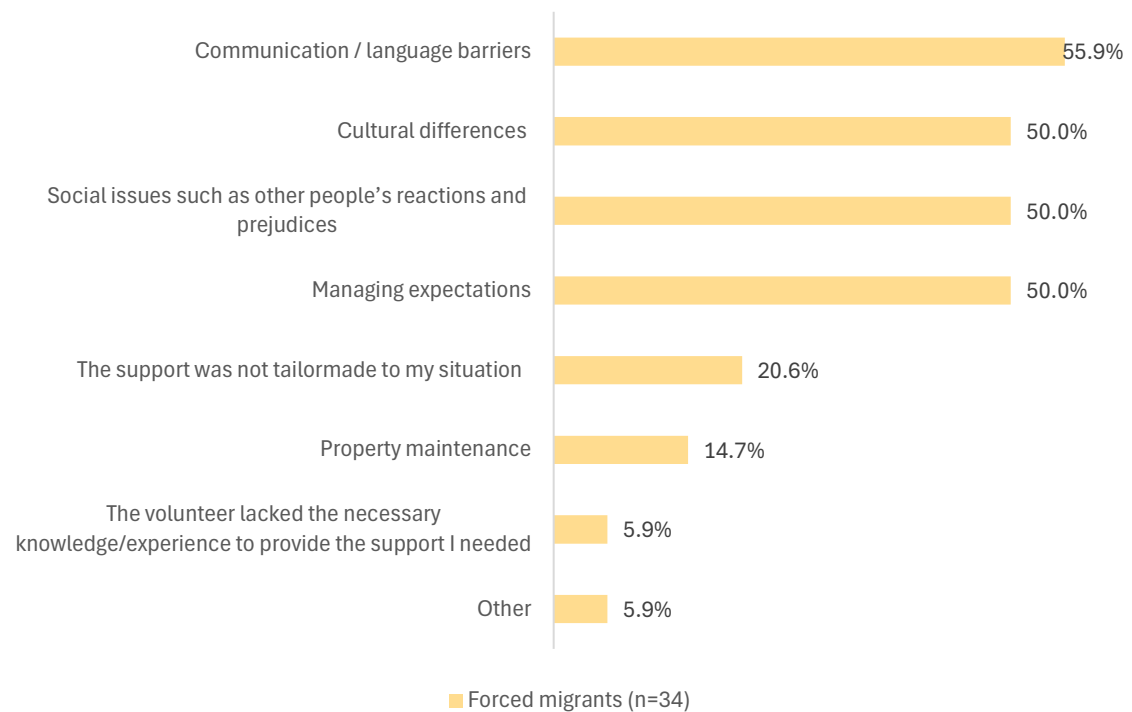


Figure 35. Challenges encountered by forced migrants in the support received in Italy (multiple answers possible, %)



Addressing these challenges

Both volunteers and forced migrants have several ideas on how to overcome the challenges they encountered during the support. The solution most frequently mentioned by the 119 volunteers is more efficient collaboration with the local administration (58%), followed by access to specialised protection services (52.9%). Two in five volunteers mention better institutional guidelines (38.7%) and one in five mentions cultural sensitivity training (26.1%) or financial support (23.5%) as beneficial. Notably, better support from the involved organization (15.1%) is also indicated as helpful. Additionally, some volunteers suggest a helpdesk (12.6%) and access to online platforms or mental health coaches (9.2%). Other solutions formulated include providing continuous training for public staff, reducing bureaucracy, and improving access to local services. Volunteers also suggest offering more information to hosted families about what to expect in Italy, increasing awareness activities and community building.

The solution most frequently mentioned by the 34 forced migrants is access to specialised protection services (61.8%), followed by financial support (55.9%). Access to a helpdesk (41.2%) and cultural sensitivity training (26.5%) are also seen as beneficial. Other suggestions include better institutional guidelines, access to online platforms or mental health coaches, and exchanges with other forced migrants, each at 5.9 per cent. One other solution (5.9%) would be vocational training.

Many volunteers (n=119) reported receiving support themselves during their volunteer engagement. The most common form of support was mentorship and training (63%), which is crucial for equipping volunteers with the skills and knowledge needed to effectively assist forced migrants. All other types of support were also frequently mentioned: language support (56.3%), sharing experiences with other volunteers (44.5%), administrative support (40.3%), support in guiding forced migrants to local services (38.7%), mediation in case of conflicts (36.1%), material support (34.5%), legal support (34.5%), mental-health support (26.9%) and financial support (23.5%).

*Figure 36. Support volunteers received during their engagement in Italy
(multiple answers possible, %)*



The majority of volunteers found the training or mentorship they received relevant to their needs. Specifically, more than half (56.1%) rated it as ‘rather relevant’ and 32.7 per cent as ‘highly relevant’, totalling 88.8 per cent who found it beneficial. Only a small portion found it less useful, with 1.9 per cent considering it ‘highly irrelevant’ and 9.3 per cent ‘rather irrelevant’. This suggests that the training or mentorship provided was generally effective and well-received by most volunteers.

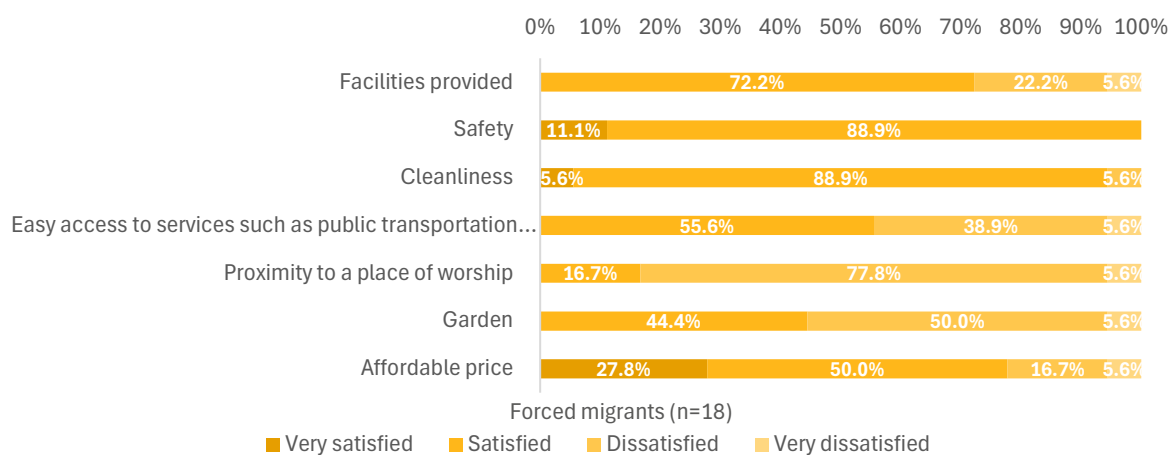
Challenges related to housing

Because of its relevance in the literature and in CS schemes (Van Dam & Schrooten, 2025), special attention was given to housing challenges encountered by forced migrants.

Forced migrants (n=18) were asked how satisfied they were with their current housing situation. Most respondents are satisfied with the safety (88.9%) and cleanliness (88.9%) of their housing. However, satisfaction with facilities provided is lower, with 72.2 per cent of forced migrants that are satisfied and even 22.2 per cent that are dissatisfied. Easy access to services like public transportation might be a concern, with 38.9 per cent dissatisfied. Proximity to a place of worship is notably low in satisfaction, with 77.8 per cent dissatisfied, and only 16.7 per cent satisfied. Garden availability also shows mixed

satisfaction, with 44.4 per cent satisfied and 50 per cent dissatisfied. Affordability is relatively well-rated, with 50 per cent satisfied and 27.8 per cent very satisfied.

Figure 37. Satisfaction of forced migrants with their current housing situation in Italy (multiple answers possible, %)

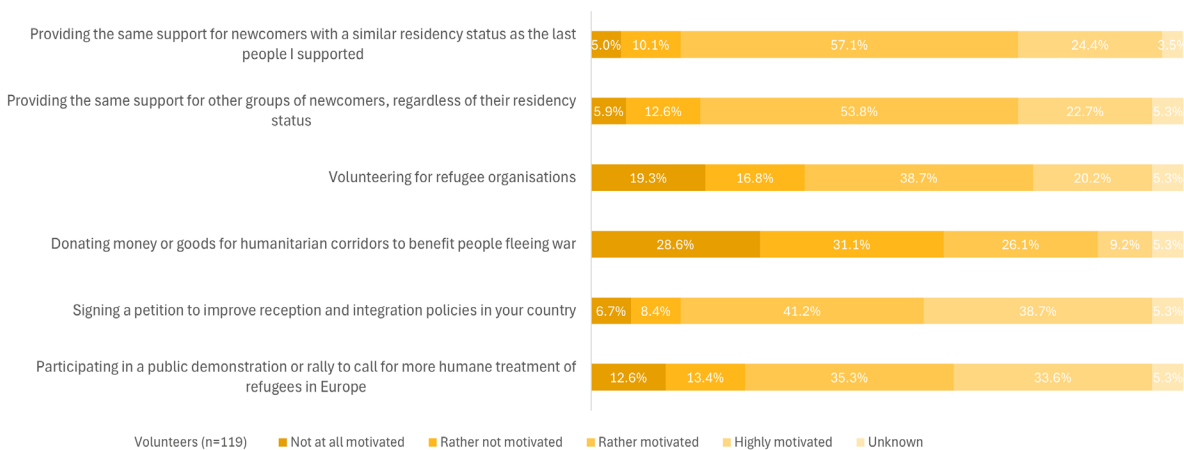


When looking for housing, the most significant barriers for forced migrants (n=34) are financial constraints (79.4%), language difficulties (70.6%) and high prices (67.6%). Additionally, racial discrimination (26.5%), lack of employment (26.5%) and lack of property availability (20.6%) are notable issues. Some respondents struggle with the absence of support networks (14.7%) and housing accessible by public transport (17.6%). A few mentioned the lack of housing near work opportunities (8.8%) and owners' reluctance to rent to families with minors (2.9%). Housing availability near supermarkets, services, or schools did not play a role for the respondents.

4.3.9. Future engagement of volunteers

Volunteers (n=119) were asked about their willingness to engage again in the future for forced migrant related support. Their answers reveal varying levels of motivation among respondents to participate in different future activities. The highest motivation is seen in providing the same type of support for forced migrants with a similar residency status, with almost three fifth (57.1%) rather motivated and 24.4 per cent highly motivated. Also providing the same support for other groups of forced migrants, regardless of their residency status scores high, with more than half (53.8%) rather motivated and 22.7 per cent highly motivated. Conversely, donating money or goods for humanitarian corridors has the lowest motivation, with 28.6 per cent not at all motivated and only 9.2 per cent highly motivated.

Figure 38. Motivations of volunteers to participate in the future activities in Italy (multiple answers possible, %)



4.4. Findings from the qualitative research⁵

In this section, the findings from the qualitative research in Italy are discussed. In Italy, two FGDs were organised: one with migrants and activists who hold a community radio in a social centre in Rome (five participants: three men and two women) and one with activists and policymakers (nine participants: five men and four women). Furthermore, 46 people were interviewed: nineteen volunteers and professional workers of refugee reception facilities (eleven men and eight women), six scholars (five men and one woman), four policymakers (two men and two woman), four activists for housing rights (one man and three women), five operators of humanitarian corridors (three men and two women), four operators of the real estate market (two men and two women), and four forced migrants (four men).

In this section, quotations from various respondents will illustrate the research findings. Each quotation is followed by a unique code that identifies the respondent. The code consists of an abbreviation representing the respondent's profile and a number to differentiate between respondents with the same profile:

- AC: activists for housing rights
- EXP: scholars of migration and refugee reception
- FM: forced migrants
- LL: operators of the real estate market
- PM: policymakers
- UC: operators of humanitarian corridors
- WE V-O: volunteers and professional workers of refugee reception facilities

⁵ Section '4.4 Findings from the qualitative research' is authored by Stefano Portelli, Vincenzo Carbone and Francesco Maria Pezzulli.

4.4.1. Introduction

CS is based on the idea that ‘it takes a community to find a home’. This idea has been conveyed in multiple occasions in the interviews, especially by organisers of big networks of volunteers that proposed and manage humanitarian corridors in Italy, such as Caritas, Sant’Egidio, the Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy (FCEI) and the Italian Recreational and Cultural Association (ARCI). By matching forced migrants with sponsor groups before the departure, these initiatives manage to create networks around each person who is included in a CS project, and to provide support to this network:

“To house a family, we need around twenty people who can accompany the process. We arrived at this conclusion with time; because somebody shall go with the kids, somebody shall teach them Italian, somebody shall take care of economic sustainability... [...] Everybody can do something, and this means not only professionals.” (UC 4)

Interviews were conducted with individuals in leadership positions within these organizations, as well as those organising CS projects involving forced migrants who already are in Italy. The largest network, Refugees Welcome Italy, was included, along with smaller local organizations such as Progetto Ali, Asinitas, and Terre Ferme. These interviewees emphasised the significant potential of CS to mobilise local networks in support of freedom of movement and the rights of people on the move, surpassing the capacity or willingness of the state to ensure these rights.

All interviewees who participated to these initiatives consider that the help that CS provides in the difficult situation of refugee reception in Italy is twofold. On the one hand, it helps vulnerable people overcome their dire situation and find pathways for inclusion in Italian society. On the other hand, it encourages local social groups to organise into networks of mutual help, and to take action to guarantee the rights or address the needs they perceive as unmet by the political and administrative structures of the Italian state: *“In Cuneo, Piedmont, a group created a sponsor model involving local community members. They matched migrants with sponsors who helped them with various activities, using a ‘time bank’ system.” (WE V-O 2)*

“In 2008, I left my country. Because in my country there was a problem, a dictator. The same president for 32 years. We had a job in a company, in agriculture, the countryside. In 2007, my father was arrested, and all the jobs stopped. In 2008, it was the same, so I escaped from our country. There were so many problems: prison, military, then they started the war with Ethiopia. So, in 2009, I escaped, to Sudan. I was in Sudan for four years, then after Sudan in Libya, and arrived at Lampedusa. Three weeks in Lampedusa, then Pozzallo, then Camini. I arrived in Camini in 2013. I was in the project. When the project finished, I rented a house, then I bought a house. (FM 5)

“In 2018, I worked in Greek refugee camps to identify vulnerable people for medical treatment and security in Italy. The experience was deeply touching, seeing many people in dire conditions.” (FM 2)

“The migrant loses its [label] as being a migrant, he becomes a person in a network of relationships where he is the migrant, but his main feature now is that he has been hosted by Mr. X or Miss Y, so in the local context he assumes an identity, a name, that in fact is his real name.” (WE V-O 6)

For many, CS is a way to put into practice the idea of a cohesive social structure, that includes the most disadvantaged, through a controlled form of resource redistribution, and which obtains in exchange a higher level of self-consciousness and understanding of the world.

“The state must return to being a state and put at the centre politics and policies, with respect to a whole idea of social discourse that is always put on the background. But I also believe very much in mutual help as a form of life and activation. This means: there are some rights and they should be accessible, demandable, but on the other side I think that the life of people does not depend on this, but on a network of mutual help that can be more open, and that brings to a different level of knowledge, especially when we talk about people coming from different backgrounds.” (WE V-O 2B)

However, multiple obstacles make it difficult to scale up of this caretaking process. The difficulties mostly involve the social structure of Italy as a country of emigration, which still has many difficulties in configuring as a receiving society, and the administrative structure of the Italian state, leading to complex

procedures in the daily lives of forced migrants and those who help them. As a forced migrant explained, very concisely:

"I also lived in France. You can't compare to Italy. You can't even compare Italy with Spain. When we talk about migrants. Italy is the bottom of the scale, when we talk, to my understanding, of the integration of migrants. Some people are lucky. Some of them. One over a hundred." (FM 3)

A special mention goes to the case of Camini, a small village in the Italian Southern region of Calabria. A local network, which initially took the form of an association and later became a SAI reception centre, has created over 200 accommodations for forced migrants by refurbishing abandoned houses left by people who migrated from the village. This network has successfully established a CS project that already housed over 200 migrants. The project is an offshoot of the project in Riace, a nearby village that gained global recognition for the mayor's effort of repopulating the abandoned houses with (forced) migrants (Berardi, 2021; Carbone, 2019).

"We involved Italians, such as carpenters and construction workers, to refurbish houses for migrants, creating a circular economy of rents. From 2011 to now, we created 200 accommodations, offices, and workshops. We support migrants to train and find jobs, ensuring they work with regular contracts and are respected as workers." (WE V-O 16)

4.4.2. The perspective of volunteers

The volunteers interviewed for this study were organisers of humanitarian corridors who have managed the matching of forced migrants with Italian families, people working in the SAI reception system and helping forced migrants achieve housing autonomy, members of grassroots organizations that support forced migrants in obtaining housing and other rights, and activists of political groups that support housing for forced migrants. Thirteen of the people interviewed live and are active in Rome; four are in Southern Italy (Calabria), two in Northern Italy (Veneto and Emilia Romagna).

Critiques of the official reception system

The main point that all interviewees share, and that motivates them to engage in CS projects, is the challenging conditions of the Italian reception system and limited scope of comprehensive public policies. This may have led some to perceive these issues as so ingrained that they may seem almost intentional. Those who have spent many years working in the reception system or with forced migrants may often feel burned out due to the perceived lack of institutional interest in the wellbeing of forced migrants:

“The great problem of the circuit of reception is the fact that it has been dismantled, then restored again, some professional figures were removed, other added but probably have less relevance. In general, I think that the level of the services has really decreased.” (WE V-O 11B)

Austerity cutbacks inflicted to the official reception system is almost universally considered the main reason why activities that could help integration were reduced in the official reception system, causing forced migrants to spend many years without any training or support. This lack of support negatively affects their ability to attain inclusion in Italian society. Considerable importance is given to the need to learn the Italian language, as a sign of reasonable potential integration: *“SAI, as it is built, does nothing else than produce people who, when they are out, they don’t know where to go.” (EP 2)*

“The most virtuous mechanism there is in Italy is SAI, but what the Decree Conte-Salvini did was to completely empty the CAS, [...] That is, the first level of reception of any kind of intervention that gave any prospect [of improvement]. For example, they took out the language schools from the CAS. So, when you go from the first to the second reception system, you never had any classes of Italian, because they parked you there as an asylum seeker that could be expelled.” (WE V-O 1)

“[Forced migrants] have enormous gaps [of knowledge], because when they finish their time in the reception system, they are thrown in a world they don’t know, and for which they are absolutely unprepared. Moreover, in their everyday life, they have a series of enormous emotional and relational gaps. And the other problem is that there is nobody directing anything, so maybe the same person is in charge of different services, different associations, but without a global view of the person, of what they are doing.” (WE V-O 7)

Volunteers are generally very proud, instead, of smaller SAI located in very small villages, which seem to present better conditions to support people in their process of inclusion, even if it has the negative consequence of rooting people in areas that are isolated and often derelict:

“We do not talk of immigration, but of emigration, people that emigrate to other countries to find their luck somewhere else. And they leave their houses empty, with entire municipalities that remain depopulated. And why don’t we regenerate these places, giving those houses to [forced migrants]?” (AC 3)

“These are interesting things, for sure, because you put in communities new energies, new contacts. But these are all depopulated villages, with very few people, mostly very old people [...].

So, these experiences are far worse than people think. It is much better when reception is spread on the territory [In Italian 'accoglienza diffusa'], but it is always a small place, it is always a parallel channel, you anyway created a kind of ghetto, you put them there, nobody sees them." (AC 1)

"We are having a hard time with SAI, because we understood that... people who arrive through humanitarian corridors are placed at the bottom of the list, so we never manage to put them into SAI facilities. This is what there is: I understand it, because from their point of view there are always too little resources [In Italian 'la coperta è sempre troppo corta'] so they prioritise people who are homeless or who did not have any housing alternative. But this means that we should leave our guests in the streets to give them this opportunity..." (UC 2)

Some volunteers extend these critiques to the overall logic of inclusion/exclusion, and of emergency, which pervades the entire public reception system, and especially on the role that third sector organizations have carved for themselves in a system that does not provide wellbeing to forced migrants.

"When you shift the focus from humanitarian issues, charity, and emergency to the right to housing, which includes freedom of movement and not being forced into precarious jobs, the entire mechanism begins to break up. Institutions and stakeholders with economic interests in maintaining the current dynamics resist this shift. Even third sector organizations and social cooperatives, despite good intentions, survive because of the emergency humanitarian paradigm." (AC 2)

Hardships in finding housing for forced migrants

Among the organizations that work in supporting forced migrants in their attempts to find autonomous housing, some already hold houses of their own. In general, only the huge networks of volunteers, that already have some property available, do not face problems in providing housing for forced migrants. All other volunteers interviewed declare that housing is the biggest

"Housing is the biggest obstacle we face. Even us as an organization, when we try to rent a house, in our name, to host refugees in it, it is not easy. When owners know that our aim is to give apartments to migrants, we often have problems. (UC 2)

problem they face in supporting forced migrants towards autonomy. Even the organisers of big and well-known networks of volunteers, both religious and secular, claim that they face huge difficulties in renting houses, and that these difficulties are mostly rooted in prejudice:

“There is an immense difficulty in finding a flat for this specific use, also if we provide the rental contract, we guarantee payments for the bills, but there are huge prejudices, so the problem is not economic.” (WE V-O 1)

“Housing refugees is a tragedy, because when they leave the [official] structures they can’t find a room. They don’t find it because nobody rents it to them. Even Italian people do not find them [...]. Not even when they have a working contract. These poor guys need residence; if they don’t have a residence in Roma they can’t sign a contract, because short term rentals are only accepted if you have your residence abroad.” (WE V-O 13)

Volunteers confirm that public policies for housing are lacking, as an organiser of a well-known network of volunteers states: *“There is no public policy for housing. Everything is entrusted to the free market.” (WE V-O 1)*

However, finding housing in the free market often involves facing racism and discrimination, as stated by a volunteer trying to find houses for rent for a group of forced migrants from the Balkans in the Italian region of Campania: *“I have asked to all real estate association. As soon as we arrived [they said]: ‘Yes, but we absolutely do not rent to Roma people, this is not for them.’” (AC 1)*

“The private rental market has one main feature: it is racist and classist. It demands qualification, it is not open for some specific nationalities. And when they refuse me a house because I am a foreigner, one, two, three times, who will guarantee for me? Nobody.” (AC 4)

Setting up community sponsorship schemes

Several interviewees claimed that the only possibility that forced migrants had to find housing was benefitting from some kind of mediation from volunteers or sponsor groups, such in the case of a volunteer who shifted her contract to a forced migrant from Western Africa. It would not have been possible for him to improve his situation outside the challenging conditions of an institutional reception centre and manage to have a rental contract, if it wasn’t through the network of trust that the volunteer created around him.

“When B. came, I was living there for two years. Then I went back to Naples and since [the landlord] trusted me so much, he made a contract for B. He now has a rental contract, and through this he managed that a friend of his could have his name on a registered rental contract. He obtained residency, he found a permanent job [In Italian “a tempo indeterminato”]. He created

for himself a situation of stability, starting from homelessness. He was in a CARA, that terrible one in the periphery of Rome.” (AC 1)

Volunteers who work in grassroots associations underline the potential of networks of personal trust that can emerge from cultural activities, such as a theatre laboratory developed by an association in Rome.

“We met a boy from the theatre classes who was outside the reception system and slept in the streets. He joined us and created relationships, found his first job, and was hosted by A. for a few months. Knowing him changed our neighbours’ perceptions.” (WE V-O 7)

Building relationships and networks of trust through volunteering and sponsorship represent motivations for setting up models of CS. In fact, CS emerges as a way of systematising mediation and support to groups that are able to provide matching, background checks and training activities: *“We give sponsors a dossier with the history of the people, and they evaluate and offer options like an apartment in Brindisi or a house in Lunigiana. Beneficiaries usually agree.” (UC 1)*

“In the model we developed, there is a key stakeholder who is the intermediary; and then a series of other people who can validate their positions, but only if they meet certain conditions, through the monitoring and the control, from the outset, of the characteristics of those potential sponsors.” (UC 2)

“We developed assessment paths for groups to become sponsoring communities, including online interviews, role games, and training. We aim to structure a solid community sponsorship model, inspired by Canada.” (UC 2)

Some interviewees criticise the notion of community, preferring to talk about trust and mutual help; they still recognise that these forms of grassroots sponsorship are not spontaneous, that there is always a form of promotion, an ‘engine’.

“There are contexts in which it can work, but it does not work in terms of community. It works in term of relationships, of trust, of reciprocity. These are contexts in which... it’s small scales, the village, the neighbourhood. Areas that are linked to the church. But, I must say it, there is always an engine.” (EP 3)

Mentorship and support for sponsor groups

Organisers of humanitarian corridors are very aware of the importance of the messages they convey to both forced migrants and volunteers, and in particular of the work they do in the interaction between them: *“The most important part is the beginning. If the beginning goes well, integration will be rather easy. So, the issue on which we all insisted is learning the language.” (UC 4)*

In the cases in which forced migrants are hosted by a family, volunteers have to take care of the mediation between the volunteers and the guests, and of the conflicts that may emerge. In the case that the organization already has facilities to house people, care is put in training forced migrants to live in the new conditions, even if often this training may seem a form of acculturation.

“The place of fractures is very often the kitchen. So, for example in our houses, even when it is common houses, we created a big kitchen with all separate fireplaces. Everybody has their kitchen; everybody has their fridge. So, we understood that, for example, to have them living together during the first six-seven months, before we give them an apartment, is very useful, because they learn to live together.” (UC 4)

Mediation should also try to compensate for negative experiences for volunteers: volunteers must also work to manage the expectation of those who offered their houses.

“Even if they didn’t have a positive experience, we try to support them to explain them what can happen. What was the experience? The typical negative experience, for example when the person, or the family [you host] leaves without telling you anything. This may create disappointment. We prepare them to this, we tell them ‘Don’t worry, these people have been saved and will have a future anyway...’” (UC 4)

For one interviewee, however, there are important biases in the organizations that organize CS, which are visible in the way volunteers treat forced migrants.

“In these associations moved by good will, obviously, the risk is that they gather people that want to feel that they are good people. So, there is a dimension of charity. There is this idea of ‘I do something that will save you, because this will make me become a better person’. This feature is very present in all volunteer organizations, that perform a kind of ‘pop’ activism, as I call it: they are active, but they also want to quickly become a humanitarian organization; because it is easier

to talk about humanitarian organizations, than of human rights, or of political rights. This is where you find most ambivalences and ambiguities.” (EP 1)

In one specific case, the support given to forced migrants is not framed as support to migrants, but to workers: it is the case of the hostel Dambe So in the agricultural town of Rosarno, where an organization funded by the Valdese Church has created a ‘hostel’ where temporary workers in agriculture can rent an accommodation for very little money, to avoid entering the networks of exploitation that extract profit from the need of housing of temporary workers, almost all forced migrants. The association manages to sustain itself through these small rents and presents itself as an alternative to the humanitarian paradigm that governs many other projects. The idea is to offer to beneficiaries a support that can be paid for, and economically sustainable. The project is also expanding to production and distribution, with the setting up of fair-trade agricultural companies that supply consumers in Milan, and is also networking with Camini to create other opportunities for fair jobs in the area.

“We also worked a lot in the field of community intervention. For example, when in summer we have free apartments, we put tourists in them, such as boy scouts, who give us a donation, and sometimes help us to clean the neighbourhood. This activity, together with an activity of regenerating a park that we then dedicated to the memory of people who were killed or died, with a memorial value, allowed us to get in touch with locals, who basically appreciate us very much.” (WE V-O 10)

Dambe is one of the few projects which is explicitly aimed at single men, a target population which is often excluded from CS projects that involve household accommodation. Even if Camini and Rosario represent extremely successful and innovative projects, many other towns and villages in the same area of Calabria host interesting projects of widespread territorial reception. This is mostly organised in the form of SAI, which, instead of hosting forced migrants in a single facility, spreads them in a wider territory. This could for example be an entire village, where one by one the project manages to find houses, refurbish them, and host people. These projects such as Gioiosa Jonica or Caulonia can be considered forms of CS, or at least present the potential to create CS schemes, for example to accommodate the people who will leave the projects:

“The community always answered in a positive way. We did not have any phenomena of discrimination, of racism, we did not have serious problems with the community. We have people who rent their houses and offer opportunities for work. The relationships with neighbours [are good]; which is also the reason why we decided to engage in widespread territorial reception [In Italian ‘accoglienza diffusa’], apart from guaranteeing autonomy, it also helps to insert people in the community. (WE V-O 14)”

It is important to consider, however, that the potential for extension of CS is not infinite, and that the reach of this structure of reception cannot be imagined to structurally accommodate all forced migrants in Italy. To the contrary, at the local level many operators notice that they cannot expand as they imagined. Similarly, the network Refugees Welcome has noticed that as soon as they reached the considerable number of 2 000 families offering their houses, they could not expand anymore. Given the fact that the number of forced migrants hosted in reception centres in Italy up to the end of December 2024 was almost 140 000 (Italian Ministry of Interior, 2024), and that many more are precariously housed in shanty towns or other forms of ‘informality’, it is important to remark the limits of CS.

“We attempted to propose an extension of the project of Gioiosa to the municipality of Locri, which is known for other issues, but it only lasted some months. Because the community rejected completely the idea of receiving [refugees]. ... they simply did not do it, so you can’t work there. Because you don’t have the material conditions: where do I do integration, if there is no community that integrates?” (WE V-O 14)

“The offer of people who are available to host is not infinite, we may also have saturated it. I can tell you that the cost of hosting a family, through the so-called social networks, has increased substantially. It increased for two reasons, on one side the market is saturated, on the other the social networks we use are not adequate.” (WE V-O 6)

Another important factor to understand the state of CS is the Ukrainian crisis. The sudden influx of forced migrants from Ukraine in 2022 changed many factors of the reception system: on one side, the timeframe that beneficiaries of temporary protection from Ukraine had was considerably different from the rest of refugee groups. On the other, the facilitations they received from the Italian government were very different than those offered to all the other waves of forced migrants. Finally, the expectations of Ukrainian forced migrants were much higher than other forced migrants. These conditions in some way demobilised some of the networks of CS that had been carefully created during the past ten years, as an organiser explained:

“When the war in Ukraine happened in 2022, 150 000 people arrived in Italy, mostly housed by Ukrainians or those in contact with them. This migration saturated the reception market and affected the mental space of organizations and people. Solidarity burned down a bit due to the different and more difficult forms of reception.” (WE V-O 6)

4.4.3. The perspectives of forced migrants

To understand some qualitative aspects of long-term relationships with the country, the qualitative research in Italy focused on forced migrants who already spent a long time in Italy. Some work as mediators or are in some ways connected with CSOs guaranteeing for CS or humanitarian corridors. All have also benefited of ‘homestay accommodation’, either at the beginning of their time in Italy, or after having left institutional facilities. In some cases, they have also guaranteed for other forced migrants who needed help in finding housing. They have thus played different roles in the field of forced migrants’ reception and finding accommodation for forced migrants outside the official reception system. During the time they have spent in Italy, many of their peers have migrated to third countries such as Germany or France, where access to welfare, to housing and to the job market may be perceived as guaranteed. Their analysis of Italy is therefore compared to information they have on other contexts.

Something that often puzzles volunteers who offer their houses, and even forced migrants who became mediators, is the fact that the process of inclusion in a family is often interrupted abruptly as forced migrants suddenly decide to move to a third country; or, when forced migrants do not seem happy or grateful for the opportunities they had. This is an example of an ‘academic corridor’, a complementary pathway to bring scholars and students, in this case in a house north from Rome:

“In 2021, we organised with university students and a professor to help over 50 professors and their families. We set up a structure with volunteers and fetched them to a house in Cerveteri.

Most left to other countries. We helped an Afghan professor and his family move to Italy, then to France, where he got a contract but feels nostalgic for Afghanistan.” (FM 2)

However, to understand the reactions of forced migrants, it is important to take a broader view of the challenges faced in Italy: navigating a housing market marked by discrimination, facing the ambiguity of informal ‘mediators’ such as diasporic communities, and encountering the inconsistencies in how laws are applied in Italy. Gaining insight into these aspects through the perspectives of forced migrants themselves, or those who have been in close contact with them, helps to clarify misunderstandings related to the expectations that play a crucial role in human relationships within CS.

“The management of all the housing system, and of the inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers, is very verticalized, and we all know well that all the models [...] like Rica have found a fierce opposition, first bureaucratic, then political, and even judicial. To my understanding, this happens also because basically – and this is what many people who live in our squats tell us, who are refugees and asylum seekers – the system tends to maintain you in what many describe as a status of permanent infantilisation, of perennial lack of independence.” (AC 2)

Navigating discrimination

The experience of inclusion in Italy is fundamentally dependent on the quality of the shelter and of the network in which each single forced migrant manages to find a space. The stories of people who lived in the institutionalised reception system help to understand how much the Italian housing system is marked by discrimination: *“We had – because it was not only me working in this – really frightful answers, that always went in the direction of racism: ‘We don’t want black people.’” (LL 3)*

“I was born in Iran, and my family moved there from Afghanistan for security. I stayed in Greece for a while, then crossed the Balkans to Austria and arrived in Rome. In Termini, Afghans helped me request asylum. My experience in a refugee centre was devastating, with poor conditions and violence. I often had to pray for food and faced many hardships.” (FM 2)

Discrimination is more prevalent than economic reasons. Even though there are no economic barriers, forced migrants are unable to find housing: *“The income is never a problem. When foreigners do not find a house, the problem is never income, but racism.” (WE V-O 6)*

For many forced migrants, the possibility of having a proper home feels like a dream, something that seems impossible to achieve. Everybody remembers the expedients through which they managed to have their first house, always temporary or dependent on a network of acquaintances.

“They ask you the documents, I send them my income and everything, and then they invite me for a visit. You go there, and then, at the end of the day, when they see you as a black person, they don't want to give [the house]. So, we did it continuously, for one year and a half, and it didn't work. No luck. Zero. Until I restricted the area to Calabria, where I had lived for many, many years. I couldn't even find anything there. But I was lucky, I found a tourist bed and breakfast. Somebody wanted to rent during wintertime: I rented it, and it was ok. (FM 3)

“A friend of mine rented a house and told me if I wanted to go live with him, he paid 400 euro for a single room, he told me to pay 200 and 200. I did small jobs, distribute leaflets, advertisement, so I could earn some money to pay a rent and find a space. I also worked with an association, but had some project and could pay for myself. I also went to an evening school. But the house really saved me, my friend really saved me. I never imagined that I could rent a house and live in a private house.” (FM 2)

This racist bias of the housing market, as one volunteer says, is taken for granted by everybody who navigates this field: *“The issue of social housing is completely closed. Migrants do not even think of accessing social housing, because there are no policies that foster access to them.” (AC 3)*

“We say that there is a racist rental market, but this is not proved. We know it as our experience, because this is what we understand from our front desks. Every month we go in a mission to Termini [Rome's main train station] and when we bring the leaflet of our legal helpdesk, we ask ‘Why are you here, why do you sleep in the streets?’. In most cases they answer, ‘Nobody rents me a house because I am black.’” (AC 4)

This leads to the paradox that even people who have spent many years in Italy and speak the language well, have enormous difficulties in finding a house without the intermediary of Italian friends. This experience obviously influences the trust that many forced migrants have towards the idea of integration.

"[I have been] fourteen years in Italy: I still can't do anything on my own. I have to go with my Italian friends. If I need something in Rome, I have to call L. or somebody else; if I need it in Naples, I must call A. Somebody must be an intermediary, should be there." (FM 3)

The ambiguities of mediation: 'caporalato abitativo' (gangmasters housing brokerage)

Many forced migrants say that diasporic communities in Italy are less strong than in other European countries. As an example, an Afghan community in Rome is in the way of forming in recent years, while in Germany and France there are Afghan associations that have been established for a long time already.

"In Germany, Afghan people live in ghettos, recreate their society, and maintain their lifestyle. In Italy, the Afghan community is smaller and poorer, spread across the countryside or small cities, and they come to Rome to work. Some live in Casilina and are starting to set up shops in Torpignattara, trying to create a community." (FM 2)

Forced migrants tend to group in areas of private rent, such as the aforementioned Casilina or Torpignattara in Rome; mostly because they are excluded from public housing and are forced to relate with the speculative housing market. As a Nigerian forced migrant explains:

"Social housing? I tried to make an offer, for many years, I see that there is also property taken [from the mafia], auctions, whatever... But as soon as they see your name, you are a foreigner, you have residence permit, the law says that you can, but in practice you can't." (FM 3)

"[Afghans] can't buy a house because they don't have to invest, and they can't rent, because they can't pay 50 per cent of their salary, of their income, to rent a house in Rome. So, they live outside the city, for example now they are creating a small community in Tivoli, since rents are lower. Some days ago, I was in Tivoli, I knew there was a nice community [...] Prices are lower, more affordable, and it is connected to Rome. (FM 2)

The need to mediate implies that forced migrants may recur to very different structures to obtain basic rights, not necessarily to those that are mainly concerned for their wellbeing. Networks of diasporic mediators may represent an opportunity to access housing, but they may also mediate for very poor and even dangerous housing solutions.

“As a new migrant, to address an association that will exploit you, is not a good idea. Most of these diaspora associations, for my understanding and experience, they become business centres, criminal business that exploit their fellow migrants. And this is why you have to be very careful.”
(FM 3)

In fact, some networks that guarantee access to rights, such as to formal residence permits, may request illegal payments for their services, even if what they offer is nothing more than rights to which all refugees are entitled. This often applies to diasporic networks.

“Regarding migrants’ networks, you have forms of intermediation for many services, but also for the access to housing, for the access to residence. For example, there are networks that allow you to be hosted. Hosting is fundamental to request renewal of the residence permit. But you have to pay for hospitality. According to the markets, in Naples 300, 400, 500 euro, according to the seasons and the level of control and repression; according to where the civil registry, the local police, control or don’t control.” (EP 3)

Squatting can sometimes represent a positive experience precisely because it can be seen as a solution which is halfway between CS provided by networks of experts of the Italian system, in this case activists, and diasporic networks, such as those living in squats. As an Italian activist says of a person living in a squat she manages:

“He says for example that when he moved to live in the squat he got rid of a series of hurdles and nuisances. He learned Italian better, he even could start to study, he went back to school, on his own. In brief, his quality of life had substantially improved.” (AC 2)

Not all experiences in squatting are positive, though, as this forced migrant explained about a squat in Rome:

“A huge building occupied by a squatting group rented to immigrants. It wasn't what I expected. The place was like an abandoned factory with broken glasses. I called A. and L. and said, ‘I cannot do this. I rather go back to Napoli!’” (FM 3)

Far worse than squatted buildings, however, are shanty towns created, especially in Southern Italy, near areas of temporary work in agriculture. One forced migrant had created an association to fight illegal recruitment of workers by gangmasters known as ‘caporali’ (Dines, 2023). He also refers to how

mediators provide housing for their employers, as a form of ‘caporalato abitativo’ (gangmasters housing brokerage).

“I’ve travelled all my life, and Rosarno was one of the toughest. My brothers went to work there and had a bad experience. I picked up two guys stranded in an agricultural settlement with no job or money. The conditions were so bad I said, ‘If you stay too long here, you’ll die’. One of them is in France now, and we joke about when I rescued him.” (FM 3)

Arbitrariness as an opportunity and a curse

All interviewed forced migrants describe Italy as a place where laws are rigid and unfair, but where there is an enormous space to overcome them, due to the collaboration of people who make a living outside legal means. This even opens possibilities of finding housing, but puts forced migrants in situation of dependency, patronage, and danger.

“In Italy, you can find landlords who rent houses built illegally or without a contract to avoid taxes. The conditions are often dangerous or precarious, but landlords don’t care as long as they make money. Many foreigners in Southern regions manage to contact Italians who don’t care about the law.” (AC 3)

These forms of illegal networks that create smoother access to housing – though often in very poor conditions – may even border criminal associations, which in Southern regions are more visible than elsewhere. A volunteer recalls that in an occasion a real estate agency offered them accommodation for rent to 400 families, but that it was possibly in houses belonging to a criminal network:

“This agency even offered us an entire building, only to tell you what a power they have. We are in the land of Camorra, so if they want to give us houses, they can give us as many houses as they want.” (AC 1)

Expectations and misunderstandings

Cohabitation is not always easy. Volunteers often speak about conflicts and misunderstandings among volunteers and guests.

“Those I know, who lived in apartments, which were rented by ARCI or by Caritas, lived in apartments that were forms of cohabitation. So, if there were families in the apartment, there was the entire family group. Otherwise, there were matching that were very much forced, so the dynamics of conflict among people living together were always repeating the same way.” (WE V-O 5)

An Afghan forced migrant who is mediating for forced migrants explains a series of examples related with humanitarian corridors for Afghan forced migrants: people often do not respond to the expectation even of their fellow countrymen who help them to obtain housing in Italy:

“One day, we had to pay 800 euros for two months of electricity, which was a huge burden. We fundraised and used money collected for another person. An Israeli friend in the outskirts of Rome hosted two siblings. The sister left, and the brother stayed in Rome, entering the official reception system. Another young Afghan artist stayed with our friend C. before moving to a religious monastery in Trastevere, which helped him enrol in university and find a job. He learned Italian quickly and was well-integrated. Eventually, he moved to Germany and called from a refugee centre. I felt sorry but didn't ask why he left. He had documents and did great things in just over a year, but now it's too late to return.” (FM 2)

There are interpretations of this kind of incidents that also involve power relationships and unbalances of opportunities. A psychologist explains why often forced migrants respond to ‘house accommodation’ with behaviours that may seem puzzling:

“Bringing together two worlds, like an Italian family and a boy from Gambia, without prior self-reflection, leads to misunderstandings about power, sex, exoticism, and racial prejudices. Families expect refugees to conform to their expectations, creating pressure for the refugee to meet these expectations. This often leads to a breaking point where the refugee does something to escape this agreement. (EP 1)

4.4.4. *The perspective of policymakers*

The policymakers work at different levels of the public system: employees of administrations, managers of specific departments and scholars of public universities who are expert in public policies and help to understand and modify the existing laws and norms. The academics interviewed highlighted that the gaps in the public system are not incidental but are part of a broader conception of the state which tends to create discrimination and differential access to basic resources: *“Italy in these 25 years has never created a real reception system that we could consider working. This did not happen for logistic, or economic reasons, or for lack of time; it happened for a political orientation.” (EP 2)*

People who work as civil servants very often have positive attitudes towards CS schemes and actively support their establishment. In many cases, it is precisely the support of the administration that made it possible: *“A lot of work is done by the city council administration that obviously is responsible for projects. In our case, we were lucky because there is a lot of collaboration from the mayor, from the vice-mayor, and the officers.” (WE V-O 14)*

Many mayors, however, may find themselves in the difficult situation of having to navigate an institutional structure that has not defined the basic guidelines of how to face a structural issue such as the need of housing for forced migrants. The interviewees explain clearly that the gaps in the official reception system are due to political choices, that also determine what is called a ‘dual approach’ to migration.

“In the last years, what really characterised recent Italian history is that what I called in many occasions ‘a binary approach’: some sort of internal war, invisible but not less fierce, between the two aspects that Italy cultivated in parallel: the approach we can call widespread reception, and the approach of public structures directly managed by the state.” (EP 2)

Interviewed policymakers mentioned that rights, which should be guaranteed for all may be sometimes overlooked, or not fully accessible to specific groups of population such as forced migrants, and that legal action to address this neglect may not always lead to positive outcomes.

“The entire issue of migrants’ reception and of the policies for the social integration of foreigners is a story of very serious lacks, of radical absences... In practice, a foreigner who arrives to Italy in theory is entitled to access public assistance, social workers, but often this is not true [...]. One of the typical features of Italy is that civil action and public support plans against discriminatory behaviours are non-existent. I am talking about discriminatory practices that were introduced by

the institutions themselves, for example that you need some years of legal residence to access public housing.” (EP 2)

Moreover, interviewed public servants recognise that initiatives meant to improve migrants' reception can sometimes be at odds with public policies that may contribute to exclusion and segregation.

“The political system lives of the creation of distress, lives on the construction of the foreigner as an internal enemy, so it cannot avoid controlling the reception system. The reception system is key to the actual hostile political approach, so it has to control it, organise it, that is, badly, because a system of reception that works well and that produces inclusion is exactly what they don't want.” (EP 2)

In fact, some mayors were even at the forefront of contrasting discriminatory policies, such as those who use residence as a tool to hinder the access of forced migrants to basic rights.

“When the Constitutional court in 2018 brings down the Salvini decree⁶ that said that asylum seekers could not have the residence permit, for a long time this was applied literally, even if the decree did not say exactly that, but it was reinterpreted. So, a conflict starts, many mayors rebel, there is a conflict, a political conflict. Several mayors were at the forefront, and asked for the intervention of the Constitutional Court, saying that the Decree violates article 3 of the Constitution⁶.” (EP 4)

Fragmentation of public policies and subsidiarity

One of the interviewees describes the fragmentary state of Italian institution as 'balkanisation'⁷: each level of the state acts independently, and there is no coordination, to the point that policies at a local level easily contradict national or regional policies. Funding cuts have led to a fragmented use of publicly funded resources.

“When you have balkanised, so that everyone does everything on their own, and those who are stronger go, those who are weaker stay, at least you have to democratically guarantee the essential levels. But those essential levels are structured in a situation that is balkanised. Thus, everything depends on the single employees, from their good will. [...] My experience is that in migrants'

⁶ The full law text of the constitution is available here: <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/dettaglio/codici/costituzione>

⁷ This term is generally used for the fragmentation of political units into smaller and eventually conflicting segments. See for example De Winter et al., 2009.

reception, when you try to go out of it you depend on the good will of those you will meet.” (EP 3)

One of the managers of the SAI system has candidly admitted that *“our best resources are our workers”*: it is mostly through the personal networks of the workers themselves, and not through resources of the system, that SAI manage to meet the expected results of producing inclusion and emancipation:

“There are no solutions, no programmes, no reasoning, no programming, on how to solve the problem of housing for the workers. There are some ‘spot’ solutions, only to show that somebody in the institutions has taken the problem seriously. But there are no structural solutions.” (AC 3)

In such a context, even top-level policymakers such as a mayor, may find themselves acting as individual actors, relying on their personal networks of relationships.

“The mayor activates individually, not as a mayor. He activates as somebody who lives on the ground and has richer networks and acquaintances, he knows more people, he knows more things.... He knows how many houses are empty, he knows the owners of houses who have many, who are well off and may have houses [to let], he knows where are the houses that have been empty for years, so he goes and talks to them and say ‘there is this family, they may need...’, and so it goes.” (EP 3)

How to create alternative access to housing

NGOs that strive to find housing for forced migrants try to offer forms of mediation to public institutions, for example to convince municipalities to rent their facilities directly to migrants, as in a case happened in the city of L’Aquila. Experiences that emerge from these mediations may be replicated by institutions on their own.

“Even when they have a job, people don’t manage to find housing. So, we tried to understand if the City Council – because the houses that were entrusted to us were in the name of the Federation [...] - could convert them, rent them directly to these people. And maybe we succeeded, they are right now preparing the rental contracts.” (UC 2)

“The positive and proactive interaction with public administration or local municipalities, then create a virtuous circle, through which then the local administration takes the insights that developed from those different stakeholders, manage to transform them into concrete actions. (WE V-O 1)”

Policymakers who try alternative solutions may also face racism in their communities. An interviewee who did research in the internal region of Abruzzo, says that:

“In internal areas when you bring people to live in those contexts, you insert them in communities, it can be a mechanism also to avoid cutbacks to specific services, for example to keep schools open, to keep health services open. But it is considered a dangerous issue, politically. Many mayors for example would tell me that to repopulate their villages may be a solution, but they would say ‘I tell you off the record, because my voters would not appreciate this kind of situation.’” (AC 2)

Public administrations may often display strong resistance to framing the question of migrants' rights in the same terms of rights for the rest of citizens: *“When you divide, you create different services, you create differential problems, so you create problems that are more important or less important.” (AC 1)* and *“When they talk about refugees and asylum seekers, in particular, the issue of where they live, how they live, is never considered a problem of housing rights.” (AC 2)*

Moreover, public administrations themselves may often have a problem of mistrust: people that benefit from housing subsidies, for example, may have a hard time in finding housing, because homeowners do not consider municipalities reliable in payments.

“Having funding from the City Council is not a guarantee, sometimes it is even the contrary. During the Covid pandemic, while this agency was active, the housing subsidies have been given with a big delay, so the homeowners find themselves with tenants that couldn't pay the rent [...] The City Council did not pay the subsidy, and they couldn't evict them, because in most cases they were vulnerable people.” (WE V-O 8B)

4.4.5. *The perspective of landlords*

This section discusses the perspective of a series of private operators of the real estate market who are

“There are no houses for rent, and those that are available have very high prices. Try to look on [a website], try to find a house for rent in whatever neighbourhood: there are prices that are absurd, that two years ago were not so high. (LL 1)

interested in renting their flats (or their customers' flats) for the reception of forced migrants, brokers who mediate among real estate managers and potential tenants or associations of tenants, and people who offer their consultancy to smoothen the relationship between tenants and landlords. It is important to know that the interviews took place in a moment when the private market is stagnant, due to processes of financialisation, touristification⁸ and deep transformation of traditional form of residence. This process is obviously more visible in big cities, so that forced migrants are often forced to move to non-metropolitan areas, which sometimes do not fulfil their expectations of social mobility.

“The difficulty of finding houses for rent in Rome now is very high. I am a real estate broker for 20 years, and I never found such a critical situation. Regarding housing projects, I have to say that there have been many difficulties but also many satisfactions.” (LL 2)

“The impression is that at a global level, not only at the Italian level, there is an increase of investment on rent, compared to ten years ago. Maybe rent has become a more interesting market sector [...]. Today you don't find anything for rent anymore. There are no more apartments for rent. Moreover, today for a rental they request me a frame of guarantees that most people are not able to provide.” (LL 4)

The interviewees explained how the last six years saw a decrease in house sale of nearly 25 per cent, and that transaction with mortgages were only 40 per cent of previous years. The rental market is instead growing and has been defined 'lively' in the last report of the Bank of Italy. In the experience of our interviewees, the availability of housing for rent has never been so low, while housing prices and

⁸ On the concept of touristification, see for example Sequera & Nofre, 2018

guarantees requested by landlords have never been so rigid. This condition makes it especially hard accessing housing for a relevant sector of the Italian population, and most (forced) migrants fall in this category. As a study of Polytechnic of Turin shows, people who leave the official reception system typically have a job but lack a house: their housing condition is more precarious than their occupation (Campagnaro et al., 2022).

Economic guarantees or networks of trust

Organizations that practice forms of CS, or of support to housing for forced migrants, have to elaborate ways of offering warrants to landlords that encourage to rent their houses to migrants, to overcome the structural closeness of the rental market. Many volunteers claim that trust is more important than money, in overcoming the structural difficulty of renting to forced migrants: it is lack of trust, not lack of economic guarantees, which prevents homeowners from renting to forced migrants. This view is shared by many volunteers and many operators of the real estate market.

“Right now, to find a house for a refugee or a beneficiary of international protection, is practically almost impossible. Over all the cases I worked on, around 70, in less than 10 per cent I managed to have a positive outcome [...]. Moreover, there is a cultural distrust, a racial distrust, which worsened in the last years. I knew it existed, but I didn't think that it was so bad.” (LL 3)

Other real estate market brokers foreground the problem of the economic guarantees that they request – or their customers request – when renting to poor people in general, and especially to forced migrants. A real estate agent we interviewed, who is collaborating with an NGO that manages humanitarian corridors, mentioned that:

“The problem [of housing] is certainly due to the fact that they are afraid that [refugees] don't have a continuity in their income. There is the fear that they may damage the house. And there is fear in general, because they are black, because they are migrants... there is a kind of xenophobia, so maybe those who are not xenophobic have the problem of 'who guarantees me'. Obviously, it is even more complex when there are small children. (WE V-O 3)

“In the field of rental, you have to remember that what happens in this country does not happen in other countries. So, the big difficulties of giving houses to people who have no income, or no

solidity – because you may also have an income, but if you don't have a permanent job you will not find a rent. Because what happens if he loses his job? It is very hard to rent, knowing that if that person has a problem and does not pay me... they can pay the rent, but nobody guarantees for me. The problem is not to put them somewhere, the problem is that the laws do not defend the landlord.” (LL 1)

Several interviewees confirmed that the networks created by CS manage to access a part of the housing stock which would be kept outside the rental market, because it is made of houses that for different reasons are not easy to rent, for their position, their conditions, or the family circumstances. The mediation of Italian NGOs or groups of sponsors helps to access this sector of the housing market.

“We significantly reduce systemic racism in the housing market through a network of people, not agencies. About half of Italy's real estate market operates by word of mouth, giving us a 50 per cent better chance of finding a house without systemic racism. It's not the family's duty to find a house, but their network helps spread the word, providing a strong guarantee that agencies can't offer.” (WE V-O 6)

In many cases it is the prestige of the organization that allows to overcome mistrust and convince homeowners to rent to forced migrants. One case is an agency in Rome which has established a stable relationship with ARCI and directly proposes to their customers the possibility of renting an apartment to the association, which would then use it to house forced migrants. In a competitive housing market such as Rome, where every apartment that is offered for rent immediately has many requests, a mediation like this can represent a crucial improvement of the chances of finding houses for forced migrants.

“V. gives a sensation of great reliability, clearly, we requested the documents, since we have a relationship with this ONG [ONLUS], and we began with a first rental contract. Then V. asked me to have them as a reference every time we had a new apartment. I told them that it would be difficult but that I was available to do it. Obviously, they are the ones who created their reliability, now I propose to ARCI all the flats that arrive to me, precisely because I trust the reliability, the human reliability, in the sense that not everything is written, there is a personal relationship. It is not always ARCI that can take charge of everything, but in the first relation it is ARCI the guarantee, it is V.” (LL 1)

Mediating with the landlord

Several volunteers or workers of NGOs detailed ways in which they managed to win the trust of a property owner to obtain housing for forced migrants, generally offering services or something in exchange for availability of a flat that they would not manage to rent in the regular housing market. Yet, what really matters is the trust that the owner feels with respect of the funder as detailed in the previous section. This is a way of accessing houses that are not on the market, to overcome the markets' inaccessibility. The case of Dambe So Hostel in the agricultural town of Rosarno is an example of how a grassroots initiative funded by the Valdese Church was able of accessing a big facility for rent.

"We guarantee landlords a respectable deposit. For example, when renting a large residence, we offered the owner 21 000 euros as a deposit to make it habitable. This gives us solidity since we are not a mediating agency; we rent, host, and sometimes sublet. We make agreements, provide hospitality declarations, and the Valdese Church pays the rent, ensuring landlords feel secure."
(WE V-O 10)

Often NGOs operate forms of mediation that are directed towards landlords, as in this case reported from Tuscany, where a federation of local municipalities has mediated with an entrepreneur, to convince them to guarantee directly for his employees with the landlord.

"We tried to focus on the issue of housing; and [the federation] tried to combine access to housing, by leveraging work, so asking if the employer could take a somewhat active role, be in the warranty, give economic coverage. And also, if he could mediate with the landlords themselves. The most successful cases were when the employer guarantees for the contract." (UC 2B)

"Sometimes it is the employer who acts as a warrant. Otherwise, a tool I am beginning to use, and that may be useful, is an exchange housing-work: the rental contract involves a series of equivalent services. I give you the use of the real estate asset, and I receive an equivalent which is almost always money, but it can also be workforce." (LL 4)

Some housing brokers also work in trying to bridge the conditions that make difficult for forced migrants to live in houses rented by Italian landlords, for example by training forced migrants in local ways of using domestic space: *"The training ... was meant to help them to understand how to behave in the flat. How to use things, so the owners would not get angry. It was a great experience, because after a while they understood everything."* (LL 2)

At the same time, a quality control check is extremely important to overcome the situation of decay that many of the flats that are rented to forced migrants suffer. Housing brokers are aware of the scams, and of the exploitation to which many forced migrants are subject by 'slumlords' or unscrupulous homeowners.

"If you rent a mouldy basement to an Italian, they will complain; a foreigner will not because they have no alternative. This lack of choice means they can't oppose poor conditions. One customer rents a 28-square meter basement in Centocelle without heating to couples with a child. When I visited, they recognised me and offered food, but I couldn't stay due to the smell of mould." (LL 1)

They are also aware of the fact that many requests that owners forward to the real estate agencies are not legitimate. For example, they violate the tenants' privacy; but they are forced to apply them, otherwise the tenants would go to another agency: *"I have friends who have been abroad, where nobody doesn't even think of this. You don't even put the problem; probably they don't even request references. We violate every form of privacy when we request references; but we are forced to do it." (LL 1)*

This situation obviously opens a big space of overcoming constraints, if CS manages to create a virtuous relationship between organizations that structure volunteers, forced migrants willing to engage in a path to housing which does not imply ambiguous forms of mediation, policymakers that are interested in innovating their political action, and real estate agencies or brokers that would like to do their work within their social and ethical concerns. Community sponsorship, if tailored around the real needs of each stakeholder, and oriented at the assessment of a standard of universal rights such as the right to housing, to privacy, to the improvement of everyone's condition, may be a valuable tool to combine all these interests and needs.

4.5. Conclusions

The research in Italy reveals distinct demographic and socio-economic profiles of volunteers and forced migrants. Volunteers are predominantly highly educated, with 66.7 per cent holding higher education degrees, while forced migrants have a more diverse educational background, including post-secondary non-tertiary education (26.5%) and tertiary undergraduate degrees (14.7%). Financially, 51.7 per cent of volunteers can cope with their expenses well, whereas 91.2 per cent of forced migrants struggle. Nearly 90 per cent of volunteers are Italian, while forced migrants mainly come from Afghanistan (44.6%) and Ukraine (14.5%). Most forced migrants arrived in Italy within the last three years, often with family members, and primarily seeking asylum.

The majority of volunteers (51.7%) were screened before becoming volunteers, with interviews being the most common method (90.2%). Additionally, 75.6 per cent of volunteers received training or mentorship before their first contact with forced migrants, with the majority finding it relevant to their needs.

The majority of Italian volunteers (73.7%) and forced migrants (86.7%) were matched by the coordinating organization. Key matching criteria for both groups included housing needs or offers and household composition, with gender and intercultural experience also notable. A significant portion of both groups were unsure of the criteria used. Matches often occurred upon the forced migrants' arrival, though some were made before or after their arrival. Forced migrants highlighted housing needs, religious beliefs, household composition, and intercultural experience as important criteria for a good match.

Initially, forced migrants' critical needs included material support, legal information, and language support, which decreased over time, while the need for sustainable housing and job support increased, reflecting a shift towards long-term stability. Volunteers provided various forms of support, including orientation, practical, administrative, material, language, and emotional support. Forced migrants reported receiving accommodation, orientation, practical, language, material, legal, administrative, financial, and emotional support, with a focus on primary needs.

Overall, the experience of the volunteers and forced migrants with the support they received was rather positive. Among the volunteers, 61.3 per cent valued their experience as rather positive and 36.1 per cent as very positive. Forced migrants also had a high rate of positive experiences, with the majority (66.7%) rating their experiences as rather positive and the remaining part (33.3%) as very positive. The top three most helpful aspects of being supported and/or hosted, according to forced migrants, were housing stability, help with paperwork and administrative tasks, and language support. Facilitated integration into the local community, access to local social services, finding a job, legal support, and positive impacts on well-being and mental health are also important.

Forced migrants face several significant barriers when looking for housing, including financial constraints, language difficulties, and high prices. Other notable issues are racial discrimination, lack of employment, and limited property availability. Some migrants struggle with the absence of support networks, indicating the importance of support from volunteers or other services.

While most experiences were positive, volunteers and forced migrants faced challenges to their integration, such as communication barriers, socialization differences, and social issues like prejudices. Managing expectations, property maintenance, and health issues were also concerns. To address these,

volunteers suggested better collaboration with local administration, specialised protection services, and cultural sensitivity training. Forced migrants emphasised the need for specialised protection services, financial support, and helpdesks. Both groups also recommended better institutional guidelines and access to mental health coaches. Volunteers received various forms of support, including mentorship and language assistance, which they found beneficial.

Many volunteers received various forms of support during their engagement, with mentorship and training being the most common (63%). Other frequently mentioned supports included language assistance (56.3%), sharing experiences with other volunteers (44.5%), and administrative support (40.3%). Most volunteers found the training or mentorship relevant to their needs, with 88.8 per cent rating it as beneficial. This indicates that the support provided was generally effective and well-received.

The qualitative analysis conducted in Italy emphasises the need for a more coherent and inclusive reception system that moves away from the emergency paradigm and towards a more sustainable process of integration of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, suggesting CS as a possible programming option that could support the achievement of such objectives.

The report suggests that the strengthening of Italy's dual system of reception by enhancing both the CARA/CAS and SAI facilities, ensuring they are adequately funded and staffed could enhance the provision of comprehensive support to forced migrants. Furthermore, in order to improve the overall reception system, it is recommended to enhance coordination between different levels of government and between public and private stakeholders, to establish clear procedures for accessing reception services by for instance creating a common waiting list, and to adopt a more holistic approach to integration, which includes access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities.

The analysis highlights the severe housing crisis affecting forced migrants (as well as many other sectors of the Italian society) which could be addressed by a substantial change in housing policies which includes increased investment in public and affordable housing, public-private agreements to secure access to private housing to vulnerable categories, as well as a public intervention in the rental market to avoid artificial rises in rental price and scarcity of supply. Increase in investments in the housing sector per se will not be sufficient to address the challenges for forced migrants to access adequate accommodation which requires concrete actions to combat discrimination such as, among others, to enforce more rigorously anti-discrimination laws and to promote awareness campaigns to foster positive public attitudes towards forced migrants.

In this framework, and as part of recommended solutions to this challenge, the expansion of CS programmes, which have proved promising in providing better living conditions and fostering social integration shall be considered. In this regard, government and CSOs, as well as grassroots organizations, shall continue and expand synergies in order to raise awareness about CS and to develop training programmes for potential sponsors. Furthermore, creating a more supportive legal and policy framework for CS, including financial incentives for sponsors and streamlined processes for matching forced migrants with host communities, shall be considered as a key step to enhance such programming.

All in all, while different strategies to tackle the challenges could be beneficial, addressing the root causes of unplanned migratory and displacement movements would reduce the pressure on the Italian reception system and create a more sustainable and humane approach to migration management.

5. INSIGHTS FROM LITHUANIA

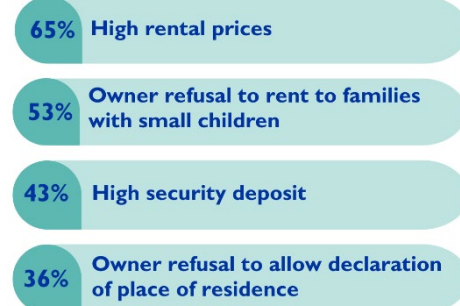
Before presenting the research findings for Lithuania, it is worth contextualising the pressures and challenges Lithuania faces in the reception and housing of beneficiaries of international protection and present the current state of CS in the country. To do so, the next paragraph summarises the chapter *Refugee reception and housing in Lithuania* from a previous RISE report (Ežerskis et al., 2025).

5.1. Reception and housing challenges

Lithuania's reception system for migrants and asylum seekers includes the Refugee Reception Centre (RRC), which provides initial housing for up to three months, extendable to six months in exceptional cases (EMN, 2024a). Forced migrants face difficulties in accessing housing, social services, and banking due to systemic limitations and societal attitudes (Huseynova, 2024; Žibas, 2018). The Ministry of Social Security and Labour is working on unifying integration policies at the local government level. From 2025, the RRC will become the Reception and Integration Agency, responsible for all foreigners' material reception conditions and assistance.

Forced migrants in Lithuania encounter several housing challenges. Financial limitations and societal attitudes make it difficult for migrants to access private rental housing (EMN, 2022). Lithuania has a small stock of social housing, with long waiting lists and limited availability. Migrants, especially from non-European countries, also face discrimination in the housing market.

Figure 39. Difficulties encountered by beneficiaries of temporary protection when trying to rent an apartment in Lithuania (%)



Lithuania's government and international organizations are working to address the challenges faced by forced migrants. Policy measures aim to increase reception capacity, streamline asylum procedures and offer various integration support measures. Partnerships with organizations like IOM and UNHCR provide comprehensive support services. The establishment of the Reception and Integration Agency aims to centralise and improve integration efforts.

5.2. Community sponsorship in Lithuania

While Lithuania does not have a formal CS programme, several initiatives support the integration of forced migrants. The Lithuanian NGO Strong Together mobilised citizens to provide housing for Ukrainian forced migrants. The BeFriend Vilnius mentoring initiative by the municipality of Vilnius support forced migrants in their integration. The Community Bridges project by Caritas Lithuania pairs Lithuanian families with foreign families for mentorship and support. In addition, there are Ukrainian-Lithuanian family programmes and gathering meetings for mutual integration and cultural enrichment organised by the NGO Tula. Finally, there are some informal sporadic initiatives organised by grassroots organizations through a Facebook groups or Joiner App.

Figure 40. Community support initiatives adjacent to CS in Lithuania



5.3. Findings from the quantitative research

The quantitative findings from the survey conducted in Lithuania among volunteers and forced migrants, respectively, are presented in this section.

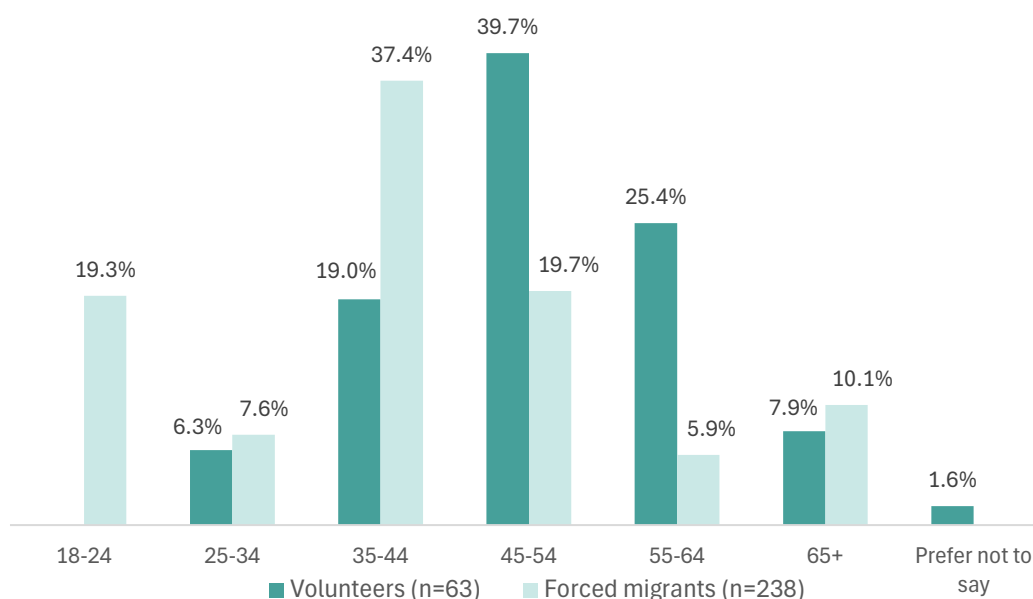
5.3.1. Profile of the respondents

This section outlines the demographic profile of 303 respondents who participated in the surveys. The analysis is based on responses from 65 volunteers and 238 forced migrants who reside in Lithuania.

The large majority of respondents (92.2%) who completed the survey for volunteers are female, while males represent 6.3 per cent. Most of these volunteers are aged 45 years and above (73%).

In the survey for forced migrants, 21 per cent of the respondents were male, while the majority (79%) were female. Contrary to the volunteers, most of the forced migrants (64.3%) are aged 44 years and below.

Figure 41. Age of respondents to the survey in Lithuania (%)

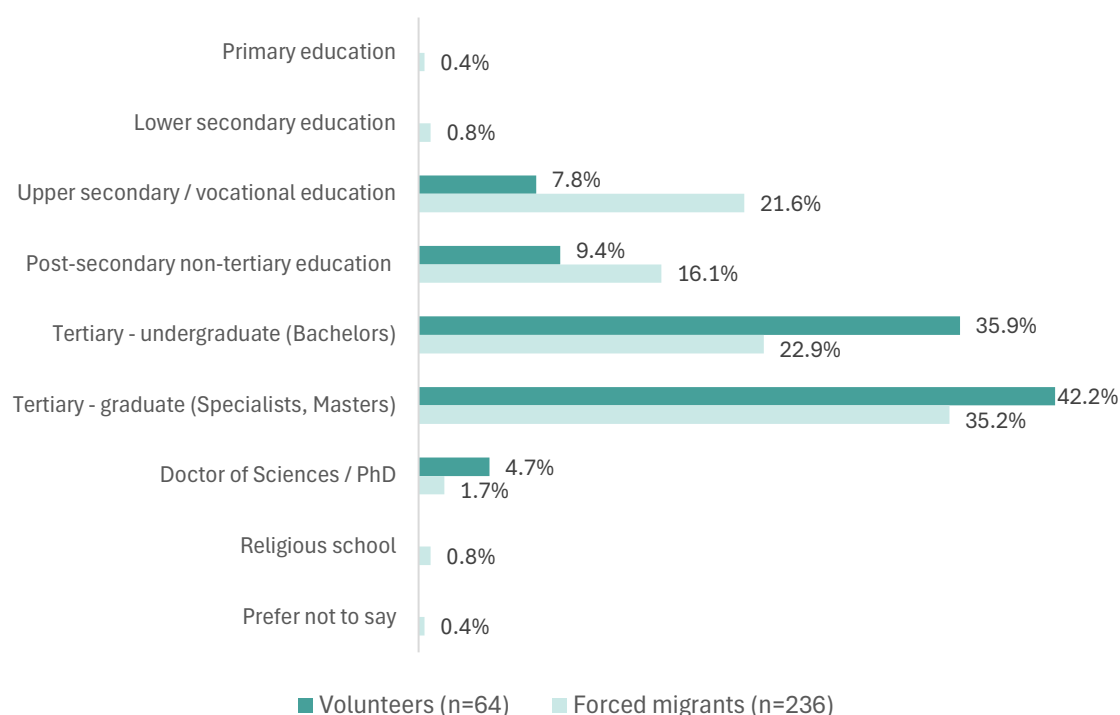


Education, work and income

Within the respondent group of the volunteers (n=64), there is a strong over-representation of individuals with a higher education degree, comprising 82.8 per cent of the respondents. Additionally, 9.4 per cent of the respondents had a post-secondary school diploma as their highest attained level of education, while 7.8 per cent had an upper secondary school diploma as their highest attained level of education.

For the forced migrants (n=236), more than one third (35.2%) of the respondents have attained a tertiary graduate degree (Master's or Specialist), making it the most common educational level. A notable 22.9 per cent have attained a tertiary undergraduate degree (Bachelor's). This is followed by 16.1 per cent who attained a post-secondary non-tertiary education (e.g. professional training).

Figure 42. Highest attended level of education of respondents of the survey in Lithuania (%)



Regarding the respondents' work situation, over 72.3 per cent of the volunteers (n=64) are employed, 7.8 per cent are self-employed, 4.7 per cent are retired and another 4.7 per cent is unemployed and looking for a job. Less than half (43.8%) of the volunteers indicate that they can slightly well cope with their expenses, 29.7 per cent very well and 17.2 per cent extremely well. Finally, 3.1 per cent only reported that they cannot get by well at all.

Among the forced migrants (n=236), 42.4 per cent are currently employed, with 11.9 per cent of these working as irregular workers. Additionally, one quarter (25%) are currently unemployed, 12.7 per cent are retired, 9.7 per cent are students and 7.6 per cent are self-employed. Most forced migrants indicate that they find it very difficult (36.9%), difficult (21.2%) and rather difficult (20.3%) to cope with their expenses. Less than 9 per cent reported that they can get by rather easily to very easily.

Nationality and place of residence in Lithuania

The majority (87.6%) of the volunteers (n=65) have Lithuanian nationality. Among the forced migrants (n=238), the vast majority are Ukrainian (97.1%). The other forced migrants come from Belarus. Regarding residential locations, most respondents live in Vilnius county, Šiauliai county or Kaunas county.

Table 7. Residential location of respondents of the survey in Lithuania (absolute numbers)

County	Volunteer respondents	Forced migrant respondents
Alytus	1	1
Kaunas	6	22
Klaipėda	5	4
Marijampolė	5	5
Panevėžys	6	1
Šiauliai	4	45
Tauragė	1	10
Telšiai	3	0
Utena	2	1
Vilnius	31	148
Total	64	237

Forced migrants' arrival in Lithuania

The vast majority (98%) of the forced migrants (n=238) arrived in Lithuania between one and three years before filling out the survey. The other 2 per cent of the respondents arrived between four and five years before the survey.

Most of the forced migrants (n=238) arrived in Lithuania with other adults from their core and/or extended family (56.7%); 18.1 per cent arrived alone and 6.3 per cent arrived with other adult(s) who are not family members. Four in ten respondents (40.8%) arrived in Lithuania with one or more children (minors under the age of 18) from their core and/or extended family. Only 1.3 per cent arrived with children who were not family members.

Although the reasons for their migration vary, most respondents came to Lithuania in search of asylum (64.1%). Others mentioned coming to Lithuania for studies (12.2%), to join family already living in Lithuania (6.7%), or for work (5.5%).

5.3.2. Volunteers' path to offering support

This section provides a comprehensive overview of the various aspects of volunteer engagement in supporting forced migrants. It begins by examining the motivations behind the decision to volunteer, to then exploring how volunteers become involved and how they were selected and trained.

Motivations of volunteers to support forced migrants

The motives of volunteers in the field of migration and asylum were examined with reference to ten items, based on previous research (Schrooten et al., 2022). For each item an average score was calculated.

A strong sense of moral duty is a major motivator, with 70.3 per cent volunteers mostly feeling this way. Yet, advocacy against the treatment of refugees is not a strong motivator, with 62.9 per cent not considering it at all. The government's call for help did not significantly influence respondents' decision to volunteer, with 45.2 per cent not influenced by it at all.

The data also reveal that many volunteers derive personal benefits from their experiences. A considerable number of volunteers (52.4%) feel that their volunteering experience helps them feel better about themselves. Many (43.5%) are somewhat motivated by the desire to learn about asylum, migration, and other cultures through first-hand experience. 22.6 per cent of volunteers feel this motivation to a great extent. Professional development is not a primary motivator for over half of the volunteers, with 53.2 per cent not considering it at all. However, for a small group (11.3%), it is a significant factor.

While 27.4 per cent of volunteers were not motivated because they feel connected to forced migrants at all, a notable number (21%) felt somewhat motivated by feeling connected. Many volunteers (48.4%) were not encouraged by close ones, suggesting that personal initiative is a significant factor. However, combined, about one in three volunteers (21% very little, 21% somewhat, and 9.7% to a great extent) did receive some level of encouragement from their social circles.

A significant majority of volunteers (82%) indicated that were not motivated by a personal connection with the forced migrants before starting their support. Likewise, most volunteers (82.3%) were not motivated by having experienced similar suffering themselves. However, a small group (8.1%) felt motivated by a strong connection due to shared experiences.

Table 8. Motivation for supporting forced migrants in Lithuania (score and %)

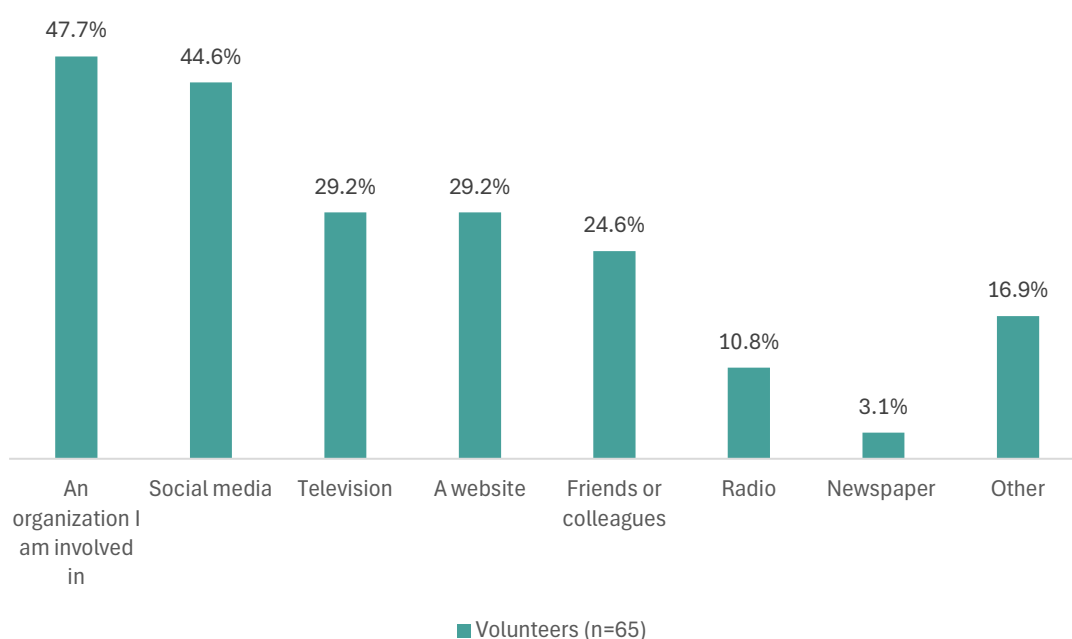
Motive of volunteers	Average score (max score is 5)	Not at all (1)	Very little (2)	Somewhat (3)	To a great extent (4)	N
I feel a moral duty to provide humanitarian assistance to people in need	3.64	1.6%	3.1%	25.0%	70.3	64
Thanks to this experience, I feel better about myself	3.32	4.8%	11.1%	31.7%	52.4%	63
I want to learn about asylum, migration and/or other cultures through concrete, first-hand experience	2.76	12.9%	21.0%	43.5%	22.6%	62
I feel connected to newcomers in general	2.37	27.4%	21.0%	38.7%	12.9%	62
People close to me have encouraged me to get involved in this volunteering work	1.92	48.4%	21.0%	21.0%	9.7%	62
The government has called for my help	1.84	45.2%	30.6%	19.4%	4.8%	62
I want to open doors for my future professional career	1.82	53.2%	22.6%	12.9%	11.3%	62
My choice to support newcomers is a critical act against the way refugees are treated in this country	1.58	62.9%	22.6%	8.1%	6.5%	62
I already had a personal connection with the forced migrants I support before starting to support them	1.43	82.0%	4.9%	1.6%	11.5%	61
I have experienced similar suffering myself in the past	1.39	82.3%	4.8%	4.8%	8.1%	62
Other	2.65	14.6%	2.1%	18.8%	35.4%	48

Participants were also offered the opportunity to provide another reason through free text entry. The other motivations respondents mentioned for supporting forced migrants are diverse, including being driven by their professional roles, such as working at the National Social Integration Institute or being a Caritas volunteer. Historical empathy also played a role, as does the desire to provide humanitarian aid to those in dire situations. Religious motivations and the belief that helping others is a fundamental human duty further inspired volunteers. Additionally, some volunteers were motivated by the potential positive impact on their region's security and the personal lives of those they help. The diversity of migrants and the volunteers' relationships with them also influenced their motivations.

How do people get involved as volunteers?

Volunteers in Lithuania (n=65) learned about opportunities to support forced migrants through a variety of sources. The most significant sources are organizations they are involved in (47.7%) and social media (44.6%). Television (29.2%) and websites (29.2%) are also important channels. Friends or colleagues (24.6%) serve as valuable word-of-mouth sources, while radio (10.8%) and newspapers (3.1%) have a smaller impact. Additionally, 16.9 per cent of volunteers learned about these opportunities through other means – for instance, through their jobs or humanitarian organizations.

Figure 43. Sources of information for involvement in welcoming forced migrants in Lithuania (multiple answers possible, %)



From all respondents (n=65), most became involved in supporting forced migrants through existing involvement in an organization or initiative that coordinates such support (38.5%). Another significant portion (21.5%) directly contacted an organization to offer their help. A smaller group (7.7%) was contacted by an organization with a request to provide support. Some volunteers (16.9%) took the initiative to reach out to forced migrants themselves. Lastly, 15.4 per cent of volunteers became involved through other means, such as through work, friends, or through participating in the activities of organizations that provide support. Personal experiences also played a role, such as staying in contact with an organization that helped a relative during a crisis.

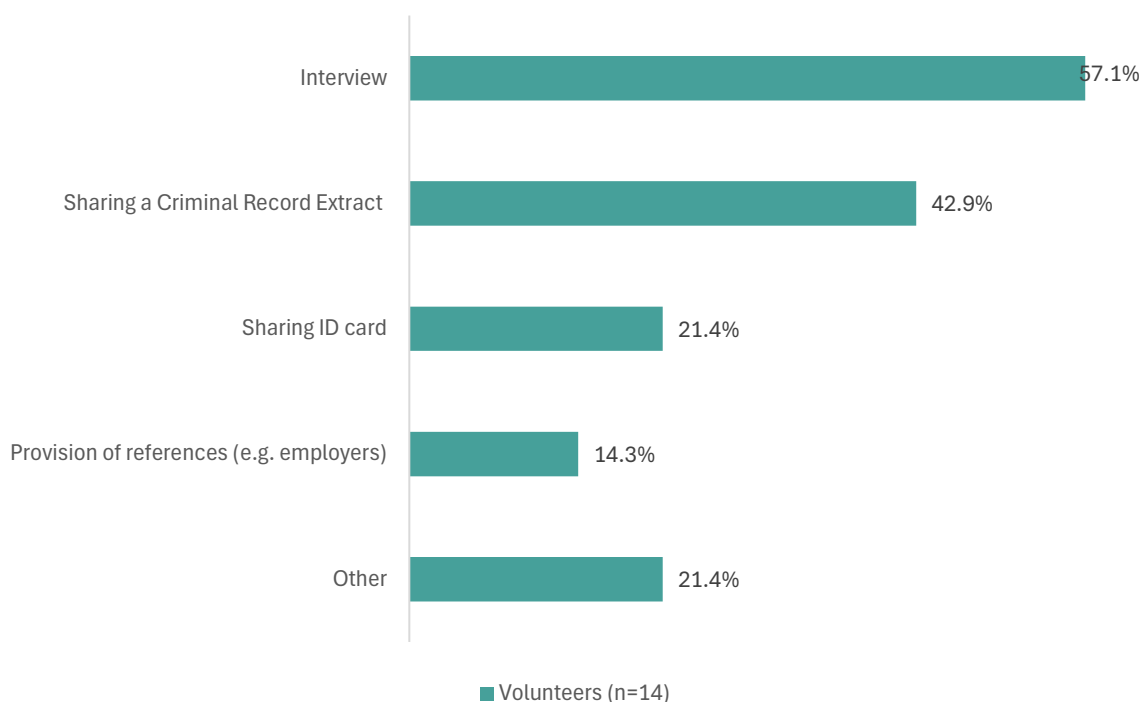
For those who participated in organizations (n=25), the majority were engaged with NGOs (60%) or government-sponsored organizations (24%) and 12 per cent in a faith-based organization. Among respondents who directly contacted organizations (n=14), 57.1 per cent affiliated with NGOs, followed by 21.4 per cent with other organizations and smaller shares with government-sponsored organizations (14.3%) and one respondent with informal networks (7.1%). Of those approached by organizations (5 respondents), two respondents engaged with NGOs and one respondent each affiliated with government-sponsored organizations, informal networks, and other organizations.

Screening and preparation processes

Most volunteers (n=59) were not screened before becoming a volunteer (79.6%). Only 21.9 per cent of respondents reported that they were screened, while 1.6 per cent were unsure if they underwent any screening process.

The most common screening process for volunteers was an interview, mentioned by 57.1 per cent of respondents. Sharing a criminal record extract was required for 9.2 per cent of volunteers, while 21.4 per cent had to share their ID card. Provision of references was the least common, with only 14.3 per cent of volunteers needing to provide them. Additionally, 21.4 per cent went through other screening processes – for example, filling out a questionnaire.

Figure 44. Screening processes of volunteers (multiple answers possible, %)



Remarkably, only 13 per cent of volunteers in Lithuania who offered private accommodation to forced migrants had their accommodation screened by an external organization before offering it to forced migrants, while 87 per cent did not undergo any screening.

A significant majority of volunteers (n=65) did not receive any training or mentorship before their first contact with forced migrants (75.4%). Less than one in four volunteers (23.1%) received some form of training. A small fraction (1.5%) could not recall whether they received training. Among the volunteers who did receive training or mentorship before their first contact with forced migrants, the majority found it rather relevant (50%) or highly relevant (42.9%). Only a small fraction (7.1%) considered the training rather irrelevant.

5.3.3. Forced migrants' path to support

For one third of the 238 Lithuanian respondents to the forced migrants survey, the support they received for housing or integration was provided by an NGO (29.4%). This was followed by a government-sponsored organization (23.1%), faith-based organizations (10.1%) and informal networks (9.7%). Other sources of support included diaspora organizations and international organizations, each assisting 2.1 per cent of the respondents. Additionally, 9.2 per cent of respondents specified other types of support, such as friends or acquaintances, the university, their workplace, or volunteers.

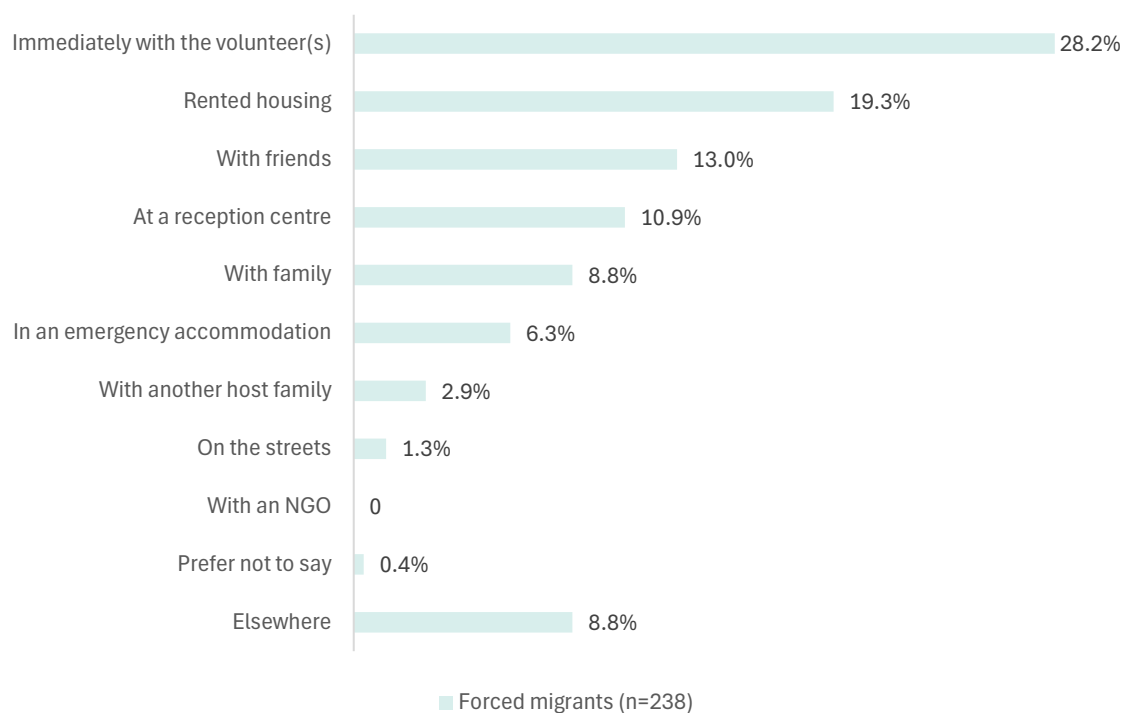
How do people become beneficiaries of housing or integration support?

Forced migrants in Lithuania learned about the organization where they found support mainly via the diaspora (22.7%). Social media was also a major source, with 21.4 per cent of forced migrants learning about the programme through these platforms. The standard procedure as resettled refugees accounted for 15.5 per cent, whereas NGOs informed 12.2 per cent of forced migrants. Embassies (2.5%) and governmental partners (1.3%) played smaller roles.

Initial place of stay upon arrival

Upon arrival in the country, most of the 238 forced migrants stayed immediately with volunteers (28.2%). A significant portion (19.3%) found rented housing, while 13 per cent stayed with friends. Smaller percentages stayed at a reception centre (10.9%), or with family (8.8%). Emergency accommodations were used by 6.3 per cent, while 2.9 per cent stayed with another host family. A very small number (1.3%) ended up on the streets, and 0.4 per cent preferred not to say. A remaining part (8.8%) stayed elsewhere – i.e. a hostel, dormitory or with another forced migrant.

Figure 45. Forced migrants' place of stay upon arrival in Lithuania (%)

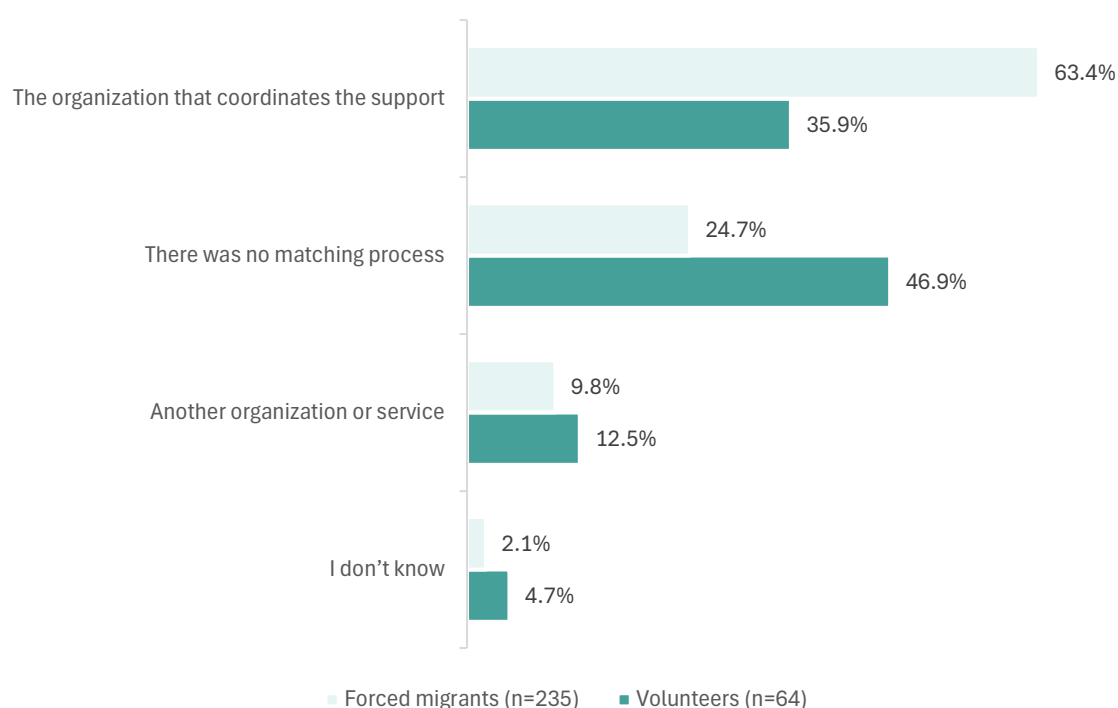


5.3.4. Matching process and criteria

Nearly half of the volunteers (46.9%) reported there was no formal matching process between them and the forced migrants, as is the case for one in four forced migrants (24.7%). Most forced migrants (63.4%) were matched with their volunteers by the organization that coordinates the support, where the coordinating organization was responsible for the match for more than one third (35.9%) of the volunteers. Another 12.5 per cent of the volunteers and 9.8 per cent of forced migrants were matched by a different organization or service – such as Caritas, the municipality, or the project ‘Strong Together’. A small share of volunteers (4.7%) and forced migrants (2.1%) were unsure about the matching process.

Among those forced migrants matched by the coordinating organization (n=149), nearly half (49.7%) rated their experience as rather positive and 45 per cent described it as very positive, with minimal negative responses. For those matched by another organization (n=23), 60.9 per cent rated their experience as very positive and 39.1 per cent as rather positive. Respondents who experienced no matching process (n=58), 48.3 per cent reported their experience as very positive and 44.8 per cent as rather positive. The small group who was unsure about the matching process (n=5) were all positive about their experiences.

Figure 46. Matching actor in Lithuania (%)



In the cases where there was a matching process, volunteers and forced migrants referred to criteria that underlie the matching between them. When comparing the criteria for matching volunteers and forced migrants, there are notable differences and similarities. For volunteers, the most significant factors were knowledge of a common language (35.3%) and housing needs or housing offer (32.4%), whereas for forced migrants, housing needs or housing offer was the most significant criterion (52%). Household composition was important for both groups, with 20.6 per cent of volunteers and 26 per cent of forced migrants mentioning it. The amount of time volunteers could invest was notable for 17.6 per cent of volunteers, while age was a significant factor for 17.5 per cent of forced migrants. Income, religious or ideological beliefs, and political preferences were less common criteria for both groups but were still relevant to some extent. Interestingly, a significant portion of both groups were unsure about the criteria used, with 14.7 per cent of forced migrants and a notable share of volunteers (11.8%) indicating uncertainty. Additionally, 10.2 per cent of forced migrants reported no matching process, highlighting some inconsistencies in the matching approach.

Other criteria (11.8% of the volunteers) for matching volunteers with forced migrants refer to the urgency and severity of the forced migrants' situation, the specific needs of the forced migrant, but also government programmes and resources available for integration. Additionally, 10.2 per cent of the forced migrants mentioned other criteria – such as health and support needs, educational commitments and safety needs.

Most matches between volunteers (n=34) and forced migrants (n=209) occurred upon the forced migrants' arrival in the country, according to both volunteers (50%) and forced migrants (37.8%). Matches that happened after a certain time accounted for 23.5 per cent of the volunteers, and 27.8 per cent of the forced migrants. A significant share of forced migrants (29.2%) was matched before entering the country, while only 14.7 per cent of matches of volunteers were made before the forced migrants entered the country. Additionally, 11.8 per cent of volunteers and 5.3 per cent of forced migrants were unsure about the timing of the match.

Forced migrants in Lithuania were also asked which criteria they found important themselves for a good match with volunteers. Their answers highlighted several key factors, with housing needs/housing offer being the most significant (66.1%). The amount of time one can invest (52%) and household composition (43.5%) are critical for almost half of the respondents. Further successful criteria according to the forced migrants were age (27.1%), personal interests or hobbies (24.9%), intercultural experience, income and political preferences, all about one in five. Gender played a role for 15.8 per cent of the forced migrants and religious or ideological beliefs for 14.1 per cent. 9.6 per cent of the forced migrants point to

additional criteria for a successful match with volunteers, thereby emphasising humanity, compassion, and a desire to help forced migrants.

Figure 47. Matching criteria for volunteers and forced migrants in Lithuania (multiple answers possible, %)

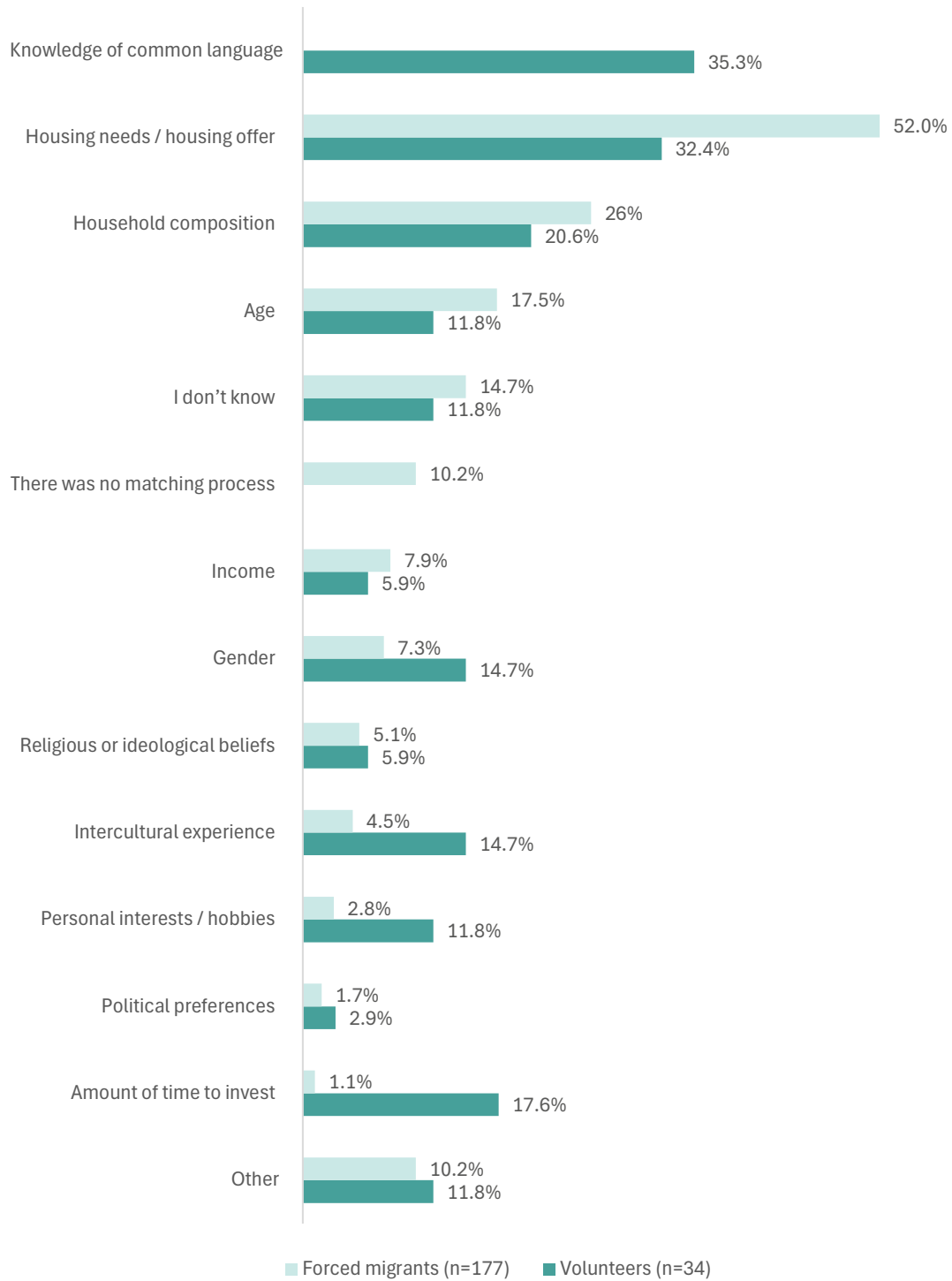
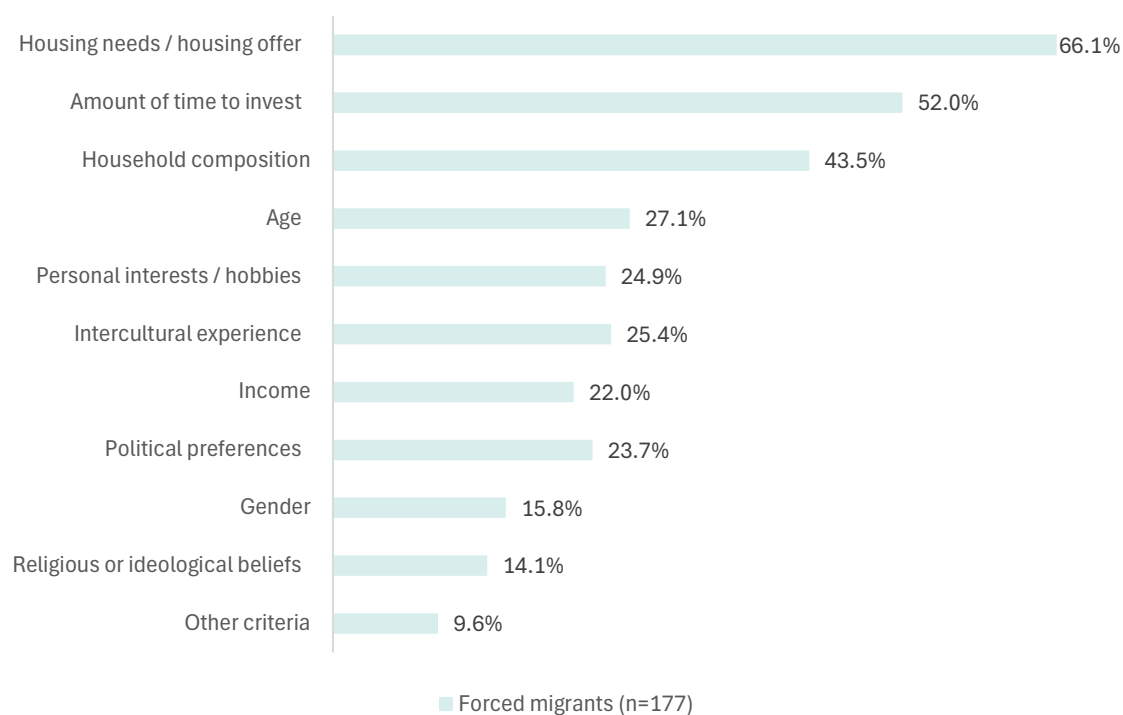


Figure 48. Criteria forced migrants in Lithuania deem important for a successful match with volunteers (multiple answers possible, %)

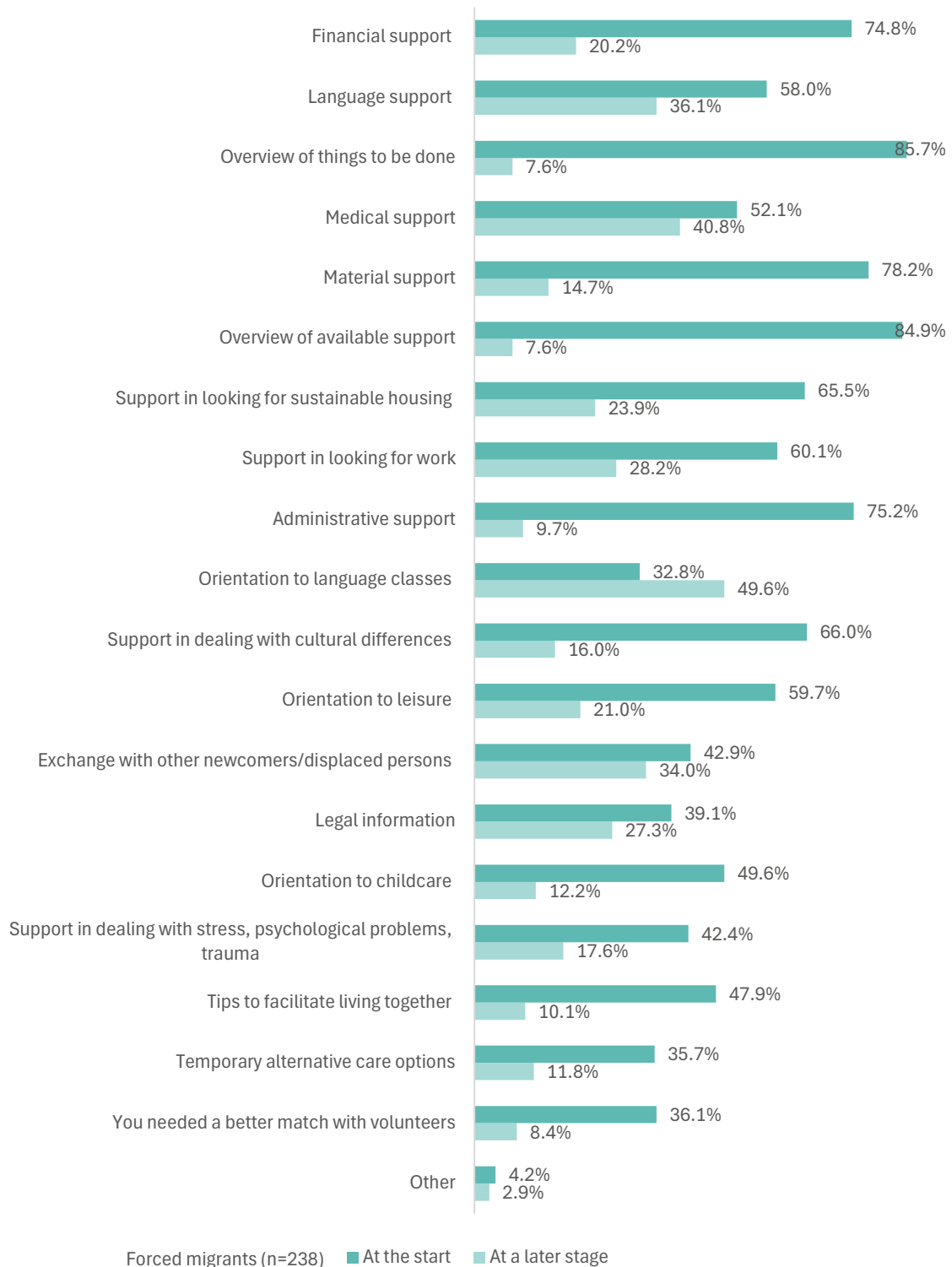


5.3.5. Support

Support needs of forced migrants

The needs of forced migrants (n=238) evolved between the start of their support period to a later stage. Initially, the most critical needs included an overview of things to be done (85.7%), an overview of available support (84.9%), material support (78.2%), financial support (74.8%), administrative support (75.2%). Over time, these support needs decreased significantly. The need for medical support remained relatively high, with 52.1 per cent needing it initially and 40.8 per cent later. Language support was important for 58 per cent at the start and 36.1 per cent later. The need for support in dealing with cultural differences was noted by 66 per cent initially, decreasing to 16 per cent later. Other significant needs included support in looking for sustainable housing (65.5% initially, 23.9% later) and work (60.1% initially, 28.2% later).

Figure 49. Needs experienced by forced migrants in Lithuania (%)



Support offered by volunteers and received by forced migrants

Volunteers (n=65) provided different forms of support to forced migrants. The most common forms of support provided include material support (76.9%) and support with orientation in the new society

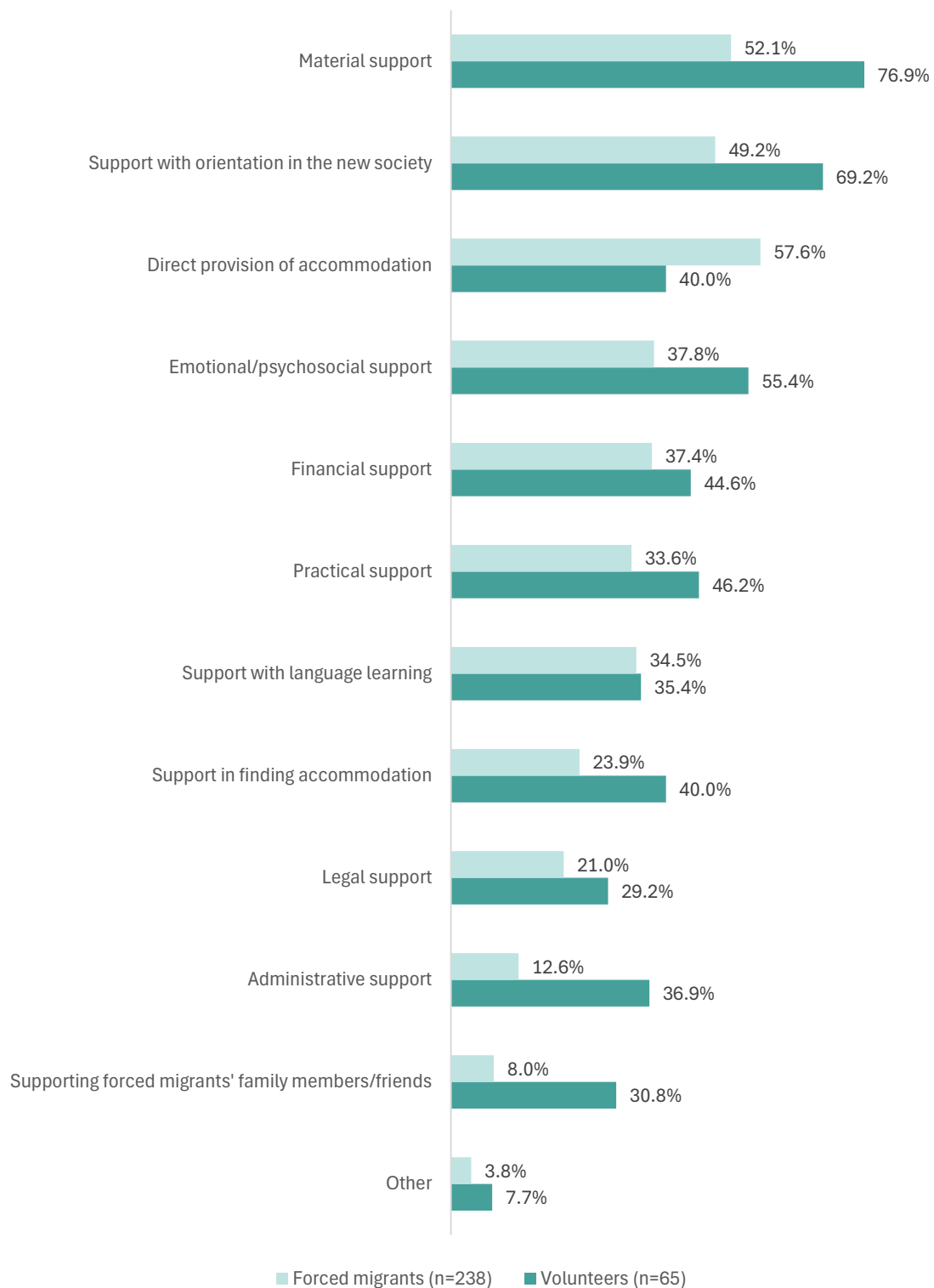
(69.2%). Emotional and psychosocial support was given by the more than half (55.4%) of volunteers, and practical support, such as transport and orientation to services, was provided by 46.2 per cent of volunteers. Other forms of support provided included financial support (44.6%), directly providing accommodation (40%), help in finding accommodation was given (40%), administrative support (36.9%) and language learning (35.4%). Additionally, almost one third (30.8%) of volunteers supported family members or friends of the forced migrants. Legal support was offered by 29.2 per cent of the volunteers, and 7.7 per cent provided other types of support – referring, for instance, to providing educational support.

Forced migrants (n=238) were also asked about the support they received. The most common form of support was volunteers providing accommodation (57.6%), closely followed by material support (52.1%) and support with orientation in the new society (49.2%). Emotional/psychosocial support (37.8%) and financial support (37.4%) were also important forms of support offered to forced migrants, as were language assistance (34.5%) and support in finding accommodation (33.9%). Practical support (33.6%) and legal support (21%) were also important. Administrative support (12.6%) and assistance for family or friends (8%) played smaller but still vital roles. Other forms of assistance (3.8%), refer to receiving help in finding work or education.

At the time of filling out the survey, 63.1 per cent of the 65 volunteers in Lithuania reported that they had supported forced migrants in the past and continued to do so currently. Meanwhile, 33.8 per cent of respondents indicated that they had supported forced migrants in the past but no longer do so. Additionally, 3.1 per cent were supporting forced migrants for the first time.

Similarly, 12.6 per cent of the 238 forced migrants were receiving support for the first time, 26.9 per cent of forced migrants had previously received support and were still being supported, and 60.5 per cent of forced migrants had received support in the past but were no longer receiving it. Most of the forced migrants were residing in rented housing (58%). Other recurrent housing situations were 'staying with family or friends' (5.9%) and 'staying with a host family' (5.7%). Three respondents lived in a reception centre, one person was living on the streets, and one person was staying in an emergency accommodation. Fifteen respondents resided elsewhere, for instance in a collective centre or housing provided by the employer.

Figure 50. Support received by forced migrants and support offered by volunteers in Lithuania (multiple answers possible, %)



5.3.6. Private accommodation as a specific form of support

Among the types of support offered, private accommodation was also mentioned. Almost 58 per cent of the 238 forced migrants mentioned that they received this kind of support, while 40 per cent of the 65 volunteers mentioned that they provided accommodation directly. Private accommodation referred to different types of living arrangements:

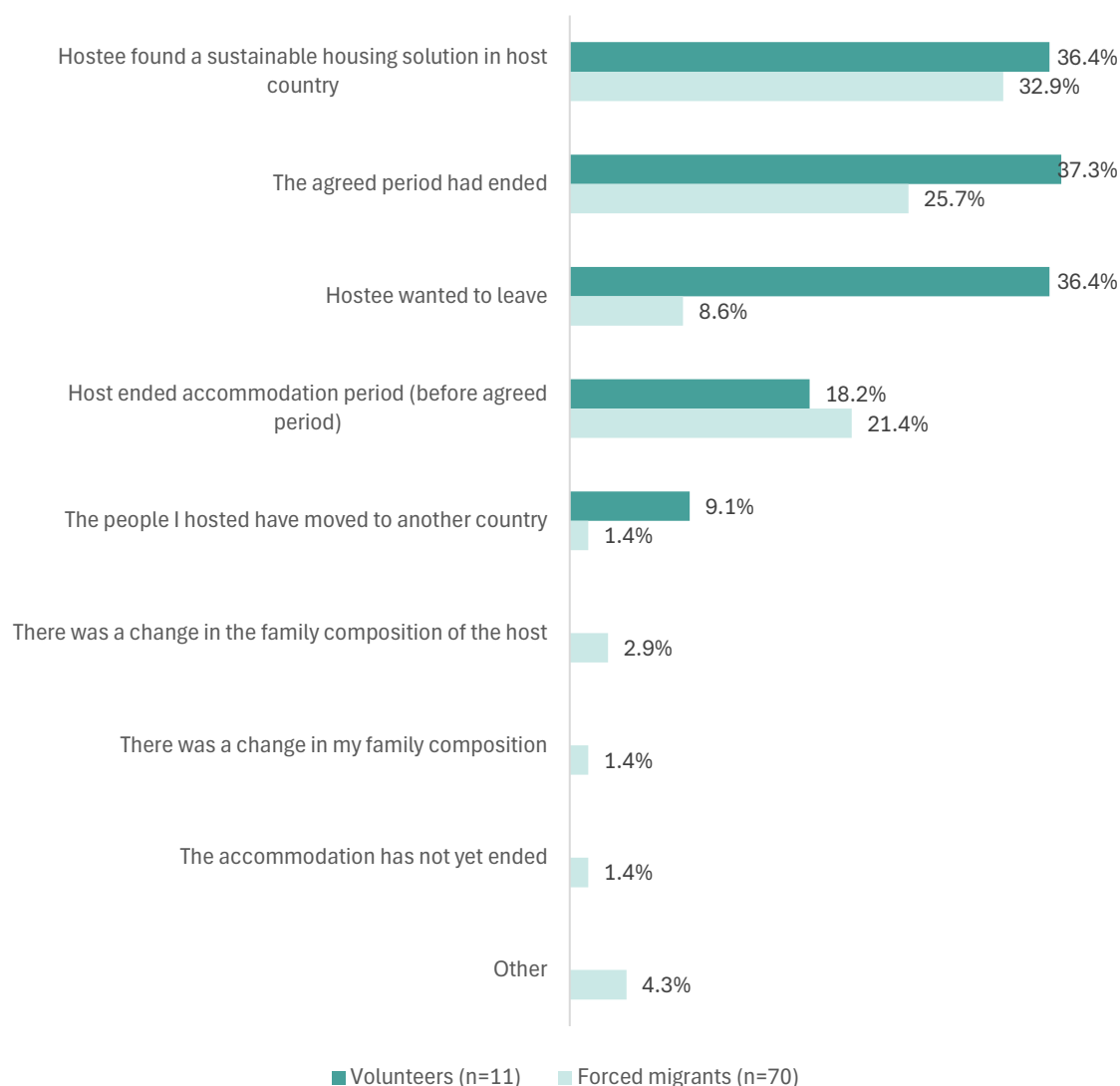
- Sharing one or more rooms in the same accommodation (38.5% in the survey of volunteers and 14.6% in the survey of forced migrants);
- Forced migrants are accommodated in separate accommodations (50% in the survey of volunteers, 50.4% in the survey of forced migrants);
- Forced migrants are accommodated in completely separate units within the same accommodation as the volunteers (3.8% in the survey of volunteers, 19% in the survey of forced migrants);
- Forced migrants are accommodated elsewhere, e.g. in forms of collective housing (7.7% in the survey of volunteers, 16.1% in the survey of forced migrants).

Duration and termination of accommodation period

In comparing the data from volunteers (volunteers) and forced migrants (forced migrants) regarding the duration of accommodation, some notable similarities emerge. The most common hosting period was more than one year, mentioned by more than half (53.8%) of volunteers and 52.6 per cent of forced migrants. Hosting periods from 2 to 6 months were mentioned by 26.9 per cent of volunteers, which aligns 30.7 per cent of forced migrants reporting staying for the same duration. Additionally, 7.7 per cent of volunteers accommodated for 7 to 12 months, closely matching the 6.6 per cent of forced migrants. Short-term stays of one week to one month or stays of less than one week were rare for both groups.

When looking at the reasons for ending the hosting period, most forced migrants indicated that they found a sustainable housing solution in the country (32.9%). Additionally, 25.7 per cent reported that the agreed period had ended. For 21.4 per cent forced migrants, the accommodation period was ended by the volunteers. Another 8.6 per cent chose to leave themselves. Other reasons were changes in the family composition of the volunteer (2.9%) or forced migrant (1.4), the forced migrant moving to another country (1.4%).

Figure 51. Reason for termination hosting period according to volunteers and forced migrants in Lithuania (%)



Most forced migrants who had been hosted in private accommodation, indicated that support and follow-up were provided by an external organization after the accommodation period ended (63.2%). Meanwhile, almost one third (31.6%) of respondents continued to receive support directly from their volunteers. Only a small percentage (2.6%) reported that the support ended completely, and another 2.6 per cent mentioned other unspecified forms of support.

5.3.7. Overall experience

Comparing the overall experience of volunteers and forced migrants in Lithuania reveal some interesting insights. A significant majority of both groups had positive experiences. About half of the volunteers (52.3%) described their experience as somewhat positive, while 44.6 per cent rated it as very positive.

Only a small fraction had negative experiences, with 1.5 per cent reporting very negative and 1.5 per cent somewhat negative experiences. Forced migrants (n=235) also had a high rate of positive experiences, with 46.8 per cent reporting their experience as very positive and 48.1 per cent as rather positive. Only a small number of respondents had negative experiences, with 4.3 per cent indicating a rather negative experience and 2 respondents (0.9%) reporting a very negative experience.

Figure 52. Overall experience of the respondents of the survey in Lithuania (%)

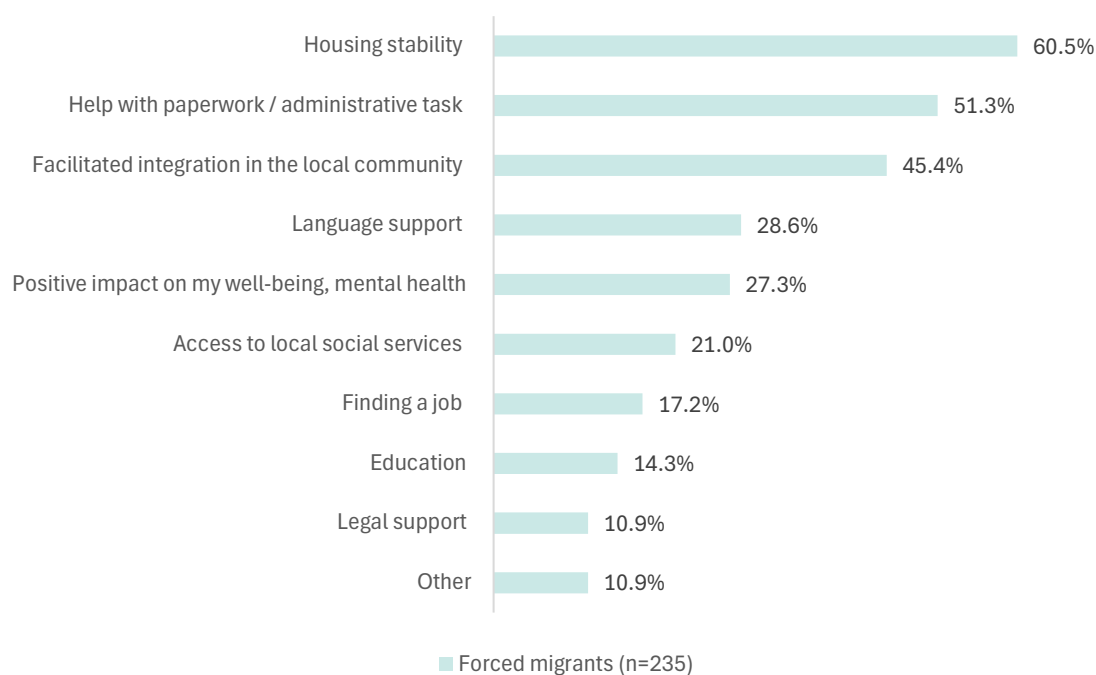


Respondents living in separate accommodations solely for their use (n=69) reported the highest levels of satisfaction, with 72.5 per cent rating their experience as very positive and 27.5 per cent as rather positive. Those residing in a completely separate unit within the host's accommodation (n=26) also expressed high satisfaction, with 57.7 per cent reporting very positive experiences and 42.3 per cent rather positive. Similarly, respondents sharing one or more rooms with their hosts (n=20) had positive experiences, with 60 per cent rating their support as very positive and 40 per cent as rather positive. In contrast, individuals accommodated elsewhere (n=22) reported a broader range of experiences: while 68.2 per cent rated their support as rather positive, only 18.2 per cent described it as very positive, and some reported very negative (4.5%) or rather negative (9.1%) experiences.

Forced migrants were asked about the most helpful aspects of being supported and/or hosted. The top three aspects that were mentioned were: housing stability (60.5%), assistance with paperwork and

administrative tasks (51.3%) and facilitated integration into the local community (45.4%). Language support (28.6%) and a positive impact on well-being and mental health (27.3%) were significant as well. Other important aspects included access to local social services (21%), finding a job (17.2%), education (14.3%), and legal support (10.9%). Other factors (10.9%) refer to financial and material support or practical assistance like transport and medical support.

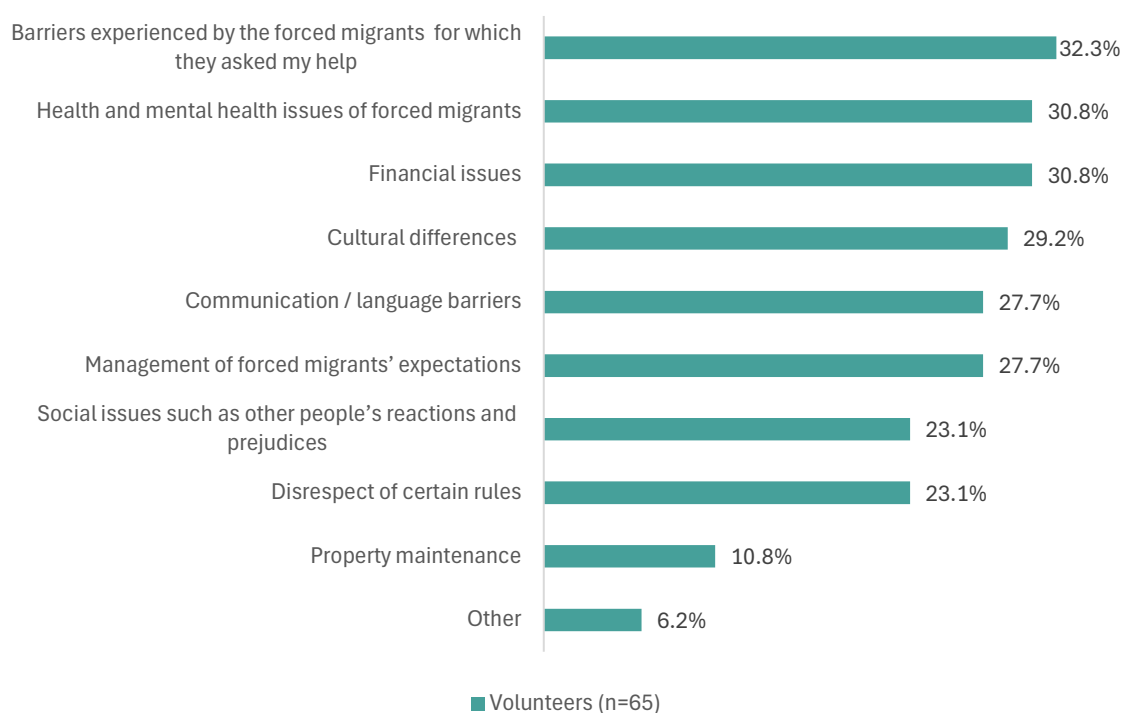
Figure 53. Most helpful aspects of being supported and/or hosted according to forced migrants in Lithuania (multiple answers possible, %)



5.3.8. Challenges encountered

Although most experiences appear to be quite positive, volunteers and forced migrants also faced different challenges during their support trajectory. The most significant issues for volunteers were dealing with barriers experienced by forced migrants (32.3%), health and mental health issues (30.8%) and financial issues (30.8%). Perceived differences in socialisation patterns (29.2%), communication and language barriers (27.7%) and managing beneficiaries' expectations (27.7%) were also significant challenges. Social issues, such as reactions and prejudices from others, and disrespect of certain rules, each affected 23.1 per cent of volunteers. Additionally, a remaining part (6.2%) of volunteers reported other unspecified challenges.

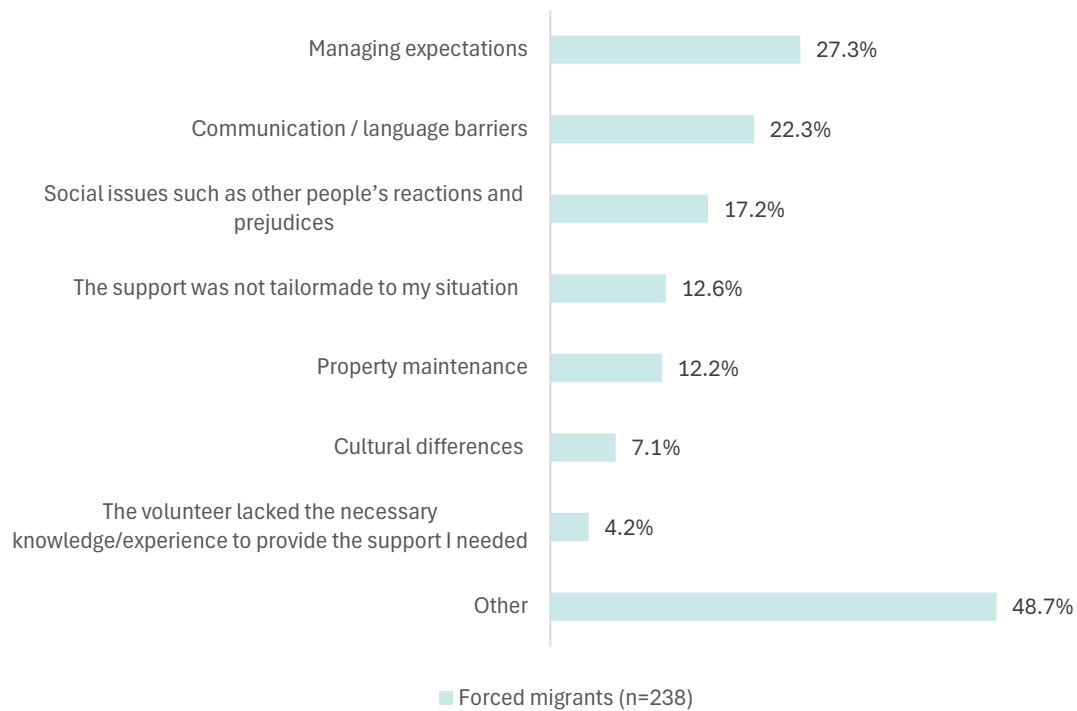
*Figure 54. Challenges encountered by volunteers in the support provided in Lithuania
(multiple answers possible, %)*



The most common issue for forced migrants was managing expectations (27.3%), which includes understanding what services could be expected and the duration of support. Communication and language barriers were also significant (22.3%). Social issues, such as reactions and prejudices from others, affected 17.2 per cent of respondents. Quality or maintenance of the property (12.2%) and support not being tailored to individual situations (12.6%) were also notable challenges. Cultural differences (7.1%) and the volunteers lacking necessary knowledge or experience (4.2%) were less common but still impactful.

Additionally, a large portion (48.7%) reported other challenges, indicating a wide range of potential issues not captured by the specific categories listed. Examples are pressure from the side of volunteers to remain in provided housing, documentation issues, and a lack of information on available support or how to apply for residence permits. Some respondents mentioned financial difficulties and the high cost of living. Issues like overcrowded housing and volunteers being unresponsive for long periods were also mentioned.

Figure 55. Challenges encountered by forced migrants in the support received in Lithuania (multiple answers possible, %)



Addressing these challenges

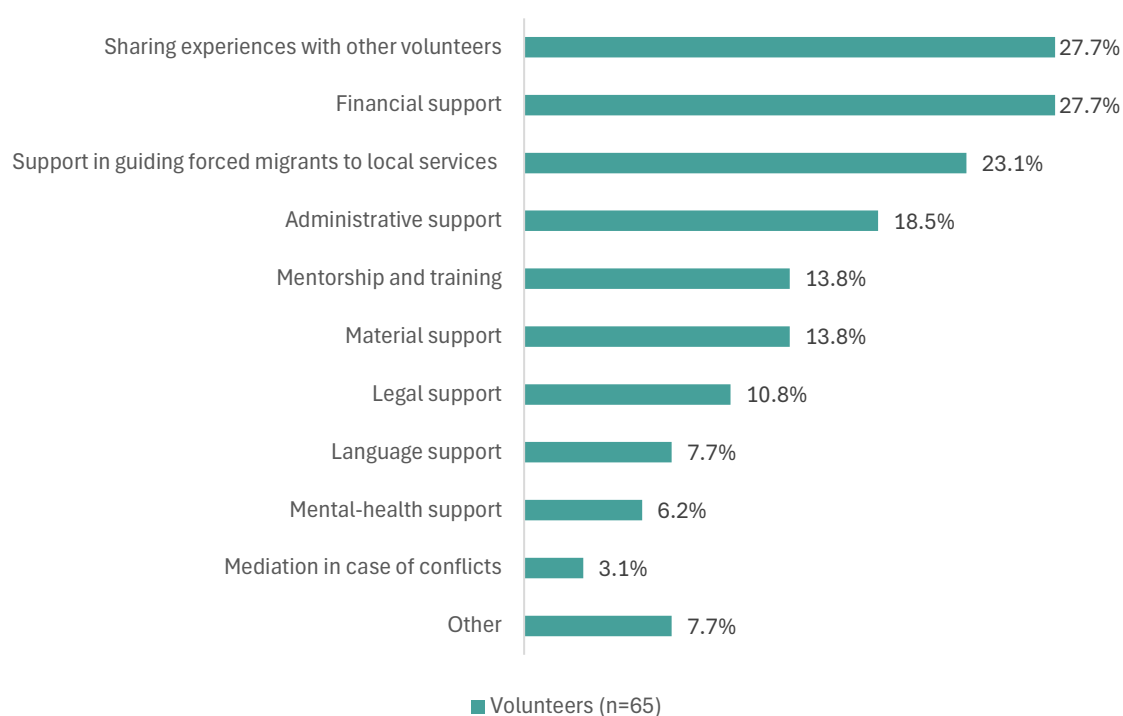
Both volunteers and forced migrants have several ideas on how to overcome the challenges they encountered during the support. Volunteers mainly highlighted access to specialised protection services (35.4%) and financial support (33.8%). Better institutional guidelines (27.7%) and more efficient collaboration with local administration (30.8%) were also significant. Cultural sensitivity training (16.9%) and access to a helpdesk (10.8%) could have provided additional support. Some volunteers felt that better support from their organization (7.7%) and access to an online platform or mental health coach (6.2%) would have been beneficial. Other suggestions (4.6%) refer to support for finding housing, financial support (especially for seniors), and a more effective and unified information system for migrants regarding taxes, social insurance, and support.

Similar to the volunteers, forced migrants mentioned financial support was identified as the most helpful, with 39.9 per cent of respondents highlighting its importance. Better housing quality (24.8%) and improved institutional guidelines (17.6%) were also significant. Cultural sensitivity training (16%) and access to specialised protection services (11.8%) were noted as valuable for addressing specific needs. Access to a helpdesk (11.3%) and opportunities for exchange with other forced migrants (5.5%) could have provided additional support. Although less frequently mentioned, access to an online platform or

mental health coach (2.9%) and more frequent meetings with volunteers (2.5%) were also considered helpful. Other potential countering solutions (44.1%) include, for instance, consultations and information about available help with integration, documentation, and medical support. Language courses, and the recruitment of volunteers who speak English, Russian, or Ukrainian were mentioned as beneficial. Some respondents suggested a more organised institutional system and online education platforms as areas for improvement.

Many volunteers indicated that they received support themselves, during their engagement as a volunteer. Financial assistance (27.7%) and sharing experiences with other volunteers (27.7%) are the most common forms of support mentioned. Guidance to local services (23.1%) and administrative support (18.5%) were also significant. Material support and mentorship/training each accounted for 13.8 per cent, while legal support (10.8%) and language support (7.7%) were less prevalent. Mental-health support (6.2%) and mediation in conflicts (3.1%) were the least common.

Figure 56. Support volunteers received during their engagement in Lithuania (multiple answers possible, %)



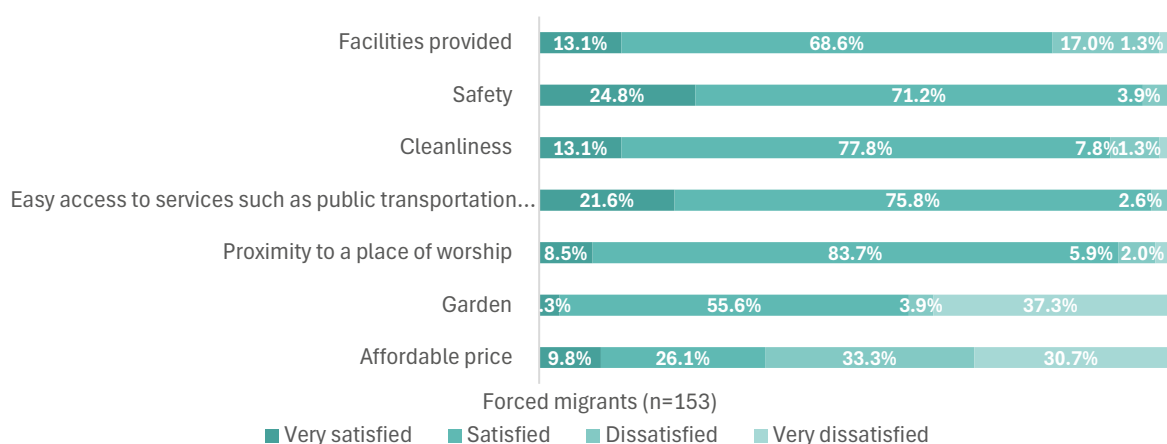
Data on the support volunteers received during the programme show that 16.7 per cent of respondents found it rather irrelevant, 33.3 per cent found it rather relevant, and half (50%, n=18) found it highly relevant.

Challenges related to housing

Because of its relevance in the literature and in CS schemes (Van Dam & Schrooten, 2025), special attention was given to housing challenges encountered by forced migrants.

Forced migrants were asked how satisfied they were with their current housing situation. Their levels of satisfaction varied regarding different aspects of their current housing situation. Overall, respondents were satisfied to very satisfied around most aspects, including the facilities provided, safety, cleanliness also received high satisfaction and easy access to services like public transportation. However, the price is an area of concern.

Figure 57. Satisfaction of forced migrants with their current housing situation in Lithuania (multiple answers possible, %)



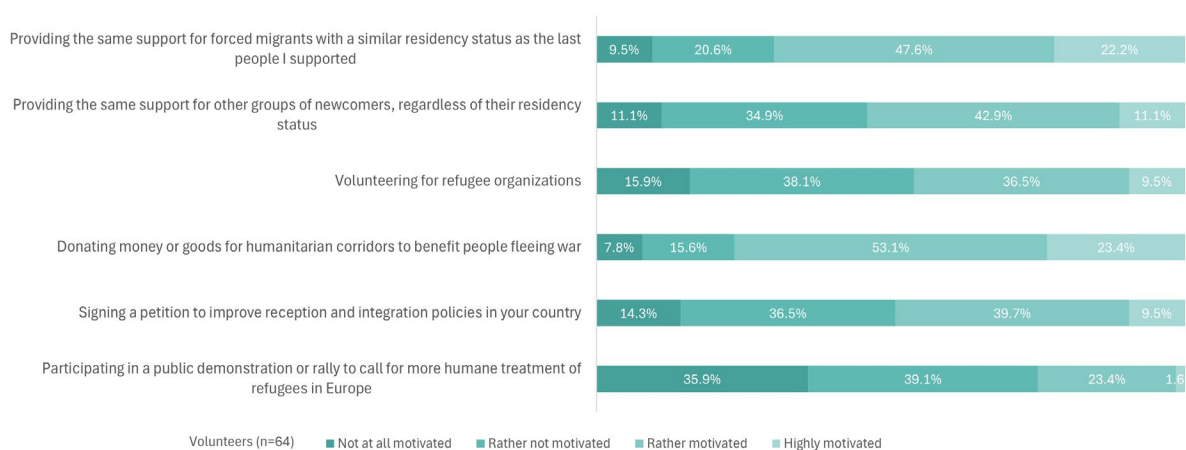
When looking for housing, the most significant barrier for forced migrants in Lithuania is high prices, affecting 53.4 per cent of respondents. Other financial constraints, such as the inability to pay a deposit for several months, impact thirty-four per cent of respondents. Owners' reluctance to rent to families with minors (26.5%) and racial discrimination (20.2%) are also notable barriers. Lack of employment (12.6%) and language difficulties (9.7%) further complicate the search for housing. A smaller percentage of respondents (5%) referred to a lack of available properties, and 3.4 per cent mentioned a lack of support or network for finding housing. Issues like no housing available with nearby work opportunities (0.4%) or accessible by public transport (0.4%) were less common. Additionally, 12.2 per cent of respondents reported no difficulties, while 1.7 per cent mentioned other challenges – such as landlords not renting to forced migrants or to people with pets or the absence of affordable housing near workplaces.

5.3.9. Future engagement of volunteers

Volunteers were asked about their willingness to engage again in the future for forced migrants related support. Their answers reveal varying levels of motivation among respondents to participate in different future activities. The highest motivation is seen in donating money or goods for humanitarian corridors, with 53.1 per cent rather motivated and 23.4 per cent highly motivated. Moreover, most volunteers are rather motivated (47.6%) or highly motivated (22.2%) to provide the same support for forced migrants with similar residency status.

The motivation drops slightly when asked about providing support for other groups of forced migrants, with 42.9 per cent rather motivated and 11.1 per cent highly motivated. The motivation for volunteering for refugee organizations is more evenly spread, with 36.5 per cent rather motivated and 9.5 per cent highly motivated, but a significant portion (38.1%) is rather not motivated. Volunteers are the least motivated to participate in public demonstrations, with more than one third (35.9%) not at all motivated and 39.1 per cent rather not motivated.

Figure 58. Motivations of volunteers to participate in the future activities in Lithuania (multiple answers possible, %)



5.4. Findings from the qualitative research⁹

In this section, the findings from qualitative research conducted in Lithuania are presented. In Lithuania, two focus groups were organised: one with volunteers (seven women) and one with forced migrants

⁹ Section '5.4 Findings from the qualitative research' is authored by UAB „Spinter tyrimai”.

(five participants, all beneficiaries of temporary protection, all women). Additionally, ten representatives from CSOs and governmental institutions were interviewed (nine women, one man). By integrating

insights from both in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, a comprehensive and topic-clustered analysis is offered.

In this section, quotations from various respondents will illustrate the research findings. Each quotation is followed by a unique code that identifies the respondent. The code consists of an abbreviation representing the respondent's profile and a number to differentiate between respondents with the same profile:

- CSO: representatives of civil society organization
- FM: forced migrants
- GO: representatives of governmental organizations
- V: volunteers

5.4.1. Arrival and accommodation: manifestations of organizational structures

Forced migrants shared their experiences about their arrival in Lithuania, citing the reasons for choosing the country as invitations from friends or acquaintances, or its favourable geographic location. For example, some forced migrants arrived in Poland first but chose Lithuania as their next destination, as Poland quickly became overcrowded with forced migrants at the beginning of the war, making it difficult to find housing. However, in many cases, the decision to come to Lithuania was heavily influenced by invitations from acquaintances already residing there.

When discussing the accommodation process and the role of organizational structures in facilitating housing, forced migrants indicated that their first point of contact in Lithuania was the Registration Centre, where they received initial help with accommodation. Volunteers who offered housing through organizations like *Stiprūs kartu* (Strong Together) did so after registering their willingness to assist and, in some cases, also provided housing for acquaintances who were migrants. Some volunteers mentioned that they had previously worked with organizations related to migration and then personally contributed to the housing process.

When discussing the accommodation process and the role of organizational structures, forced migrants indicated that their first point of contact upon arriving in Lithuania was the Registration/Registry/Migration Centre, where they received initial assistance with accommodation.

Volunteers who provided housing mentioned that they started offering support by registering through the Stiprūs kartu organization and expressing their willingness to help. Some volunteers also accommodated acquaintances who were migrants. A portion of the volunteers noted that they had worked in organizations related to migration and then had personally contributed to the housing process.

The organizations that the volunteers mentioned they encountered when offering housing were Stiprūs kartu and The Family Centre of the Vilnius Archdiocese. Volunteers approached Stiprūs kartu as volunteers, expressing their willingness to welcome forced migrants into their homes. One respondent mentioned receiving a letter from The Family Centre of the Vilnius Archdiocese, asking them to host a family. Until they could provide housing, the volunteer supported the family financially, and once the opportunity arose, they moved in together.

Volunteers who were professionally involved in migrant assistance were aware of all the housing criteria and procedures. When asked to specify them, they mentioned the questionnaires sent by Stiprūs kartu which assessed the size of the housing (in square meters), ease of access to essential services (such as education and healthcare), and proximity to public transport stops. Based on these criteria, families were matched with volunteers offering accommodation.

After the initial accommodation period or due to other reasons for leaving the provided housing, forced migrants searched for new places to stay either on their own or with the help of volunteers. The search for further accommodation was facilitated by Red Cross volunteers, acquaintances who were forced migrants from Ukraine, or through social networks.

Forced migrants cited several reasons for wanting to change their housing. These included the desire to live independently with only their own family (as most lived with the volunteers), a lack of social interaction, a desire to engage with and integrate into the local community (especially relevant for younger migrants without families or children), and the inconvenient location of the provided housing, such as a house in the suburbs too far from their workplace. In some cases, volunteers requested that the forced migrants vacate the housing due to changes in their personal circumstances (e.g. a child returning to Lithuania or needing more space for a daughter after childbirth). A more exceptional case involved an unfriendly volunteer, with whom the forced migrant had to live, feeling controlled and eventually being pressured to pay for utilities, despite the legal agreement for free accommodation.

5.4.2. Experience in helping with accommodation: experiences of volunteers and forced migrants

Evaluation of accommodation experiences

Overall, forced migrants had positive experiences with accommodation. All participants stated that they found housing smoothly and credited this largely to the staff at the Registration Centre. All forced migrants received housing free of charge, which they described as a lifesaver:

This was invaluable help when you've lost everything. It takes time to get back on your feet. When you only have 1 000 USD, and you know it would only last you a month if you had to pay for everything yourself, this help was a real salvation.
(FM2)

Criteria for receiving housing

When discussing the criteria required to receive housing, forced migrants stated that no formal procedures or criteria needed to be met. On the contrary, they mentioned that organizations were proactive in addressing accommodation needs. These organizations actively assessed the preferences and circumstances of the forced migrants and offered housing options that best suited their individual situations. For example, one young mother with a child was assigned a house in the suburbs near a kindergarten or school. Forced migrants also noted that other factors, such as access to transportation and the ability to communicate with locals in Russian, were taken into consideration.

From the volunteers' perspective, they similarly noted that there were no specific programmes or stages required to provide housing, as most of the arrangements were voluntary, either through Stiprūs kartu or by hosting acquaintances.

Housing conditions: living alone or with volunteers

Forced migrants reported being generally satisfied with the housing conditions. In most cases, they mentioned living with the volunteers; however, they still had separate living spaces within large private homes. They stated that they were provided with all necessary household items and equipment. Furthermore, forced migrants noted that not only was the housing provided free of charge, but the volunteers also covered utility costs, provided food, and helped with various domestic issues.

Volunteers also reported that the housing conditions were excellent, often offering the same homes they lived in themselves. For cases where the volunteers did not reside with the forced migrants, they stated that the accommodation provided was spacious and of high quality. Forced migrants mentioned that all families or individuals they housed were not required to share their accommodations with other forced migrants. In most cases, the housing provided by the volunteers was the place forced migrants first stayed in after arriving in Lithuania, unless they had temporarily stayed for a few nights in state facilities or in homes of acquaintances. Forced migrants described the state facilities as having very poor living conditions, with many beds in single rooms, sleeping in what can be considered corridors, inadequate for long-term living.

Agreements related to housing

Both forced migrants and volunteers reported that the only formal agreement related to housing was the signing of a loan-for-use agreement, which was described as part of the *Stiprūs kartu* accommodation process. Volunteers mentioned that even when they later accommodated forced migrants independently (without the involvement of *Stiprūs kartu*), they continued to use this type of agreement. All other arrangements related to accommodation were mostly verbal, typically concerning the length of stay, an agreement that the forced migrants would not pay for utilities, or house rules. One volunteer, for example, mentioned that one of the house rules was that: *“If you need something or want to ask someone who’s in another room, you don’t shout, you go over and ask them.” (V3)*

It was noted that most agreements were informal and involved adapting to each other’s personalities and needs as they went along. In some cases, household chores were shared as an unspoken form of compensation for housing.

Feedback from the organization that facilitated accommodation

Both volunteers and forced migrants noted that there was no follow-up contact from the organizations involved during or after the accommodation period. Stiprūs kartu or any other organizations were involved only at the beginning of the accommodation process, but no further contact or checks on living conditions were made afterward. Neither volunteers nor forced migrants were asked for feedback, nor did the organizations seek any.

5.4.3. Integration, support received and need for support

Support received and organizational structures involved

Forced migrants who had fled war and arrived in a country with a different language, systems, and cultural norms emphasised that the support they received from host organizations, institutions, and volunteers was crucial. The primary need for assistance was housing, but beyond that, forced migrants also mentioned receiving various types of help from different sources. These included assistance with food and essential items from the Red Cross, as well as temporary accommodation for three nights. Employment Service consultations regarding job opportunities were also mentioned, along with advice on integration from other organizations and their volunteers. Forced migrants noted that this assistance often involved sharing useful contacts and directing them to the appropriate people for further help.

Assistance from institutions not directly linked to migrant support

Forced migrants also reported receiving help from institutions not directly linked to migrant support. Educational institutions, such as schools and kindergartens, were highlighted for providing free education, meals, and transportation. For instance, one forced migrant mentioned being able to send their child to a private Lithuanian-Ukrainian school free of charge thanks to the administration's support. Another forced migrant reported that their workplace provided food assistance and access to Airbnb vouchers for 40 days of free accommodation.

Assistance from individuals

Forced migrants also mentioned receiving assistance from individuals, often volunteers from organizations or members of local communities. This help included finding housing after the initial accommodation period, with volunteers from the Red Cross helping to locate a place to stay. Financial support was also provided, with some contributing up to 150 euro toward rent payments. Forced migrants noted help in finding jobs in places like Circle-K, private Lithuanian-Ukrainian schools, as nannies,

or working as cooks in Russian-speaking Lithuanian families. Volunteers also assisted in finding medical care, such as helping locate a dentist, covering the costs of medical visits, or finding veterinary care for pets. In addition, they mentioned support with items and transportation when moving to a new place. Some also reported receiving assistance with registering for residence permits, finding extracurricular activities for children, and help navigating the school system (such as getting children into Russian-speaking classes).

The volunteers emphasised that all the people around them came together in groups and communities, collectively gathering and sorting items to give away, offering help on a large scale. They noted that this was a pressing issue, and people wanted to contribute not only through official volunteering but also individually.

Emotional and psychological support

Emotional and psychological support was also emphasised as an essential form of assistance. Both forced migrants and volunteers stated that this was a sensitive area. Volunteers noted that they saw how deeply affected the Ukrainian forced migrants were by the war, especially the children. One volunteer mentioned how children would cry at night or be startled by the sound of fireworks, which reminded them of gunfire. Therefore, emotional support was deemed critical, and migrants expressed gratitude for the psychological comfort they received.

Emotional help was not only provided by close circles such as neighbours, kindergarten teachers, or schoolteachers but also by the volunteers, who offered moral support and helped ensure psychological well-being. One volunteer remarked: “*We shared in all the worries and challenges the migrants faced*” (V3).

Forced migrants highlighted how this care made them feel like part of a family, saying that the homey atmosphere and family-like environment greatly helped them recover, as volunteers tried to ensure that the migrants felt as much at home as possible.

From both forced migrants’ and volunteers’ experiences, it was clear that there was no shortage of support. Help was provided not only by organizations and volunteers but also by individuals who came together in groups or communities. It was noted that this was a pressing issue, and it was easy for people to personally engage, which led to a high level of volunteer activity.

5.4.4. Challenges in accessing and receiving support and housing

The language barrier

The language barrier was identified as one of the main challenges in receiving support, as noted by all groups of informants. Forced migrants, especially older individuals, reported not knowing English, making Russian their only means of communication or relying on other forced migrants who became volunteers and helped their fellow countrymen. It was noted that children adapted to the language more quickly and were often able to help their parents with translation.

The following issues caused by the language barrier were identified: difficulties in receiving support or expressing expectations, disruptions in smooth socialisation, obstacles to securing well-paid jobs or jobs that match one's qualifications or profession, and the limited accessibility of information in a language that migrants can understand. As one migrant noted, "*It all starts from here—migration processes, filling out documents, understanding what I need to do*" (FM1). It was also noted that the language barrier complicates the rental process—if a rental agreement is prepared in a language the tenant does not understand, they cannot feel safe or confident about the rental terms, and this becomes an issue for landlords as well.

Due to the difficulties caused by the language barrier, forced migrants are attending or planning to attend Lithuanian language courses to learn the language thoroughly (not just to obtain a certificate). It was mentioned that information about language learning usually reaches forced migrants through the Employment Service, Caritas, the Red Cross, and various Facebook groups.

Housing

Housing was reported as one of the primary challenges in receiving support. It was identified as a basic need that had to be met for further integration to be possible.

“Integration doesn't begin with language courses or community activities; it starts with addressing basic humanitarian needs like housing. Without housing, no further integration can proceed. (CSO3)”

Both governmental and non-governmental organizations noted systemic issues related to the housing process. For example, there was a delay in receiving financial support for housing. Ukrainians are entitled to three months of accommodation compensation from the municipality, starting from their visit to the migration office, but the funds are only received two weeks later, leaving forced migrants without a place to stay during that period. It was also noted that Stiprūs kartu is no longer operational and that temporary housing facilities or shelters are only available for the most vulnerable groups (such as women with children and people with disabilities), leaving those outside these groups without options.

The difficulties in renting housing for large families, especially those with five or six children, were also highlighted. Experts noted that there is a very limited supply of housing units that can accommodate such large families, if any at all.

Experts further noted that successful integration is most likely to occur in large cities, where there are better opportunities for employment, education, and access to specialised services, such as therapy or social work, which are especially important for those fleeing war. However, integration in large cities is also more difficult due to the higher cost of services and housing, which is often not matched by the forced migrants' lower incomes. As a result, the highest concentration of forced migrants is in Vilnius, which only increases the competition for housing among this group.

Social attitudes toward foreigners and existing prejudices also hinder the ability to secure housing. It was reported that landlords often remain reluctant to rent to forced migrants, especially from countries further away than Ukraine. Additionally, a lack of understanding of the legal system and fears about renting to families with children, due to the complexities of terminating a rental contract, further contribute to this challenge. Some landlords prefer to rent properties 'under the table', which complicates the involvement of the state or the receipt of financial support, as a formal rental agreement is required to receive any assistance.

Additional challenges: mothers with children, understanding the system, cultural barriers

Additional challenges were noted, particularly for mothers with children, who faced significant difficulties in finding flexible jobs (especially considering that job opportunities were already limited). Without family members or close relatives to help care for the children, their options were even more restricted.

Another reported challenge was the lack of understanding of the local system and its processes. When forced migrants arrived in Lithuania, they struggled to comprehend how the municipality operated. It was mentioned that while processes related to education and healthcare were somewhat easier to

navigate, thanks to assistance from volunteers and NGOs, considerable difficulties remained in understanding other aspects of the system.

Forced migrants also noted cultural differences as a less frequent but notable challenge. For example, they mentioned difficulties in understanding aspects of Lithuanian culture:

When do we smile? When do we show that we like or don't like something? I've heard many say it's easier to understand services and information here, but it's much harder to understand you as Lithuanians. (FM3)

Changes in support provision in recent years

Experts noted that the current pace of support provision has significantly decreased. A portion of the forced migrants has already left Lithuania for their final destination countries, which they initially intended to reach. Lithuania served as a transit stop for many. The remaining forced migrants, those still in Lithuania, often live in designated centres, such as refugee reception centres or mother-and-child centres. These centres mostly house seniors, mothers with children, large families, or individuals with health conditions.

It was noted that the decrease in support is partly due to the strong Ukrainian community already established in Lithuania. This community, which has become well-rooted, now takes on much of the responsibility for helping newly arriving forced migrants, offering guidance and assistance where needed.

Overall, it was emphasised that the initial wave of forced migrants arrived in Lithuania out of necessity, often without a clear plan. By contrast, the second wave arriving now are more informed about where they are going and whom they will be staying with. Many of the forced migrants who remain in Lithuania are those who plan to settle down permanently or those who continue to live in social centres.

Volunteers' experiences

Volunteers who provided accommodation to migrants also reported facing certain challenges. One of the more frequently mentioned difficulties was the lack of clarity about the extent and type of assistance they were expected to provide. As one volunteer noted:

“ I didn't know exactly what medical services they were entitled to because sometimes services would be denied, even though I knew they had the right to emergency care. (V2) ”

Another challenge reported by volunteers was helping forced migrants find employment, especially when the forced migrants had higher qualifications and wanted to secure jobs that matched their expertise. Helping forced migrants manage stress, particularly children who had experienced trauma, was also mentioned as a difficult task. Volunteers reported that accessing psychological support for forced migrants was complicated, as healthcare institutions often refused to provide consultations in a language other than Lithuanian, or with a translator.

Overall, the most frequently mentioned challenges in providing and receiving support were the language barrier and housing issues. These two aspects were identified as causing a cascade of related problems and were the most frequently mentioned by both forced migrants and experts. Other challenges were mentioned less often or were important to a smaller / more specific group of forced migrants.

5.4.5. Known initiatives of civil society and state institutions

Awareness of Stiprūs kartu and other organizations

Forced migrants who had received support from organizations helping with refugee reception and integration most commonly mentioned the organizations they had personally encountered. For instance, one forced migrant highlighted Stiprūs kartu stating that the organization helped them find housing. Another forced migrant mentioned volunteering at the Red Cross and collaborating with Stiprūs kartu to resolve accommodation issues. A third forced migrant noted that they used Stiprūs kartu to help find housing for an acquaintance. All three forced migrants expressed positive experiences, reporting that the organization quickly found suitable housing for Ukrainians and that the volunteers were very friendly. Representatives from governmental institutions highlighted that Stiprūs kartu is one of the most prominent examples when discussing organizations addressing refugee reception and integration issues. However, they also noted that other organizations are involved as well:

“Everyone is contributing in their own way—be it the Red Cross, Caritas, the Order of Malta, and other Organizations—but it’s difficult to single out any other Organization apart from ‘Stiprūs kartu’ as a particularly notable example. (GO2)”

Before discussions about the CS model in Lithuania became more widespread, a representative from an NGO mentioned that Stiprūs kartu was one of the most notable examples of such a model, although it is no longer active. The representative stated:

“When Ukrainian refugees arrive, they see that ‘Stiprūs kartu’ provides housing assistance, but when they call, they are told that there are no staff or volunteers available, although some help with transportation may still be offered. (GO1)”

Representatives from non-governmental organizations, in addition to Stiprūs kartu also identified IOM, “which has the largest information centre in all of Vilnius” (GO3), as an institution assisting with migrant integration. They also mentioned the Red Cross and Caritas as organizations that provide consultations on housing searches and how to navigate the process.

Other individual activities and initiatives

In addition to organizations, individual activities and initiatives that support forced migrants’ integration were also highlighted. Community-led initiatives, volunteer activities, and events aimed at assisting forced migrants and their children were mentioned. NGOs representatives noted specific initiatives, such as cultural evenings that are organised once a month, where people from different cultures come together to learn about each other. These events focus on a different culture each month, with activities ranging from sharing traditional dishes to dancing and singing.

Another initiative mentioned was the celebration of International Refugee Day, which is held in a different parish each year to reach a wider group of people and raise awareness about migration and refugee issues.

Therefore, while the number of initiatives has decreased in recent times, there are still activities and efforts in place to support forced migrants' integration. Experts noted that their awareness of organizations and initiatives is much broader than that of forced migrants, who typically only know about the organizations or initiatives they have directly interacted with.

Figure 59. Most commonly known organizations in aiding migrant integration in Lithuania



5.4.6. Community sponsorship model in Lithuania

Awareness of the community sponsorship model

The CS model is understood by only a small portion of respondents, mainly experts working in state institutions. A significant part of the respondents had not encountered this concept and could not provide any examples of it in action.

Representatives from NGOs stated that there are no concrete forms of CS in Lithuania, but individual communities are trying to collaborate on projects and obtain funding for those activities. More frequently, they referred to community empowerment forms, such as the Refugee Reception Centre or programmes supporting refugee entrepreneurship, where individuals can apply for and receive financial aid. However, it was noted that these examples were more individual cases rather than community-wide efforts.

State institutions were somewhat more familiar with the model but only at a superficial level. The most prominent example they cited was the Stiprūs kartu initiative, which had played a major role in housing Ukrainian forced migrants at the start of the war.

Volunteers who received forced migrants tended to understand the CS model more as general community assistance (from friends, neighbours, etc.) in the form of supplies or social interaction. They mentioned that the existence of such a model could be seen through the support provided by neighbourhood or gardening communities, like those in Tarandė or other residential areas.

Organizations associated with the community sponsorship model

Stiprūs kartu was highlighted as a successful and overall exemplary instance of the CS model, especially because Ukrainians were seen as a very specific group that easily garnered public support. The state encouraged action, and citizens found it easy to identify with the Ukrainians asking for help. It was much easier for people to relate to their situation and feel empathy compared to forced migrants from the Middle East or African countries, where cultural differences make it harder for the local population to empathise in the same way.

Forced migrants who were provided with a full explanation of the CS model reported that they believed there were enough organizations in Lithuania working in this area, but that ensuring their continuity was important. The organizations they associated with this concept included Caritas, Save the Children, IOM, the Red Cross, the Ukraine Centre, and Ukreate Hub in Lithuania. According to one woman, these organizations have continued their activities and support for Ukrainians even two years later, organising celebrations, events, discussions, psychological support meetings, and grant competitions.

One expert mentioned the BeFriend initiative, a mentoring programme that operated in 2022, which closely resembled a CS format. The programme was aimed at war refugees and Ukrainian citizens, with mentors assisting forced migrants on various matters, including housing. The process involved the Ukrainian forced migrant registering for the programme, being matched with a potential mentor, and receiving the necessary assistance—whether that be finding schools or kindergartens, securing work or housing, or receiving broader social support in a mentoring format. The expert noted that the programme has since evolved, as the number of arriving Ukrainians has changed, along with their needs.

Limitations and obstacles to the community sponsorship model

Overall, it was noted that the CS model is still not widely known, even among individuals who, professionally or through their personal experiences, might be closely connected to it.

Experts highlighted that the primary obstacle to the successful operation of such a model is the fact that Stiprūs kartu was a spontaneous and one-time response to a well understood threat. In a broader context, the general public is not fully prepared or informed about forced migrants from the Middle East, North Africa, or other regions.

It was also pointed out that this type of initiative requires continuity and financial support, such as subsidies for individuals renting apartments. As one expert noted:

In the long term, even Stiprūs kartu could only assist for a limited time. There should be some kind of continuity.
(GO2)

Another critical aspect for the smooth operation of this model is a clearer legal framework: *"Less shadow and more proper, clean declarations."* (GO3)

Recommendations for the future

It was emphasised that there is a need for similar or related organizations in other cities. It was noted that Vilnius has quite a few such organizations compared to Klaipėda or other cities, and expanding these efforts to other regions is crucial.

Experts also noted that a well-functioning community should be well-organised, with a clear definition of what it represents (e.g., an association or NGO) and operate transparently: *"It should be clear what it stands for and what its goals are"* (GO1). Such transparency could help the community obtain funding, such as donations through the 1.2 per cent income tax allocation or other forms of financial support.

In addition, it was highlighted that strong leadership is essential for a well-functioning community:

Leadership is a fundamental principle, and it's crucial for the community—even if it is strong, without leadership it's impossible. (CSO2)

The leader, especially if they are from the community of forced migrants (for example, a Ukrainian), should be well-established in the country and able to assist arriving forced migrants by mediating with NGOs or state institutions. However, it was noted that the leader does not necessarily have to be from the same ethnic group; it would be beneficial for them to speak the community's language and understand its culture. At the same time, having a Lithuanian leader who understands the local language and bureaucracy was deemed essential to guide the community in the right direction. The proximity and unity within the community itself were also noted as important.

Finally, it was suggested that future efforts to improve the assistance process should focus on giving more attention to the most vulnerable groups—seniors, people with disabilities, and single mothers with children.

5.4.7. Additional reflections

Accommodation after the initial reception period

Most of the forced migrants interviewed stated that they are now living in different accommodations than the ones they were provided with upon arriving in Lithuania. They reported that finding new housing was not a significant challenge, and currently, nearly all of them are renting accommodations independently working, paying rent, and covering utility bills. Only a few respondents mentioned living in housing provided by acquaintances, though they still cover their own utility costs.

The most reported difficulties with forced migrants' current living situation are financial. A large portion of their income is spent on rent and utilities, and many said that their earnings are insufficient because, without language proficiency, they cannot work in their field of expertise and earn a corresponding salary. Additionally, it was noted that from January 2025 onwards, the state will no longer provide any financial assistance.

NGO representatives also observed that some Ukrainians are now finding it more difficult to rent housing. One stated, "*In the beginning, they were welcomed with open arms, but now many are being*

turned away" (CSO5). This situation was attributed to financial issues and cultural differences, such as smoking indoors, which was stated as common for some Ukrainians but unacceptable to landlords, as well as landlords not receiving the promised compensation from the state for providing housing.

Recommendations for improving integration beyond state institutions

The respondents highlighted the importance of sociocultural and community activities as recommendations to improve integration outside of state institutions:

"This is very important, and state institutions will never fully address this need. They only cover the basic necessities, but the more we involve people in social activities, the lower the risk of social exclusion. (GO3)"

It was also noted that there is a lack of communication about the added value that forced migrants bring to society. Respondents suggested that improving the perception of forced migrants could positively influence how they are viewed:

"We mostly talk about how dangerous they are (whether it's justified or not), but what's missing is basic communication that shows why we need them, especially given our current demographic situation. (GO4)"

Another recommendation for improving forced migrants' image in the community was for the forced migrants themselves to demonstrate their commitment to staying in the country, such as learning the language.

“Language learning is a key form of assistance, and the fact that migrants are willing to learn it shows that they are planning to stay and live here among us. (GO4)”

To promote self-sufficiency and integration, respondents identified key areas of focus: allowing time to find a job and secure stable income, offering more Lithuanian language courses or encouraging language learning, and organising employment and skills development programmes.

Post-reception experiences

From the volunteers who provided accommodation for forced migrants, only one respondent is still housing forced migrants. Most of the other forced migrants either returned to Ukraine or moved on to other countries. The volunteers stated that the reason for no longer offering housing was the perception that there was no longer a need—forced migrants had returned to their home country – or the volunteers needed the space for their own family members.

“It became comfortable and safe, and they did not feel much urgency to look for something else. (V2)”

Some also believed that it was time for the forced migrants to become more self-sufficient and move forward independently.

However, volunteers noted that they would be willing to provide help again if needed, as they understand the difficult situation faced by people leaving their homes. One volunteer mentioned that they still provide support by sending packages, maintaining contact, and offering help when challenges arise.

5.5. Conclusions

Public engagement in the non-governmental sector in Lithuania remains relatively weak compared to neighbouring countries, such as those in Scandinavia. This phenomenon can be attributed to both historical and cultural factors. Lithuania, for many centuries, was predominantly an agrarian society with a lifestyle characterised by isolation and a strong focus on micro-communities, especially the family unit. During the Soviet era, forced collectivisation further deepened societal resistance to collective action. Additionally, historically low levels of trust in both society and the state have discouraged individuals from investing their time and effort in initiatives they do not fully trust.

Given this socio-cultural context, the potential for implementing a CS initiative in Lithuania appears limited. However, the outbreak of the Russian war against Ukraine on February 24, 2022, along with the urgent need to accommodate Ukrainian forced migrants and the perceived threat of broader conflict, mobilised Lithuanian society in an unprecedented way. Amidst international organizations providing aid to Ukrainian forced migrants, the private initiative *Stiprūs kartu* emerged as a significant player. Despite the tragic circumstances, this timely and well-positioned initiative provided a unique example of civic solidarity, offering valuable insights into the potential for developing a CS model in Lithuania.

The survey in Lithuania reveals distinct demographic and socio-economic profiles of the volunteers and forced migrants. Volunteers are predominantly older women (73 per cent aged 45 and above) with a high level of education (82.8 per cent holding tertiary degrees) and are mostly employed. In contrast, forced migrants are younger (64.3 per cent aged 44 and below), primarily female (79 per cent), and face significant financial and employment challenges, with 42.4 per cent employed. The financial situations of the volunteers and forced migrants surveyed reveal contrasting realities. Most volunteers are relatively stable financially, with a majority (43.8%) reporting they can manage their household income slightly well, while a smaller proportion (29.7%) indicate they manage very well or even extremely well (17.2%). Forced migrants, on the other hand, face significantly more financial challenges.

Many find it difficult to manage their income, with 36.9 per cent reporting it as very difficult, 21.2 per cent as difficult, and 20.3 per cent as rather difficult. Only a small percentage (under 9%) indicated they can manage relatively easily.

The screening process for volunteers and their accommodations in Lithuania appears to be minimal. Only 21.9 per cent of volunteers reported undergoing any form of screening before starting their support activities, with interviews (57.1%) and sharing criminal record extracts (9.2%) being the most common methods. Furthermore, a significant 75.4 per cent of volunteers did not receive any training or mentorship before their first interaction with forced migrants. Regarding accommodations, the majority (87%) offered accommodations without formal screening.

A significant proportion of volunteers (46.9%) and 24.7 per cent of the forced migrants reported that no formal matching process was in place. Key criteria considered during matching included knowledge of a common language (35.3% of the volunteers), housing needs (52% of forced migrants and 32.4% of volunteers), and household composition (26% of forced migrants and 20.6% of volunteers).

The support provided by volunteers to forced migrants in Lithuania is diverse, addressing a wide range of needs to facilitate integration and well-being. Material support (76.9%) and assistance with societal

orientation (69.2%) were the most commonly provided forms of help. Emotional and psychosocial support was also significant, offered by 55.4 per cent of volunteers. Practical assistance, such as transportation and orientation to services, was provided by 46.2 per cent, while financial support (44.6%) and accommodation (40%) played key roles in easing the migrants' transition. Additionally, 36.9 per cent of volunteers assisted with administrative tasks, and 35.4 per cent offered language learning support, crucial for integration. Legal assistance (29.2%) and aid to migrants' family members or friends (30.8%) were also highlighted.

Access to the housing market for forced migrants in Lithuania is fraught with challenges. High housing costs are the most significant issue, affecting 53.4 per cent of respondents, while additional financial constraints, such as the inability to pay deposits, impacted 34 per cent. Discrimination further complicates access, with 20.2 per cent of migrants reporting reluctance from landlords to rent to families with minors or individuals from certain backgrounds. Limited employment opportunities (12.6%) and language barriers (9.7%) also hinder housing prospects.

The integration of forced migrants in Lithuania is marked by several challenges that hinder their full participation in society. Language barriers are among the most significant obstacles, affecting communication and access to opportunities for 22.3 per cent of migrants. Financial instability further complicates integration, as many migrants find it challenging to manage their income and secure stable employment, with 42.4 per cent reporting unemployment or irregular work. Social issues, including prejudice and lack of tailored support, affect 17.2 per cent of migrants, highlighting the societal hurdles they face. Additionally, managing expectations regarding the availability and duration of support remains a significant issue for 27.3 per cent.

Many volunteers indicated that they received support themselves, during their engagement as a volunteer. Financial assistance (27.7%) and sharing experiences with other volunteers (27.7%) are the most common forms of support mentioned. Guidance to local services (23.1%) and administrative support (18.5%) were also significant. Material support and mentorship/training each accounted for 13.8 per cent, while legal support (10.8%) and language support (7.7%) were less prevalent. Mental-health support (6.2%) and mediation in conflicts (3.1%) were the least common. Data on the support volunteers received during the programme show that 33.3 per cent found it rather relevant, and half (50 per cent) found it highly relevant.

The analysis of the reception and integration of Ukrainian forced migrants reveals that while many local and international organizations played a role, most of the assistance was channelled through the new platform Stiprūs kartu. This initiative was particularly crucial during the early phases of accommodation, offering not only temporary shelter but, in many cases, long-term housing as well as organizational, technical, and even emotional support. However, as the situation transitioned to a 'new normal', the platform's activities began to taper off.

When discussing the CS model – still relatively new and unfamiliar to the target groups in the study – informants identified similar examples in traditional aid organizations such as IOM, Caritas, the Red Cross, Save the Children, and Ukreate Hub. These organizations possess established systems with long operational histories, defined structures, funding, and strong management practices. Stiprūs kartu could draw from these examples, adopting best practices such as its platform model that aligns the needs of incoming forced migrants with the needs and capabilities of host communities, as well as offering legal assistance and FAQ services (in the case of Stiprūs kartu, the creation of a rental agreement template was particularly effective).

All target groups agreed that NGOs in Lithuania exhibit the strongest potential for implementing aspects of the CS model. However, what remains lacking is state-supported engagement through its bureaucratic systems, as well as the integration of private and civic initiatives into a single cohesive framework. This gap is seen as a major challenge, particularly because successful collaborations between the governmental and non-governmental sectors have been scarce in Lithuania. The limited involvement of the population in NGOs' activities further complicates these efforts. The structural and organizational components are therefore perceived as the most significant threats to the successful implementation of a CS model in Lithuania.

Another challenge lies in societal perceptions of the issue and the public's willingness to assist. In a country where homeownership is highly valued, there is widespread recognition of the importance of independent housing for the successful settlement and integration of individuals. However, negative attitudes toward migrants persist. Even when contracts are signed with organizations rather than individuals, property owners are often reluctant to rent to migrants, a hesitation influenced by the recent migration situation linked to Belarus, which has further intensified public hostility towards these individuals. The integration of Ukrainians into Lithuanian society has revealed that for those whom Lithuanians often consider to be culturally similar, significant cultural challenges still arise. Cultural challenges emerged in simple household aspects, such as smoking indoors. Additionally, it was mentioned

that Ukrainians found it difficult to understand the moods of Lithuanians, distinguishing when they were happy, when they were not, and so on.

From both housing accessibility and national interest perspectives, it would be prudent to distribute migrants evenly across the country. However, this presents further challenges, as migrants in rural areas often face greater social isolation, language barriers, and, most importantly, limited employment opportunities. There is also a shortage of active local community leaders to facilitate this integration.

6. A CROSS-COUNTRY ANALYSIS OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

By examining the perspectives of volunteers, forced migrants, government representatives, NGOs, and landlords in Belgium, Italy and Lithuania, this report presents a rich tapestry of data, informing the understanding of effective practices in stakeholder engagement, sponsor mobilisation and selection, sponsor training and support, matching processes, and housing identification. This chapter synthesises the research findings and provides a cross-country analysis. It delves into a comparative analysis of the survey findings and qualitative data collected from Belgium, Italy, and Lithuania. By examining the perspectives of various stakeholders, including volunteers, forced migrants, government representatives, NGOs, and landlords, this analysis aims to uncover common themes and unique challenges faced in each country. The insights gained from both quantitative and qualitative research provide a comprehensive understanding of the operational strengths and areas needing improvement within CS schemes. This cross-country perspective is crucial for identifying best practices and formulating recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of CS programmes across Europe.

6.1. Results from the quantitative research

Profile of the respondents

The majority of respondents who volunteered to support forced migrants were female in all three countries. While this was only a small majority in Belgium (56.2%) and Italy (58%), over nine in ten volunteer respondents in Lithuania were female. Conversely, eight out of ten forced migrants in Lithuania were female, whereas in Italy (58.8%) and Belgium (51.7%), the (small) majority was male.

The high proportion of women volunteers, particularly in Lithuania, highlights the need to encourage participation from individuals of other genders, including men, transgender, and non-binary individuals. A diverse gender representation will bring a range of perspectives and approaches that better reflect the varied experiences and needs of the forced migrants.

In terms of age, most volunteers were over 45 years old in both Belgium and Lithuania, while in Italy, the majority were over 35 years old. Forced migrant respondents were mostly younger than 44 years old, with those in Italy predominantly between 25 and 35 years old.

Older volunteers in Belgium and Lithuania may indicate that financial stability and available time (possibly due to retirement) enable volunteering. Recruitment efforts should target younger demographics who may also have the capacity to contribute.

Educational levels of volunteers were relatively similar across the three countries, with most being highly educated. The two largest groups of volunteer respondents in all countries held tertiary/graduate (Master's) and tertiary/undergraduate (Bachelor's) degrees. Educational levels of forced migrants who participated in the study were more varied.

High educational attainment is common among both volunteers and forced migrants. Programmes could leverage this by providing opportunities for skill utilisation and further education.

Employment status varied among volunteers and forced migrants. About eight out of ten volunteers in Italy and Lithuania were employed, compared to only four in ten in Belgium. Four out of ten volunteers in Belgium were retired, compared to only about 5 per cent in Lithuania and 6 per cent of volunteers in Italy. Half of the forced migrant respondents in Belgium and four out of ten in Lithuania were employed, while about one in three in Italy were employed. Four out of ten forced migrants in Belgium and Italy were unemployed, compared to one in four in Lithuania.

Volunteers often have stable careers or are retired, allowing more time for volunteer activities. CS programmes should offer flexible volunteering opportunities to accommodate individuals with varying employment statuses, including remote or short-term roles.

Financial comfort levels also differed. Eight out of ten volunteers in Belgium could cope with their expenses very well, compared to five out of ten in Italy and one in three in Lithuania. For forced migrants, the income situation was more pressing. Nine out of ten Italian, eight out of ten Lithuanian, and seven out of ten Belgian forced migrant respondents had difficulty managing their income.

Volunteers generally report higher financial comfort compared to forced migrants. This highlights the need for financial assistance and budgeting support within CS programmes to help forced migrants achieve financial stability.

Most volunteers were nationals of their country of residence, with eight out of ten in Belgium, and nine out of ten in Italy and Lithuania. Among the forced migrant respondents, some similar trends were observed across the three countries, with mainly Afghan or Ukrainian forced migrants responding to the surveys.

CS programmes should include volunteers from diverse nationalities to enrich the support network with varied cultural perspectives and experiences, enhancing the integration process for forced migrants.

The main reasons for migration were the search for international protection – eight out of ten in Belgium, six out of ten in Lithuania and all but one respondent in Italy. Other reasons included having family living in the country of residence, or for studies or work, each accounting for less than one in ten respondents.

Many forced migrants arrive with family members, though a significant number also arrive alone. The primary reason for migration is seeking asylum, followed by family reunification, studies, or work. CS programmes should consider these factors to provide appropriate support for both individuals and families.

Path to support

Across all three countries, many volunteers begin their roles without formal screening, which could impact the preparation and support provided to both volunteers and forced migrants. In Belgium, only 29 per cent of volunteers undergo screening, primarily through interviews and criminal record checks. In Lithuania, the screening process for volunteers is minimal, with only 21.9 per cent undergoing any form of screening. The most common methods are interviews and sharing criminal record extracts. In Italy, about half of the volunteers were screened.

The lack of formal screening could impact the preparation and support provided to both volunteers and forced migrants. Implementing more comprehensive screening processes, such as interviews and criminal record checks, could enhance the safety and effectiveness of volunteer engagement.

In Belgium and Lithuania, most volunteers did not receive any training or mentorship before their first interaction with forced migrants. This lack of training could affect the effectiveness and confidence of volunteers in supporting forced migrants and the level of engagement and offered support. In Italy, three out of four volunteers did receive prior training or mentorship.

Providing structured training and mentorship programmes is crucial to equip volunteers with the necessary skills and knowledge, enhancing their effectiveness and confidence in supporting forced migrants.

Matching processes for volunteers and forced migrants are generally informal across the three countries. In Lithuania, nearly half of the volunteers and a quarter of the forced migrants reported no formal matching process. When matching does occur, it is often based on criteria such as knowledge of a common language, housing needs, and household composition. In Belgium, a significant portion of volunteers (39.8%) and forced migrants (61%) also reported the absence of a formal matching process. When matching occurs, it typically considers housing needs, household composition, age and personal interests. In Italy, 73.7 per cent of the volunteers and 86.7 per cent of the forced migrants reported a formal matching process. The criteria for matching in Italy include housing needs, household composition, personal interests, and intercultural experience.

Developing formal matching processes based on clear criteria, such as language skills, housing needs, and personal interests, could improve the alignment between volunteers and forced migrants.

In Lithuania and Belgium, the large majority of accommodations offered by volunteers are unscreened. The Italian data do not provide specific details on accommodation screening, but the general trend of minimal formal processes suggests a similar situation. The lack of formal screening for accommodations could have implications for the safety and suitability of the living arrangements for forced migrants.

Implementing formal screening processes for accommodations can ensure that living conditions meet safety and suitability standards.

Volunteers in Italy are driven by social networks, personal benefits, learning opportunities, and a strong sense of moral duty. Most volunteers learn about opportunities through friends, colleagues, and various media sources, including television, social media, and traditional media. Lithuania and Belgium also show similar motivations and information sources, with volunteers being influenced by encouragement from people close to them and a desire to learn about different cultures. Government-sponsored organizations play a significant role in involving volunteers in all three countries, while informal networks and NGOs also contribute.

Recognising volunteer motivations and leveraging information sources can help in recruiting and retaining volunteers.

Strengthening the collaboration between government-sponsored organizations, NGOs, and informal networks can enhance the support system for forced migrants.

While there are some differences in the specifics of volunteer engagement across all three countries, the overall trends show that volunteers provide diverse and comprehensive support to facilitate the integration and well-being of forced migrants. The positive experiences of both volunteers and forced migrants highlight the importance of ongoing support and the need for structured frameworks to enhance the effectiveness of volunteer engagement.

The needs of forced migrants evolve from initial critical needs, such as material support, legal information, and language support, to long-term stability needs, such as sustainable housing and job support. This highlights the importance of providing ongoing and adaptable support to address the changing needs of forced migrants over time.

Volunteers offer extensive support across various life domains, including administration, education, employment, social integration, and housing. This comprehensive approach is crucial for addressing the multifaceted needs of forced migrants and facilitating their integration.

Overall experience

Across all three countries, both volunteers and forced migrants reported high rates of positive experiences. In Belgium, nearly 90 per cent of volunteers and of forced migrants provided positive feedback. In Italy, the majority of volunteers (97.4%) and forced migrants (100%) rated their experiences positively. Similarly, in Lithuania, about 97 per cent of both volunteers and forced migrants reported positive experiences. Negative experiences were relatively low, highlighting the overall satisfaction and effectiveness of the support provided.

Both volunteers and forced migrants generally have positive perceptions of their experiences, indicating satisfaction with the support provided and the effectiveness of volunteer engagement.

Forced migrants identified several key areas of support as particularly helpful. In Belgium, the most valued aspects were assistance with paperwork and administrative tasks (59.1%), positive impacts on well-being and mental health (52.8%), and housing stability (48.3%). Language support (48.3%), integration into the local community (40.9%), and access to social services (31.3%) were also important.

In Italy, the top helpful aspects included housing stability (94.1%), assistance with paperwork and administrative tasks (82.4%), and language support (73.5%). Other significant areas were integration into the local community, access to social services, finding a job, and legal support. In Lithuania, the most helpful aspects were housing stability (60.5%), assistance with paperwork and administrative tasks (51.3%), and integration into the local community (45.4%). Language support (28.6%) and positive impacts on well-being and mental health (27.3%) were also significant, along with access to social services, finding a job, education, and legal support. Additional support included financial and material assistance, as well as practical help like transport and medical support.

Assistance with paperwork and administrative tasks was highly valued by forced migrants in all three countries. This highlights the critical role volunteers play in helping migrants navigate bureaucratic processes, essential for their integration and well-being.

Housing stability was one of the most valued aspects of support in all three countries. Ensuring that forced migrants have stable housing is crucial for their overall sense of security and ability to integrate into the community.

In Belgium and Lithuania, positive impacts on well-being and mental health were significant aspects of the support provided. This underscores the importance of emotional and psychosocial support in helping forced migrants cope with the challenges of resettlement.

Integration into the local community was a common theme across all three countries. Volunteers play a crucial role in helping forced migrants build connections and navigate their new environments, essential for successful integration.

Forced migrants identified a wide range of support needs, including financial and material assistance, practical help like transport and medical support, and legal support. This diversity of needs underscores the importance of providing holistic and tailored support to facilitate successful integration.

Challenges encountered

Integration challenges for forced migrants are multifaceted, with housing being a critical concern across all three countries. Moreover, in Belgium, forced migrants face hurdles such as language barriers (54%) and cultural differences (35.2%). Volunteers also encounter communication barriers (66.9%), perceived differences in socialisation patterns (50%), barriers experienced by forced migrants (49.2%) and health and mental health issues among forced migrants (40.1%).

In Lithuania, language barriers significantly hinder communication and access to opportunities for 22.3 per cent of forced migrants. Social issues, including prejudice and lack of tailored support, affect 17.2 per cent of migrants, and managing expectations regarding support availability and duration is a challenge for 27.3 per cent. Volunteers also face barriers experienced by forced migrants (32.3%), health and mental health issues among forced migrants (30.8%) and financial issues (30.8%).

In Italy, communication and language barriers are significant for both volunteers (65.5%) and forced migrants (55.9%). Cultural differences (52.9% of volunteers and 50% of forced migrants) also pose challenges. Social issues like prejudices (50.4% of volunteers, 50% of forced migrants), managing expectations (63.9% of volunteers, 20.6% forced migrants), and property maintenance (31.9% of volunteers, 14.7% of forced migrants) are notable, along with health and mental health issues (50.4% of volunteers) and financial issues (31.1% of volunteers).

Language barriers are a significant challenge for forced migrants, hindering communication and access to opportunities. Enhanced language support and training are needed.

Financial constraints, including high rental prices and the inability to pay deposits, are major barriers to housing and overall stability for forced migrants.

Social issues such as prejudice, lack of support networks, and racial discrimination affect forced migrants' integration. Tailored support and initiatives to combat discrimination are essential to create a more inclusive environment.

Mental health issues are a significant concern for forced migrants, with volunteers also facing challenges in navigating these issues. Access to mental health services and support for both migrants and volunteers is necessary.

Both forced migrants and volunteers face difficulties in managing expectations regarding support availability and duration. Clear communication and setting realistic expectations can help mitigate these challenges.

Housing is a critical concern, with high costs and financial constraints being significant barriers. Additionally, language barriers, lack of support networks, and discrimination further complicate housing access.

In Belgium, volunteers commonly received support through sharing experiences with other volunteers (33.5%), guiding forced migrants to local services (24.8%), and financial support (23.6%). Administrative support (21.1%) and mentorship and training (15.3%) were also significant. In Lithuania, financial assistance (27.7%) and sharing experiences with other volunteers (27.7%) were the most common forms of support. Guidance to local services (23.1%) and administrative support (18.5%) were also significant. In Italy, this concerned mostly mentorship and training (63%), language support (56.3%) and sharing experiences with other volunteers (44.5%). In general, volunteers found the support they received relevant.

Volunteers commonly receive support through sharing experiences, guiding forced migrants to local services, and financial assistance. Administrative support, mentorship, and training are also significant. Ensuring that volunteers receive relevant and beneficial support is important for their effectiveness and well-being.

Future engagement

Across all three countries, volunteers show varying levels of motivation to engage in future support activities for forced migrants. In Belgium, the highest motivation is seen in providing the same type of support for forced migrants with similar residency status as persons previously supported, with 48.9 per cent rather motivated and 19.6 per cent highly motivated. This trend is similar in Italy, where 57.1 per cent are rather motivated and 24.4 per cent highly motivated to provide the same support. Lithuania also shows high motivation in this area, with 47.6 per cent rather motivated and 22.2 per cent highly motivated. However, Lithuania stands out with the highest motivation for donating to humanitarian corridors (53.1% rather motivated and 23.4% highly motivated), whereas this activity has the lowest motivation in Italy (28.6% not at all motivated and 9.2% highly motivated).

When it comes to participating in public demonstrations, motivation is generally low across all three countries. In Belgium, 34 per cent are not at all motivated and only 16.6 per cent are highly motivated. Similarly, in Lithuania, 35.9 per cent are not at all motivated and 39.1 per cent are rather not motivated. Volunteering for refugee organizations and signing petitions to improve policies show moderate motivation in Belgium and Lithuania, with around 40 per cent rather motivated in both countries. Italy, however, shows higher motivation for providing support to other groups of forced migrants, regardless of residency status, with 53.8 per cent rather motivated and 22.7 per cent highly motivated.

Many volunteers are prepared to commit to further ways of helping forced migrants after their current activities have ended. This demonstrates the potential of civic engagement in the support of forced migrants and places an important responsibility on any government or Organization that wishes to engage volunteers.

Volunteers are primarily motivated by the desire to make a meaningful impact for others, rather than by activities like public demonstrations, which they are less likely to engage in. This means there is great potential to build upon this motivation in the integration of forced migrants.

6.2. Results from the qualitative research

In all three countries, NGOs and government agency staff show strong interest in CS programmes for supporting and accommodating beneficiaries of international and temporary protection. These programmes – or similar community-based initiatives – have demonstrated significant benefits, fostering a sense of inclusion and mutual support. They enable forced migrants to integrate into their new

communities while empowering hosts to make meaningful contributions. However, outside these organizations, the concept of CS is not well-known.

From local networks in Italy and proactive hosting initiatives in Lithuania to Belgium's grassroots and civic platforms, existing initiatives illustrate how tailored support systems can complement formal state mechanisms. Many respondents, especially in Italy and Belgium, stated that they are motivated to engage in CS projects due to the challenging conditions of the reception system for forced migrants.

When it comes to private accommodation, in Belgium and Lithuania, the matching process between volunteers and forced migrants is often minimal, based on available space or the number of people a volunteer can accommodate. In Belgium, volunteers could also specify whether they were willing to accommodate a pet, while in Lithuania, the accessibility of accommodation by public transport was considered. Volunteers indicated that if they expressed certain criteria, these were taken into account, but there was little evidence that forced migrants could express their preferences for accommodation, such as living in a city or the countryside. Volunteers received minimal basic information or preparation on how to host people, including general guidelines regarding agreements, legal obligations related to insurance, and practical information about services. When provided, this information was reported as a good practice.

Support provided by volunteers to forced migrants extends far beyond housing. It includes material support, social and administrative assistance, help with school activities, and finding leisure opportunities. Volunteers also explain the systems and organizations forced migrants can turn to and how these systems work in the host country. In both Italy and Belgium, volunteers play an important role in mediating access to services, organizations, and housing.

In the three countries, volunteers and forced migrants generally reflect positively on the experience. When forced migrants had a less positive experience, it was mainly due to a lack of space or privacy, often leading to them leaving the accommodation relatively quickly.


The transition to the regular housing market is particularly difficult. Finding affordable and quality housing in Belgium is challenging, especially in urban areas, and this is also true for Lithuanian cities. Respondents indicated that supporting and housing Ukrainian forced migrants is easier than supporting other forced migrants due to more positive public opinion towards Ukrainian forced migrants. Large families and single men with a refugee background struggle to find housing in Belgium and Italy, with discrimination identified as a contributing factor. In Italy, several interviewees stated that forced migrants could only find housing through mediation from volunteers.

Interviews in Belgium and Italy highlighted the lack of affordable and quality housing as a primary issue. According to the respondents, the government should address this by providing additional social housing and legally enabling alternative housing options, such as co-housing and tiny houses. Data from Italy and Belgium show that a mediator (volunteer or professional) could facilitate access to housing by finding suitable accommodations, supporting communication with landlords, and serving as a contact point for landlords once the forced migrant has moved in. On a structural level, systems like rental guarantees and rental subsidies should be expanded but must remain universally accessible to avoid creating additional exclusion criteria for vulnerable groups. Findings from Italy further suggest that renovating and utilising abandoned or underused public properties in depopulated regions could provide long-term housing solutions.

Two other major challenges for forced migrants are the need for language skills and psychological support. It is difficult for forced migrants to follow language classes while caring for children or working full-time. Psychological support is necessary because people often live in uncertainty about their future and where to build their lives. Additionally, many have experienced trauma or worry about family and friends left behind.

Highly educated forced migrants struggle to find jobs that match their previous expertise, leading to frustration among both volunteers and forced migrants. In Belgium, volunteers frequently mentioned helping forced migrants avoid taking the first available job and instead supporting them in finding work suited to their qualifications.

In both Belgium and Lithuania, a formal agreement is almost always made between the volunteer and the forced migrant. In Lithuania, this is a loan-to-use agreement, while in Belgium, it is a cost-covering agreement. Informal arrangements are also made, such as which spaces are available for the migrants. Once forced migrants move in with the volunteer, there is little to no external follow-up. Lithuanian findings indicate a need for a central actor to coordinate and oversee CS, ideally someone who speaks the forced migrants' language and understands the local context. In Belgium, volunteer reported that they could contact the Public Centre for Social Welfare or the local government for questions. Although these professionals did their best, they could not answer many practical questions, and volunteers often had to contact various services to find the right answers. Online social media platforms, such as Facebook groups, also proved helpful in answering specific questions. Thus, central coordination is important but must be closely tied to local welfare organizations and various services.



In all three countries, there is a need to promote a positive discourse around the reception and integration of forced migrants to raise public awareness. This could encourage more people to participate in CS programmes, for instance, by sharing testimonies from individuals who have experience in hosting and supporting migrants. Highlighting the role and importance of volunteers in refugee reception can also motivate more people to get involved.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusions and lessons learned from research conducted in Belgium, Italy, and Lithuania, concrete recommendations are provided. Whereas most recommendations are in line with previous recommendations from the Share Quality Sponsorship Network (Reyes & D'Avino, 2023; Share Quality Sponsorship Network, 2023a, 2023b, 2024) and European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA, 2024), some additional recommendations are also formulated.

7.1. Recruitment and mobilisation of volunteers



- **Expand the older demographic of volunteers** as there is a seemingly greater inclination to assist. Simultaneously, offer **more flexible opportunities**, such as volunteering focused on specific tasks or short-term commitments, tapping into the potential of younger individuals who may be willing or interested in volunteering.
- Acknowledge the **specific experience of higher educated citizens** more explicitly. Offer specific roles or tasks that tap into their expertise, such as mentoring, language tutoring, administrative support, or professional advice (e.g., legal, medical, educational).
- Even though literature shows that **diaspora** provide similar types of support (Meeus et al., 2019; Schrooten et al., 2019; Van Dam & Raeymaeckers, 2017), their involvement in CS programmes is limited. **Dig more into obstacles for their engagement and try to find solutions** for these obstacles.
- Offer **financial incentives** such as reduction in costs (gas and electricity, transport), vouchers, or small grants for active volunteers. Although most volunteers indicate they live financially comfortably, there is interest in incentive models.
- **Inform the broader public** about CS and its benefits through media campaigns and testimonies from volunteers and forced migrants, already participating in CS initiatives. Additionally, organise small-scale and local community events to inform potential volunteers about CS.

7.2. Screening, training and matching



- Establish a **systematic screening process for sponsors**, striking a balance between safety and accessibility. While ensuring that the screening process maintains high standards for safety and suitability – both for volunteers and forced migrants – it should not become so complex that it discourages potential volunteers from participating. A streamlined and supportive approach is key to reducing barriers while still addressing security concerns.
- Introduce **mandatory screening of accommodation** offered by volunteers to ensure it meets basic safety and suitability standards. This screening should take place before the start of the CS and be repeated during the CS.
- **Develop tools for preparation and training of volunteers**, offered in multiple formats (in-person, online, factsheets, guidelines...) to accommodate diverse volunteer schedules. Themes should cover: (1) practical information for the volunteers, for example information on legal aspects, insurance issues, practical matters relevant to hosting, costs and benefits, (2) modules or information covering the welfare system and benefits for migrants, cultural sensitivity, communication skills, trauma-informed care, understanding gender-based violence, psychological first aid, (3) an overview of interesting organizations or websites for further questions and referral pathways to local integration and protection services.
- **Develop matching criteria for a more structured approach to match volunteers and migrants based on such criteria** as language skills, shared cultural or personal interests, household composition, housing needs and living arrangements. Ensure that both volunteers and migrants are involved in the matching process to respect their preferences and needs.
- **Foresee at least one contact prior to the CS between the volunteer and the forced migrant**, to reduce the pressure on the initial contact. This contact gives both parties the possibility to introduce themselves; to ask some burning questions and to ensure they have a reasonable understanding of what can be expected to opt-in or out of the CS scheme.

7.3. Support volunteers and forced migrants



- Strengthen and provide **ongoing administrative and legal support** for volunteers and migrants.
 - Offer continuous support and mediation services to address any issues that arise during the sponsorship period. Provide mentorship, regular check-ins, meetings between volunteers and access to professional advice for volunteers to sustain their engagement and effectiveness.
 - Create central, accessible information sources for volunteers and migrants, such as an interactive platform or a helpline to understand their rights, legal processes, and available services before and at the initial stages of the CS. Additionally, a local anchor point (central point of contact for questions and assistance) is important for both volunteers and migrants during the support provided.
 - Foster collaboration and network building between government agencies, NGOs and local communities to ensure a coordinated and efficient support system for forced migrants and volunteers and to promote and advocate the CS model.
 - Install a leading organization for CS with an established structure, stable income, connections with governmental organizations, and recognition and acceptance within society.
- **Improve language learning opportunities**
 - Provide free or subsidised language classes tailored to different skill levels and include conversational practice sessions. Provide flexible starting moments to ensure accessibility.
 - Provide volunteers with basic language learning material or facilitate informal language exchanges to complement formal education.
 - List mobile apps or online platforms with language learning tools and resources specific to integration needs.

- **Address emotional and psychosocial needs**

- Inform volunteers about mental health awareness, identifying psychosocial needs or trauma.
- Foresee collaboration and access to specialised mental health professionals to provide counselling and therapy to forced migrants. This should include offering services in their native languages.
- Create spaces for migrants and volunteers to share experiences, reduce isolation, and build supportive communities. As well for migrants and volunteers organising meetups to ask questions and share their experiences with each other can create feelings of recognition and support.

- **Facilitate integration in the local community and the labour market**

- Develop guides and workshops to help forced migrants navigate local transportation, healthcare, education systems, and social norms.
- Organise cultural exchange events, community gatherings, and social activities to foster relationships between forced migrants and local residents.
- Offer vocational training, job placement services, and language classes tailored to workplace needs. Therefore, partner with local employers and organizations to create pathways for migrants to gain employment. It is important that forced migrants also gain access to jobs requiring higher qualifications through dedicated access to skills recognition processes. The findings show that they often end up in low-status jobs. Employers should therefore be encouraged to hire this target group.

7.4. Housing



- **Establish housing support** to assist forced migrants in finding suitable accommodations, navigating the rental market, providing legal guidance and help with housing contracts.
- Facilitate **intermediary support to bridge the gap between landlords and real estate agencies and forced migrants**. Volunteers, professionals and NGOs can act as intermediaries to build trust between landlords and forced migrants, addressing issues such as distrust or discrimination. Furthermore, to foster trust, intermediaries can continue to provide follow-up even after the rental agreement has been signed, to mediate any questions or issues.
- Establish **revolving loan funds to help forced migrants with rental deposits**. However, this can lead to stigmatisation and deter landlords.
- Encourage and invest in **collaboration between social initiatives and the real estate sector** to improve access to quality housing. This could include developing partnerships with trusted landlords and local authorities to increase access to affordable and stable housing for forced migrants.
- Consider **financial incentives for landlords** to make housing available to forced migrants. This could include offering incentives such as tax breaks or rent guarantees.
- Create an **insurance system** that landlords can rely on in case of payment issues with rent or potential damages.
- Provide **legal help and advocacy to combat discriminatory practices and to combat unethical rental practices**.

- Make **alternative housing options**, such as co-housing, legally possible and ensure that these forms of living do not entail financial disadvantages, particularly in instances of forced migration. Furthermore, greater investment is needed in social housing to increase the supply of affordable and quality housing.
- In the case of private accommodation within CS models, develop a **standard rental contract or agreement to ensure protection of volunteers' and migrants' rights and obligations**. This standard agreement should contain some standard mandatory clauses and additional clauses from which to select according to the specific context or accommodation provided.

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