

Dutch team launches free 'Airbnb' site for refugees

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A Syrian refugee who settled in social housing with her family in France, pictured on September 17, 2015

Three young Dutch start-up entrepreneurs have launched a website to find temporary accommodation for refugees fleeing to Europe, modelled on the popular Airbnb home rental site.

But on Refugee Hero, created in just four days and launched on

Monday, no money changes hands.

Instead [private individuals](#), and organisations such as churches, schools and mosques, can advertise how much space they can spare for free, and leave a contact phone number for migrants seeking accommodation to get in touch.

Already 63 people have registered their homes with [refugeehero.com](#), not just in the Netherlands but also in Ireland, the Czech Republic, France and even Sweden.

One of the co-founders, Jamal Oulel, told AFP the idea came to the group last week as they were discussing Europe's worst migrant crisis since World War II.

They realised that in 2014 the Netherlands spent almost 500 million euros to accommodate refugees seeking asylum in the country.

The official way "it's very cumbersome, it is a lot of work, it's inefficient," Oulel said.

"We thought we could make it cheaper and faster and more efficient. That was our starting point, and that's where we went from to launch [Refugeehero.com](#)."

The three founders, who also include Germaine Statia, 23, and Ayoub Aouragh, 24, have vowed to verify personally every pledge of accommodation, and since they have already been inundated with offers from around the world the backlog is growing.

Oulel, 25, has offered room in his own home in Rotterdam, and on Monday was delighted when someone called him. The caller didn't then follow through, "but I said to myself it's working."

"What has been curious is that there are a lot of millennials placing apartments, a lot of students even if they are living on a student loan. We are from Generation Y, and we are very open to the world."

The website registered around 1,500 hits on Monday, with interest steadily climbing on Tuesday.

A Finnish literature student, studying in Amsterdam, offered space for one person who didn't mind "living with the rest of us in close quarters."

"I want to do my part, but I don't have much money, or much time to volunteer. What I do have is a little space for someone who needs it."

Christophe T., an IT support technician from Prague, said he usually liked to host people through "couchsurfing" but liked the "idea to host specifically refugees."

Oulel, whose father emigrated to the Netherlands from Morocco before he was born, says the hope was that by housing refugees in private homes they will integrate more quickly into Dutch society.

He hopes Refugee Hero will be able to work with the Dutch authorities, saying the long term goal is to "facilitate all aspects of immigration and integration."

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