

Homeshare International

Directory of Homeshare Programmes

Austria

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Martínez Román for Homeshare International, November 2000.*

An Introduction to Homeshare in Europe

In Europe, homeshare programmes are now running in five countries: Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Spain and the UK. They largely developed independently of each other, in the early 1990s, though there are many similarities between them. A significant difference is their extent - there are 17 programmes in Spain, eight in the UK, but only two in Germany, one in Austria and one in the Czech Republic.

Why the programmes were set up

All of the programmes began with the aim of matching elderly householders and young people in need of inexpensive accommodation. In the UK, the over-riding concern was to meet the needs of elderly people in need of some support in the home. In other EU countries, however, the programmes began as a means of solving the housing problems of students. Mutual support is a key principle that links all the programmes, while in many countries, inter-generational solidarity is an additional principle.

Who benefits from the programmes

The differences between programmes are most marked in terms of who benefits. In Germany and Austria, the householders tend to be fairly independent young elderly people who need some practical help. In Spain, householders are on average 75 years old and value help and companionship, but few have significant care needs. In the UK, however, the average age of householders is over 80; some need care and support and a few are quite dependent. All householders involved in the programmes say they value the security of someone in the home, especially at night.

The young homesharers differ too. In continental Europe, homesharers are typically students aged 18+, while in the UK the minimum age is 23 and most are working.

Many programmes are now extending their remit to support disabled people and in some cases single parents and families with a dependent member.

The nature of the exchange

There are some differences here too. All homesharers get their own room and offer support in exchange, but the nature of the support varies. In the UK and Spain, homesharers provide specified help or companionship each week in exchange for free accommodation. In Austria, Germany and the Czech Republic, homesharers may provide a mix of help and a modest rent, or simply a specified level of help.

Who runs the programmes and how

In Spain, Germany and Austria, homeshare programmes have been set up by universities. UK programmes are run by not-for-profit organisations, or, in one case, by an individual. The programme co-ordinators are mostly qualified social workers except in the UK where their backgrounds vary. Most co-ordinators screen, select and match participants carefully, monitor the arrangements and provide on-going support.

How they are funded

All EU programmes share the same difficulties of running on minimal and insecure funding. The sources of funding differ, though most survive on a mix of private and public funding. In the London programme, some of the costs are passed on to the beneficiaries who pay a monthly charge. Social services support the programmes in a few individual instances where homesharers are meeting significant need.

Homeshare programmes in Austria

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