

## ***Convivial Platforms: An Analysis of Home sharing Platforms***

### ***Abstract***

This report reveals the landscape of platforms that encourage homesharing and in the process expand the possibilities of platforms being put to use for positive social change. We look at different types of home sharing and highlight the demographics of those who participate in these housing arrangements. Overall we note that despite geographical or demographic differences, such platforms, specifically on home sharing, can open up possibilities of creating sustainable, affordable housing with a multitude of indirect benefits.

### ***Introduction***

The sharing economy has become a prominent part of the urban economy in many parts of the world. Online platforms enable us to share numerous things- clothes, cars, toys and so forth. An important asset that has been shared for some time on these platforms is housing, particularly on a short-term basis. This is often referred to as 'home sharing' where owners of properties rent out a room, part of a house, or an entire house to tourists for short periods of time. These short rentals allow them to not only make a little extra money, but, the platform companies claim, also enables hosts and guests to forge new friendships. Much of academic writing has viewed these claims with a degree of skepticism and focusing primarily on the more corporate-driven models such as AirBnB and VRBO have argued that although some may have begun with more altruistic aims, they have essentially become profit-driven ventures (Ferreri and Sanyal, 2018; Gurrán, 2018; Slee, 2016). However, home sharing involves a spectrum of practices from more corporatised, tourism and short-let driven forms borne by companies such as AirBnB to more socially minded ones. Different kinds of platforms have also arisen to provide various forms of home sharing that go beyond the corporate model to more altruistic ones. The range of socially conscious platforms is wide and their existence relies on a number of different reasons which this report aims to outline. Here, it is also important to note that home sharing as a practice, has a long, global history, and takes a number of different forms including sharing between family members, non-family members, and intergenerational home sharing (Bodkin and Saxena, 2017; DSoc et al., 2011; Ruud and Nordvik, 1999). Historically, many of the discussions around home sharing referred to these practices, and particularly intergenerational home sharing where parents and children cohabit in the same house for extended periods of time or even on a permanent basis<sup>1</sup>.

Although home sharing has now come to be linked to a corporatised model of the sharing economy, we wish to refocus attention to other parts of this sharing economy spectrum where organisations use platforms to enable home sharing to support vulnerable populations. Through a focus on the elderly, the poor and displaced people, the report aims to highlight ways in which platforms can help us achieve social justice in different ways.

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<sup>1</sup> In South Asia for example, it is common for different generations to live together in the same family home.

A key issue affecting the dynamics of homesharing is elderly care and loneliness. Many elderly wish to remain independent as long as possible and want to also live in their homes (DSoc et al., 2011; Wyatt, 2018). However this may not be sustainable if they are alone, as they may need more care and company. As noted by Bodkin and Saxena (2017) and DSoc et al. (2011), for the elderly who may have available space in the homes, but be alone and suffer from loneliness, the home sharing model works well, as it provides them with a sharer who will give them company, help them with chores and activities. For some it may also help them earn a bit extra income thus supporting their financial stability. Matching owners and sharers can be complex and may require some mediation sometimes, and may lead to varied outcomes, but largely, for both the owners and the sharers, the outcomes are fairly positive.

A second key issue impacting homesharing is the lack of affordable housing particularly in many cities for a number of different groups of people. This includes those on low incomes, students, asylum seekers and so forth. The inability to access decent homes rests on a number of issues- from the lack of supply and increasing house, to growing poverty and inequality in urban areas. In other words, we see an increasing mismatch between the cost and supply of housing and the ability of many people to afford them. Affordable housing is high on the agenda for a number of governments and there are many experiments underway to create affordable living spaces. Home sharing is one of the ways in which planners can perhaps provide a radical solution to the need for affordable housing-by making use of limited resources (houses) as well as encouraging social cohesion and decreasing loneliness amongst certain populations such as the elderly (Wyatt, 2018).

Finally, in relation to the above, home sharing provides an important means to address the issue of sheltering asylum seekers. There is currently an emerging literature on refugee hosting families and the effects of that on both asylum seekers/refugees and host families themselves. Experiments of this sort are being undertaken in a number of different countries such as Italy and France. For the asylum-seekers, home sharing can be a useful option, as many do not have the necessary income to rent their own places. They may also lack the social connections to access them. Further, home sharing can enable the process of integration for asylum seekers, such as helping them learn the local language, overcome different cultural and social barriers, and access a range of services. For families and individuals sharing their homes with refugees and asylum seekers, their motivations may be far ranging, from political to altruistic and other kinds of interest. The academic literature on it is somewhat limited but looks at various important dynamics and outcomes of these practices such as on integration, hospitality, and a sense of home (Boccagni and Giudici, 2021; Ran and Join-Lambert, 2020).

### **Methodology**

This report is developed by Dr Romola Sanyal (PI) and Chijoke Anosike (RA) and analyses a number of home sharing platforms as well as home sharing organisations with socially responsible aims and which have an online presence. Most of the platforms that enabled home

sharing in a socially responsible way, were hosted by organisations that provided accommodation and other charitable services and had been around for some time. The research covers different geographical regions and was conducted between August 2019 and December 2019. Due to time and resource constraints this list is non-exhaustive. Our aim therefore is to provide a broad view of home sharing platforms, from varied geographical contexts and with diverse target audiences.

The process for discovering the home sharing platforms as well as home sharing organisations was begun with a Google key word search using phrases such as 'Home sharing', 'Home sharing platforms'. During the research Chijioke discovered a website which listed a variety of home sharing platforms and organisations from around the world. He then went onto the specific organisation's website and tried to find when they were founded. Many organisations did not have the information readily available.

He also tried to get a sense of the reach and impact. He then proceeded to categorize the organisations in the following 4 ways: 'Government' ; 'Business' ; 'NGO' and 'Religious'. Most of the organisations were NGOs.

With regards to the specific type of home sharing that these organisations focused on, he categorized them in the following 5 ways: 'Homelessness' ; 'Intergenerational Living' ; 'Elderly Living' ; 'Forced Migration' and 'Affordable Housing'.

In order to match those in need of housing with available housing, organisations have a model to determine how they prioritised those they matched. This is referred to as their matching methodology. He categorised their matching methodologies in the following ways: 'Totally Philanthropic' ; 'Service Exchange' and 'Subsidised Housing'. Totally Philanthropic is a model that does not charge home sharers anything for accommodation. Service Exchange refers to a model that allows a person to pay their accommodation in kind (helping to buy shopping or cook etc for the home owner) either fully or partially. Subsidised Housing refers to accommodation which is given at a reduced financial rate to those in need of affordable housing.

The final category is the main 'reason' for the organisation's platform to exist, the three main reasons were 'Danger' ; 'Loneliness' and 'Poverty'.

The geographical spread of the selected platforms varies quite tremendously (see Figure 1) . The listed regions are based on the country that an organisation operates from e.g. *Refugees at Home*, operates from the UK meaning they would be counted as such. In truth the majority of North American organisations are from the USA, whilst although to a lesser extent the majority of European organisations are from the UK. Many platforms also operate in more than one country. Further research into why there are such few homesharing platforms outside of North America and Europe would be important.

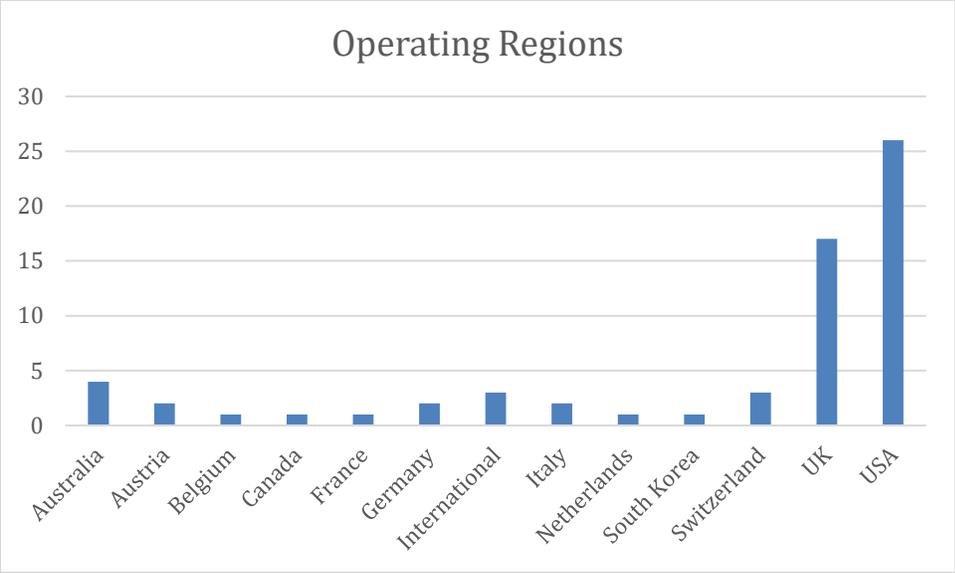


Figure 1: Operating Regions of homesharing platforms

**Types of Home sharing and their Reasons**

Types of Homesharing Platforms	Definition	Typical Associated Reason(s)
Intergenerational Living	These types of arrangements will see a young person live with an elderly person. The young person will usually pay cheaper or no rent in exchange for helping the elderly person with tasks around their home.	Loneliness & Poverty
Affordable Housing	This type of arrangement is usually aimed at less affluent families or individuals. Their main area of support needed is economic, but they are not necessarily vulnerable.	Poverty
Forced Migration	This type of arrangement will see people who are forced to migrate from their countries as refugees or asylum seekers due to geo-political conflict, natural disasters or economic conditions homeshare with individual families or in specialist accommodation. This reason contains the most vulnerable group due to the lack of established social-networks and often cultural barriers such as language differences.	Danger
Homelessness	This type of arrangement will see people deemed as homeless, rehoused with a volunteer family or in a specialised accommodation centre. Homeless people hold a high vulnerability due to their often complex mental, physical and social care needs.	Poverty
Elderly Living	This type of arrangement will see elderly people matched with other elderly people. Similar to intergenerational living, the indirect benefit to housing is a reduction in loneliness.	Loneliness & Poverty

Figure 2: Types of Home sharing Platforms

As can be seen in Figure 2, there are five types of home sharing platforms that this analysis will focus on. They each have their unique features and different driving ‘reasons’ which lead to homes being shared. The five main types of home sharing platforms cater to: ‘Intergenerational Living’, ‘Affordable Housing’, ‘Forced Migration’; ‘Homelessness’ and ‘Elderly Living’. These home sharing types broadly are provided by a range of organisations. Generally all of the home sharing types are provided by non-governmental organisations, however ‘Intergenerational Living’ and ‘Elderly Living’ platforms are sometimes provided by private businesses e.g- Silvernest, Nesterly, Roommates4boomers.

The table in Figure 3 matches each of the five types of home sharing to at least one corresponding reason. As Forced Migration accounts for 46.2% of homesharing platforms, we argue that ‘Danger’ is the main reason for home sharing, followed by Intergenerational Living which we linked to Loneliness and Poverty as the associated reason, followed by Affordable Housing which we linked to Poverty, followed by Homelessness (also associated with Poverty) and Elderly Living- also linked to poverty. Two things should be noted here- first that poverty is a cross cutting issue and features for a range of different groups of people. Secondly, and in relation to that, although we have linked Forced Migration to Danger, it can be argued to have a root cause grounded in ‘Poverty’ especially when focusing on economic-migrants. Similarly, although the home sharing type of ‘Homelessness’ is categorised in ‘Poverty’ it can also be argued to have a root cause in ‘Danger’ especially when considering the complex vulnerabilities homeless people face. Nonetheless, despite nuances these reasons have been picked to provide a basis of analysis.

<b>Type and Number of Home sharing Platforms</b>			
	<b>Types of Home sharing Platforms</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Proportion</b>
	Forced Migration	30	46%
	Intergenerational Living	23	35%
	Affordable Housing	8	12%
	Homelessness	2	3%
	Elderly Living	2	3%
	TOTAL	65	100%

**Figure 3: Table for type and number of home sharing platforms**

Figure 3 (above) and Figure 4 (below) highlight the amount of home sharing platforms in this analysis. As mentioned in the methodology section, this analysis is not a comprehensive assessment of all home sharing platforms but instead represents a sample. In total this report has analysed 65 home sharing platforms. The majority of home sharing platforms in this report

are 'Forced Migration' platforms accounting for 46% of the total, whilst 'Intergenerational Living' platforms account for around 35% of the total. Both 'Homelessness' and 'Elderly Living' platforms only account for 3% of the total, suggesting that there may be a lower demand for these types of home sharing platforms and their needs may be addressed elsewhere. 'Affordable Housing' accounts for 12% of the total, 8 of the total platforms. This analysis suggests that many of the home sharing platforms that enable convivial living may be catering for migrant-related issues.

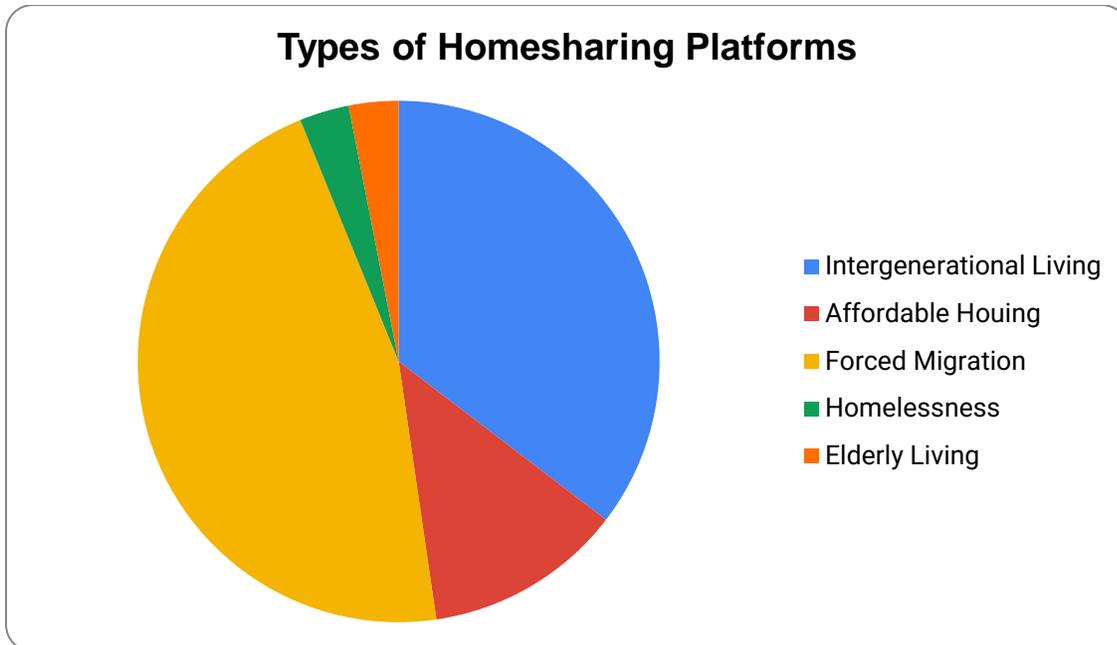


Figure 4: Types of Homesharing Platforms

**Methods of Matching Users to Home sharing Platform Types**

**Table on Matching Method Breakdown**

Types of Matching Method	Number	Proportion
Totally Philanthropic	31	48%
Subsidised Housing	15	23%
Service Exchange	19	29%
TOTAL	65	100%

Figure 5: Table on Matching Method Breakdown

Figure 5 highlights three core methods that home sharing organisations use to provide their services. The matching methodologies are best understood as how the home sharing platforms position their service. This in turn can be used as a metric of how altruistic they are. Although there is overlap on the below matching methods they are a good starting point to understand how organisation’s values influence how the framework to which they provide their services.

The totally philanthropic methods, as their name suggests are ones that do not charge to match homesharers for accommodation. The subsidised housing methods are particularly NGO or government funded, and usually expect the homesharers to contribute a relatively small amount for their accommodation costs. The service exchange method is based on homesharers swapping a skill e.g. cooking, cleaning or buying groceries ect with their accommodation host (usually elderly people) in exchange for reduced or free rent. The above methods tend not to charge to match people as they operate as not-for-profit organisations (NGOs, Religious or Governmental organisations).

Frequency of Homesharing Type and Matching Method

		Matching Method			Row Totals
		Totally Philanthropic	Subsidised Housing	Service Exchange	
Types of Homesharing Platforms	<i>Intergenerational Living</i>	0	5	18	23
	Row Percent	0%	22%	78%	35%
	<i>Affordable Housing</i>	1	6	1	8
	Row Percent	13%	75%	13%	12%
	<i>Forced Migration</i>	30	0	0	30
	Row Percent	100%	0%	0%	46%
	<i>Homelessness</i>	0	2	0	2
	Row Percent	0%	100%	0%	3%
	<i>Elderly Living</i>	0	2	0	2
	Row Percent	0%	100%	0%	3%
	Column Total	31	15	19	65
	Column Percent	48%	23%	29%	100%

Figure 6: Frequency of Homesharing Type and Method

The table in Figure 6 (above) details the number of home sharing platforms, compared to corresponding types of matching methods. Out of all three matching methods most of them are totally philanthropic (48%) and most of the types of home sharing platforms are forced migration platforms (46%).

**Figure 7: Home sharing Types and Matching Method**

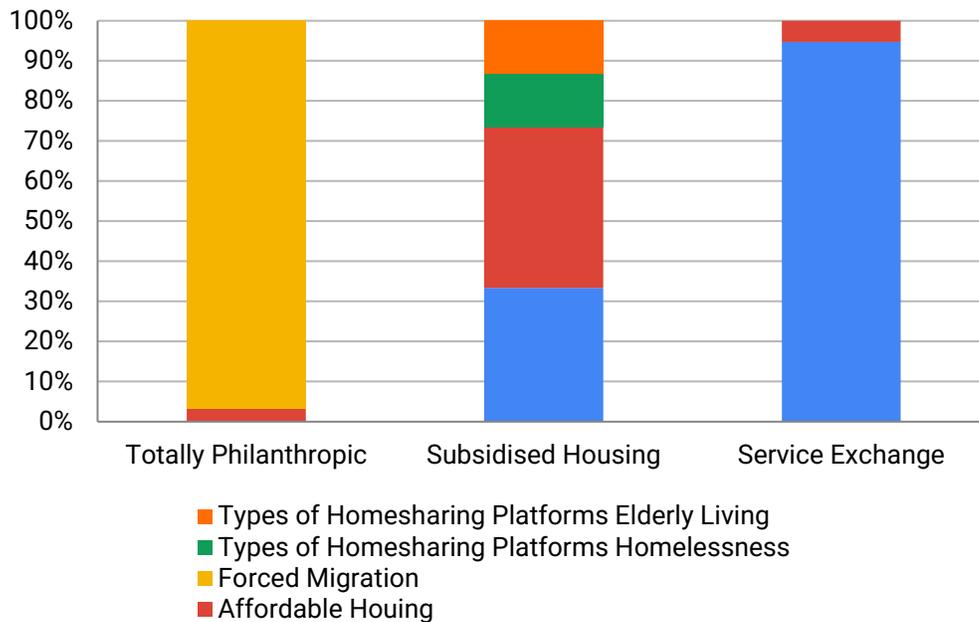


Figure 7 illustrates the information in Table 4 comparing between home sharing types and matching methods. It shows that out of the 31 totally philanthropic matching methods, 30 of them (c.97%) are attributed to the forced migration home sharing type, whilst 1 platform (c.3%) is attributed to affordable housing.

Subsidised housing is the most mixed matching method containing 4 out of 5 of the home sharing types. The largest home sharing type that makes up subsidised housing is affordable housing, with 6 platforms (40%) attributed to this group. The second largest home sharing type within the matching method of subsidised housing is intergenerational living (in this case students or young people being offered an affordable rent by an elderly person) with 5 platforms (c.33%) belonging to this group. Homelessness and elderly living, equally make up the two smallest home sharing types within subsidised housing each accounting for 2 platforms (c.13%). Service exchange mainly consists of intergenerational living (in this case students or young people offering a service for free or affordable rent by an elderly person) accounting for 18 platforms (c.95%) and the service exchange matching method consists of 1 affordable housing platform (c.5%). Thus, affordable housing is an important and promising part of why homes are shared, but how this evolves needs to be further developed

**Conclusion**

This report has aimed to move beyond the focus on corporatised models of home sharing exemplified through companies such as AirBnB. Rather, we have sought to show the varied nature of home sharing platforms, to examine how it may act as a tool of sharing space amongst diverse groups of people. There are several types of home sharing platforms, and a variety of reasons that they exist (Danger, Poverty and Loneliness) with a variety of overlap

across platform types and their reasons, showing the interdependency of issues in modern urban environments. A large proportion of home sharing platforms are totally philanthropic reliant on government or NGO funding. The varied nature of home sharing also shows the complex needs of different vulnerable groups who are the primarily benefactors of home sharing platforms such as forced migrants, the homeless or the elderly. Home sharing organisations have methods which frame how they supply their services. Overall the variety of home sharing platform types and matching methods illustrate the dynamic nature of convivial platforms, and how they can be uniquely combined in a variety of ways to help different groups. This is an important step forward as we puzzle through how to address issues of adequate housing for the most vulnerable members of society- be they the elderly, the homeless, precariously housed, or the migrants. Rather than focusing on the corporatised nature of homesharing, perhaps it is time to shift our gaze to other ways in which platforms can be utilized for the greater common good.

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