

Humanitarian Hospitality: A Framework for Ethical Encounters in Crisis Tourism

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Abstract

This paper introduces humanitarian hospitality as a conceptual framework for understanding relational ethics and care practices in crisis-affected tourism. While volunteer tourism, disaster recovery travel, and solidarity-based travel bring individuals into crisis-affected destinations, the hospitality that unfolds in these non-commercial encounters remains under-theorised. Drawing on philosophical perspectives and exploratory qualitative insights from 145 Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers and aid workers, the study examines how emotional labour, ethical care, and informal hosting are enacted in contexts of conflict and displacement. The findings both parallel and complicate conventional host-guest dynamics, highlighting the ethical and emotional complexities of providing care under conditions of scarcity and trauma. The proposed Humanitarian Hospitality Framework (HHF) positions humanitarian encounters as an underexplored domain of tourism and hospitality research. It extends hospitality theory by integrating principles of dignity, neutrality, and relational accountability into crisis-driven encounters. While not claiming empirical validation, the paper conceptually grounds the HHF as a starting point for future tourism scholarship, with implications for post-crisis recovery, volunteer mobilisation, and ethical engagement in vulnerable destinations.

Keywords: Humanitarian hospitality, relational ethics, crisis tourism, emotional labour, volunteer tourism, post-crisis recovery.

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1. Introduction

Crisis tourism, whether caused by natural disasters, health emergencies, economic collapse, or armed conflict, is a disruptive event that destabilises not only destinations and businesses but also the lives of travellers, hosts, and local communities (Dogramadjieva & Terziyska, 2022; Kirlar-Can & Ertaş, 2022; Pegkas, 2022). These crises demand more than already complex logistical responses; they also call for ethical, empathetic, and often improvised forms of care. Armed conflicts and humanitarian emergencies, in particular, have increasingly blurred the boundaries between tourism and aid, transforming the meaning and practice of hospitality. With over 300 million people reliant on humanitarian assistance, primarily in conflict zones, questions of care, access, and relational responsibility have become central to humanitarian and tourism discourse (ICRC, 2024b; Itoua & Boundja, 2021; United Nations, 2025). The effects of more than 120 active conflicts now span more than 60 countries, disproportionately impacting vulnerable populations and restricting access to food, shelter, and healthcare (University of Southampton, 2024). In such contexts, hospitality is no longer a leisure activity but a survival mechanism, an ethical act, and a form of human solidarity (Lomba & Vermeulen, 2023).

Tourism crises, often triggered by armed conflicts, natural disasters, and political instability, mirror the disruptions seen in humanitarian emergencies. They destabilise local economies, fracture social structures, and challenge the ethical foundations of hospitality. In such contexts, tourism is no longer merely a commercial enterprise. Instead, it becomes a mechanism for survival and solidarity, necessitating crisis management strategies aligned with humanitarian aid efforts (Duan *et al.*, 2021; Zajadacz & Iaromenko, 2024). In conflict zones and disaster-stricken areas, tourism infrastructure is repurposed to support displaced populations, aid workers, and emergency responders, blurring the lines between tourism and humanitarian assistance (Komasi *et al.*, 2025). As destinations grapple with the long-term effects of crises, the need for integrated crisis management strategies that align with humanitarian aid efforts becomes increasingly urgent. Understanding tourism crises through this lens allows a more nuanced exploration of how hospitality, care, and ethical responsibility intersect in extreme contexts such as conflict zones. Humanitarian assistance is operationalised by various actors, from international organisations and NGOs to grassroots associations and local volunteers and aid workers (Konrad *et al.*, 2023).

Among these, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the broader Red Cross and Red Crescent (RCRC) Movement play a distinctive role, blending legal protection with practical aid under the mandates of the Geneva Conventions. These actors mobilise logistics and relational forms of care: welcoming displaced people, providing psychological first aid, and fostering dignity amid crisis. Recent scholarship has introduced the concept of Business War Volunteer Tourism, highlighting how business leaders mobilise resources and travel to conflict zones to provide humanitarian aid (Kenworthy *et al.*, 2025). This emerging form of crisis tourism underscores the evolving role of hospitality in extreme contexts, where volunteers and aid workers, whether affiliated with humanitarian organisations or acting independently, engage in ethical and emotionally charged forms of care. The psychological dimensions of such engagement reveal how detachment, engagement, affiliation, meaning, and achievement shape the experiences of those providing aid in war-torn regions (Filep *et al.*, 2024; Gill & Kenworthy, 2025). These insights reinforce the argument that humanitarian hospitality is not merely a logistical response but a deeply relational practice, requiring resilience, ethical commitment, and emotional labour. This focus on relational care makes these volunteers and aid workers an ideal case for examining the practices of humanitarian hospitality at the intersection of aid and tourism.

This study focuses on the lived experiences of volunteers (Manen, 1997) and aid workers affiliated with the ICRC and RCRC, acknowledging that many embody a humanitarian ethos transcending contractual definitions. Whether salaried or volunteering, these individuals engage in what the authors term

humanitarian hospitality, a form of ethical, emotionally engaged, and often informal hosting shaped by altruism, care, and proximity to crisis (Brun & Horst, 2023; Haug & Gaskins, 2012; Smed *et al.*, 2016).

To analyse this concept with theoretical rigour, this paper will apply a composite ethical framework. This lens synthesises three complementary streams of thought: the Ethics of Care, which prioritises relational responsibility (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 2003); the Derridean philosophy of hospitality, which explores the tension between unconditional welcome and conditional realities (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000); and Humanitarian Ethics, which grounds the analysis in the formal principles of aid work. This composite framework provides the necessary structure to systematically explore how individuals feel responsible for showing hospitality (Duursma *et al.*, 2023) and to analyse the unique ethical dilemmas they face, such as balancing impartiality with emotional engagement and navigating logistical challenges in dangerous environments (Berg & Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2018).

While humanitarian work's logistical and institutional facets have been well documented, far less is known about its relational, emotional, and ethical underpinnings (Berg & Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2018). Research on resilience in tourism is still emerging and presents several challenges ahead (Ketter, 2022). Volunteers and aid workers often find themselves in roles akin to hosts, welcoming, caring for, and emotionally supporting those affected by violence and displacement. These practices resonate with solidarity tourism, disaster recovery travel, and volunteer tourism, yet are rarely theorised within tourism scholarship. This paper seeks to bridge that gap by positioning hospitality as a service or shelter and an ethical encounter.

This study introduces the Humanitarian Hospitality Framework (HHF), a model developed through empirical research with 145 respondents from diverse global locations with the ICRC and RCRC. Although the empirical data was a convenience sample collected globally, the framework is relevant to the European tourism and humanitarian landscape in contexts impacted by refugee and migration crises, forced displacement, and political instability, as evident in regions such as Ukraine, Poland, Greece, Italy, and the Balkans, where tourism intersects directly with humanitarian interventions, volunteer engagement, and the challenges associated with hosting displaced populations (Çetinkaya *et al.*, 2024; Di Matteo & Daminelli, 2024; Jordan & Minca, 2025; Neil, 2024; Wiśniewski *et al.*, 2024). Anchored in philosophical traditions of hospitality and informed by real-world humanitarian encounters, this HHF framework reimagines host-guest relations in extreme contexts. It contributes to tourism scholarship's growing interest in ethics, post-crisis recovery, and the moral complexities of travel and encounters by foregrounding care, dignity, and emotional labour.

2. Literature review

While existing research has extensively studied immediate disaster response in humanitarian logistics (Grigoli *et al.*, 2024; Kovács & Spens, 2009; Sheppard *et al.*, 2013), limited attention has been paid to the relational and ethical dimensions of these encounters, particularly through the lens of hospitality. Within tourism studies, hospitality has been theorised in terms of service, performance, and emotional labour (Lee & Madera, 2019). Still, its role in humanitarian and crisis-affected contexts remains underexplored. This gap is especially apparent in post-conflict recovery, volunteer tourism, and solidarity-based travel, where informal acts of hosting and care mirror but complicate conventional host-guest dynamics. Although humanitarian operations have been studied in acute phases, the recovery and rebuilding period remains underexamined, often due to urgency, visibility, and methodological limitations (Kunz & Reiner, 2012). Similarly, few real-world case studies have explored how hospitality functions as an ethical practice and affective relationship in long-term humanitarian engagement. This section engages with key literature from philosophy, humanitarian ethics, and critical hospitality studies to develop a deeper conceptualisation of humanitarian hospitality. Drawing on academic theory and field-based insights, the authors position hospitality not just as an act of service

but also as a relational practice embedded in power, care, and crisis. The review concludes by proposing a working definition of humanitarian hospitality to inform the conceptual framework developed in this study.

2.1 Theoretical Framework: An Ethics of Care

The HHF is grounded in ethical theories that emphasise relational responsibility, care, and the encounter with the Other: the stranger, the beneficiary, or the person in crisis. Three complementary streams of thought are particularly relevant: the ethics of care, Derrida's philosophy of hospitality, and humanitarian ethics.

Ethics of Care emerged as a feminist response to dominant moral theories that privileged abstract principles of justice and autonomy over relational interdependence (Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2005; Noddings, 2003). At its core, care ethics foregrounds attentiveness, responsibility, empathy, and responsiveness as central moral values that sustain human relationships (Tronto, 2013). Unlike utilitarian frameworks, which evaluate actions primarily by their outcomes, care ethics locates ethical value in the quality of relational practices and the capacity to both care for and care about others (Ehiakhamen, 2014). This perspective highlights that in contexts of crisis, where survival and dignity are at stake, ethical care offers a more robust foundation than consequentialist logics for understanding hospitality, not as a transactional service, but as a relational and affective practice (Stajkovic & Stajkovic, 2024).

Derridean Hospitality further deepens this relational orientation by confronting the tension between unconditional and conditional forms of hospitality. Derrida distinguishes between unconditional hospitality, which demands limitless openness to the stranger, and conditional hospitality, which recognises the pragmatic and political constraints of sovereignty, law, and survival (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000; Kakoliris, 2015). He describes this as a paradox: genuine hospitality requires radical openness, yet in practice it is always mediated by conditions of safety, power, and context. This paradox is particularly resonant in humanitarian settings, where volunteers and aid workers must oscillate between the ethical ideal of unconditional welcome and the conditional realities of scarcity, danger, and institutional and funder mandates.

Humanitarian Ethics provides a third anchor, particularly through the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence that guide humanitarian action (ICRC, 1979). These principles transform hospitality from a discretionary moral sentiment into an ethical duty of care (Brun & Horst, 2023). Unlike moral codes that prescribe universal rules, humanitarian ethics emphasise situational responsiveness to vulnerability and dignity in practice.

By synthesising these three streams, the HHF clarifies the critical distinction between morality and ethics. To address this specifically, the authors adopt the conceptualisation of Berr & Kühne (2024), who define morality as a system of rules and values that determine human action. In this paper, the codified Humanitarian Principles, such as neutrality and impartiality, constitute this morality. In contrast, ethics is the reflection on morality. It is the systematic, reflexive element that analyses the justification, hidden assumptions, and practical dilemmas of a moral code. The HHF is thus an ethical framework, anchored in the Ethics of Care's focus on lived practices of responsibility, attentiveness, and relational responsiveness (Baier, 1994; Held, 2005), and in Derrida's paradoxical openness, designed to perform this reflexive element. The authors use this ethical lens to analyse the internal contradictions and real-world tensions that arise when the formal morality of humanitarian principles must be navigated in the field. This synthesis positions humanitarian hospitality as a structured, reflexive ethical practice within crisis tourism and humanitarian aid.

Following philosophical and sociological convention, the authors treat morality as socially codified norms and expectations, and ethics as the reflexive examination of those norms and their implications (Berr & Kühne, 2024; Kant, 1996; Luhmann, 2019; Walker & Lovat, 2016). Accordingly, humanitarian principles and hospitality norms function here as moral codes guiding practice, whereas the HHF operates as an ethical, second-order lens for analysing how practitioners navigate situational dilemmas and value conflicts.

2.2 Hospitality redefined

Hospitality, in both its historical and contemporary forms, reflects complex negotiations of power, care, and ethical obligation. Tourism and hospitality studies have traditionally been associated with commercial hospitality service delivery, centred on guest satisfaction, comfort, and memorable experiences (Lashley, 2015; Munasinghe *et al.*, 2022). Yet its origins lie in older social and cultural practices that foreground welcoming the stranger, extending care to the vulnerable, and negotiating identity through encounters (Lashley, 2008; Nouwen, 1975).

Philosophical treatments of hospitality provide further depth to this relational understanding. Immanuel Kant (1903) defined hospitality as a cosmopolitan right, where peaceful visitation and reception are moral duties grounded in shared humanity. While Kant's framework presupposes mutual recognition and legal order, Jacques Derrida proposed a more radical vision of unconditional hospitality, a limitless openness to the Other (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000). However, Derrida also exposes the inherent tension between the ideal of absolute welcome and the political realities of sovereignty and conditionality (Kakoliris, 2015). This tension, central to this paper's composite ethical framework, is particularly pronounced in humanitarian contexts. Hospitality does not take place in safe, regulated spaces but in volatile environments of scarcity, displacement, and trauma. In this context, the act of hosting is improvised, emotionally charged, and often ethically complex. While commercial hospitality exchanges food, shelter, and service for payment, humanitarian hospitality emphasises relational care, trust, and presence without expectation of reciprocity. By integrating humanitarian ethics with the ethics of care and Derridean hospitality, the HHF extends tourism scholarship beyond leisure-driven encounters. It introduces crisis-affected, humanitarian contexts as legitimate domains of hospitality studies, thereby opening new lines of inquiry for tourism scholars concerned with ethics, resilience, and post-crisis recovery.

As Berg and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2018) note, hospitality in these contexts embodies both welcome and exclusion, a dynamic negotiation between ethical intent and operational constraint.

Drawing on this, the authors conceptualise humanitarian hospitality as ethically motivated hosting in crisis-affected tourism and aid contexts. It shares attributes with what Lashley (2008) termed emotional hospitality, a practice grounded in affective connection rather than economic transaction. Humanitarian hospitality thus includes physical provisioning, psychological support, cultural respect, and emotional presence.

This reconceptualisation is also rooted in the foundational principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement: humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity, and universality (ICRC, 1979). These principles create a normative foundation for understanding hospitality not as a gesture of kindness but as a duty of care, a responsibility embedded in the identity of volunteers and aid workers. As Beeckman (2016) and Brun and Horst (2023) argue, these ethical principles shape humanitarian conduct in relational, performative, and deeply human ways. Volunteers and aid workers are not simply delivering logistics but engaging in emotionally charged, high-stakes host-guest encounters. Many come from the same communities they serve, creating layered and intimate relationships with affected populations. In protracted crises, such as those explored later in this paper,

these relationships become long-term and reciprocal, strengthening the emotional stakes of humanitarian hospitality, especially relevant for scholars examining disaster recovery tourism, solidarity travel, and volunteer tourism, where hospitality unfolds in trauma, displacement, and recovery contexts. While humanitarian hospitality builds on insights from volunteer tourism, solidarity tourism, and disaster recovery travel, it expands these frameworks by integrating humanitarian principles such as neutrality, impartiality, and dignity. These principles distinguish humanitarian hospitality from leisure-driven travel while maintaining the relational and ethical focus central to hospitality studies.

Table 1. *Comparative dimensions of hospitality in tourism and humanitarian contexts.*

Dimensions	Conventional hospitality	Tourism in crisis	Humanitarian Hospitality
<i>Exchange basis</i>	Commercial, reciprocal	Service, altruistic, short-term	Ethical, non-reciprocal, long-term
<i>Core values</i>	Comfort, satisfaction	Empathy, solidarity, and learning	Neutrality, dignity, care, impartiality
<i>Host-guest dynamic</i>	Transactional	Often unequal, shaped by privilege, Post-disaster sites,	Relational, ethical, emotionally charged
<i>Settings</i>	Hotels, restaurants	conflict-affected regions	Displacement, trauma, and humanitarian operations

2.3 Ethical dilemmas and power dynamics

Hospitality, even when driven by ethical intent, is rarely neutral. Scholars have long recognised that acts of welcome carry embedded power dynamics that can simultaneously offer care and assert control (Lashley & Lynch, 2013). In humanitarian and post-crisis tourism contexts, these dynamics are intensified by vulnerability, mobility, and authority asymmetries. These power imbalances are a direct manifestation of what Derrida's philosophy terms conditional hospitality. The very conditions, such as institutional rules, safety protocols, and resource scarcity, that mediate the welcome, also enforce a power structure, granting authority to the host and shaping the experience of the guest. Volunteers and aid workers, often seen as hosts, must navigate complex emotional terrains marked by trauma, need, and ethical responsibility. Host-guest relationships should be equal, reciprocal, and rewarding rather than driven solely by self-interest as in traditional commercial hospitality settings (Proyrungroj, 2017). As Rosello (2001) argues, hospitality can unintentionally reproduce gratitude, compliance, or passivity expectations, even when grounded in altruism. This risk is heightened in humanitarian encounters, where the boundaries between assistance and authority are frequently blurred. Berg and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2018) describe this as the dual nature of hospitality: it is both a gesture of inclusion and a mechanism of exclusion, capable of reinforcing who belongs and who remains marginal. These tensions are not unique to humanitarian aid; they echo throughout volunteer tourism and solidarity-based travel, where unequal relationships between hosts and guests often define interaction terms (Selwyn, 2025).

Volunteers and aid workers frequently struggle between institutional commitments to neutrality and their emotional engagements. These internal contradictions, between detachment and compassion, impartiality and identification, mirror what Tomej *et al.* (2023) describe as the dilemma of survival versus solidarity. These are not abstract tensions; they shape everyday decisions in crisis-affected destinations, including how one allocates time, attention, and care. Bargeman *et al.* (2024) note that in leisure and tourism volunteering emotional intelligence, ethical sensitivity, and role clarity are essential to navigating these dilemmas without reinforcing structural inequality or burnout. Cultural sensitivity adds further complexity. In post-conflict or cross-cultural recovery contexts, relational hospitality can

support trust-building. Still, it also risks misinterpretation or overreach (Clark *et al.*, 2019). In some humanitarian settings, the presence of international workers is not entirely welcome; what Karlborg (2014) calls enforced hospitality describes situations where local populations must accommodate foreign aid or tourism actors under duress. In these cases, hospitality becomes less an open gesture than a survival strategy under constrained agency.

Hospitality can also resist dominant structures. As Lugosi (2014) argues, it can create counter-spaces and networks of solidarity that disrupt institutional hierarchies and foster grassroots resilience. In humanitarian tourism or volunteer travel, such spaces may emerge organically through shared struggle, community-building, or ethical dialogue. Yet these relational dimensions exist within and are often constrained by broader operational and political systems. Heaslip *et al.* (2024) identify several ethical dilemmas in humanitarian logistics, including prioritisation under scarcity, coordination across actors, and navigating conflicting mandates. These challenges parallel those in tourism recovery contexts, where aid, hospitality, and governance must align in the wake of disaster. The emotional toll of these encounters should not be underestimated. Research on volunteers and aid workers has documented high rates of anxiety, depression, burnout, and even suicide (Aldamman *et al.*, 2019; Lopes Cardozo *et al.*, 2012). For volunteers and aid workers, unresolved emotional labour may compromise care delivery and personal resilience. These findings point to a critical need for relational support systems for those receiving aid or hospitality and those delivering it. This internal contradiction exemplifies the distinction between codified morality and lived ethics central to this paper's framework. While the moral principle of impartiality provides a clear rule, the ethical practice requires navigating complex emotional engagements, a central concern of the Ethics of Care.

In addition, global humanitarian engagement is increasingly shaped by legal, technological, and geopolitical constraints. Sanctions, access restrictions, disinformation campaigns, and cyber-attacks can all undermine trust between actors and beneficiaries (ICRC, 2024a). Though often logistical, these obstacles have direct relational consequences: they fracture the hospitality dynamics that aid or recovery efforts depend on. Furthermore, as Newnham *et al.* (2022) emphasise, marginalised and intersectionally vulnerable groups often face disproportionate barriers to accessing both hospitality and aid. Addressing these disparities requires a commitment to inclusive, context-sensitive, and ethically reflexive practice.

The preceding conceptual discussion defines humanitarian hospitality as a relational and ethical practice grounded in care, dignity, and emotional presence. The following section presents illustrative cases from Lebanon, the Philippines, and Ukraine to explore how these abstract principles manifest in practice. These contexts, marked by protracted crises and humanitarian interventions, offer insight into how volunteers and aid workers enact hospitality through service delivery, informal hosting, emotional labour, and ethical engagement. These examples ground the theoretical framework in lived realities and set the stage for the empirical validation of the HHF.

2.4 Humanitarian Hospitality in Practice: Lebanon, the Philippines, and Ukraine

To ground the Humanitarian Hospitality in lived experience, this section presents illustrative examples from Lebanon, the Philippines, and Ukraine. Each case demonstrates how hospitality is enacted in crisis-affected contexts, not merely through delivering aid but through emotional labour, ethical engagement, and informal hosting. These examples reveal how volunteers and aid workers act as ethical hosts, performing care in environments where traditional tourism is suspended but relational encounters persist.

Lebanon: Hosting Amid Protracted Conflict. In Lebanon, decades of political instability and conflict have created a long-standing environment of humanitarian need. Red Cross and Red Crescent

volunteers and aid workers have played a central role in re-establishing trust, providing emotional presence, and offering stability in communities fragmented by war. Their work extended beyond distributing food or first aid; it involved reuniting families, supporting access to healthcare, and offering compassionate accompaniment through trauma (ICRC, 2015a; LRC, 2024). This approach exemplifies the Ethics of Care, where relational responsibility and attentiveness to emotional needs are prioritised alongside purely logistical responses. These actors often operated across volatile frontlines, and their neutrality and relational skills granted them access not only as logisticians but also as relational mediators and ethical hosts. Volunteers and aid workers themselves faced immense risks, including violence, kidnapping, and trauma exposure, yet continued to act as symbolic and practical hosts in their communities. Their actions exemplify humanitarian hospitality's emotional toll and ethical complexity, especially when formal tourism is absent, but solidarity-based relational engagement persists.

Philippines: Legacy, Loss, and Generational Hospitality. The story of Benny Balmediano, a Philippine Red Cross volunteer who lost his life during a prison rescue operation, illustrates how hospitality, sacrifice, and generational commitment intertwine in humanitarian service. His son's life-saving first aid efforts inspired Benny to join the Red Cross to extend similar care to others. After he died in an explosion during a field operation, his daughter chose to continue his legacy by becoming a Red Cross volunteer herself (ICRC, 2015b). This narrative is a strong example of the Ethics of Care, revealing how relational interdependence and responsibility can span family lines, positioning hospitality as a form of embodied memory and ethical continuity. In this context, humanitarian hospitality becomes more than a response to crisis; it becomes a cultural and emotional heritage. Benny's story resonates with literature on solidarity-based travel and memorial tourism (Lança *et al.*, 2024; Lefort & Chevalier, 2021), where acts of service are deeply embedded in personal and collective histories. In this context, humanitarian hospitality becomes more than a response to crisis; it becomes a cultural and emotional inheritance.

Ukraine: Hospitality Amid Active Conflict. In Ukraine, the escalation of armed conflict has generated widespread displacement and a humanitarian crisis. Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers and aid workers have provided shelter, clean water, medical care, and mental health support (ICRC, 2022; 2023). In cities like Mykolaiv, these volunteers and aid workers offered essential services and emotional support to senior citizens. This situation highlights the Derridean paradox of hospitality in practice. While the aid provided is necessarily conditional, limited by scarce resources and security constraints, the volunteers simultaneously strive to offer an unconditional welcome through reassurance, dignity, and symbolic protection. This constant negotiation between logistical realities and the ethical ideal of open welcome is a core challenge of humanitarian work. The Ukrainian example demonstrates how humanitarian hospitality functions as a form of post-crisis care, akin to tourism recovery models that emphasise the psychosocial rebuilding of communities through hosting, listening, and relational reconnection. Volunteers and aid workers also supported the coordination of safe passage corridors and evacuation logistics, tasks that required operational competence and the capacity to offer reassurance, dignity, and symbolic protection to those they served.

Across these diverse cases, shared patterns emerge. Volunteers and aid workers acted as ethical hosts in high-risk, emotionally charged settings. They engaged in practices that transcend traditional aid delivery: listening, staying present, maintaining dignity, and offering hope. Their work demonstrates how hospitality in humanitarian contexts is less about infrastructure and more about relational infrastructure, the web of emotional, ethical, and interpersonal dynamics that hold care systems together. These examples support the notion that humanitarian hospitality shares many attributes with ethical or post-crisis tourism forms, even when those contexts are not formally touristic. Volunteers and aid workers operationalise hospitality as a relational, emotional, and moral practice by extending care and welcome in moments of profound rupture, offering a foundation for theorising host-guest

relations in conflict-affected destinations and supporting a broader understanding of hospitality as a human ethic, not just a service encounter.

2.5 Humanitarian Hospitality

The preceding sections have illustrated how volunteers and aid workers engage in practices that extend beyond operational logistics to encompass care, presence, and relational engagement in humanitarian settings. These practices align with long-standing philosophical and ethical debates on hospitality, from Immanuel Kant's (1903) conception of hospitality as a cosmopolitan right to Derrida's vision of unconditional openness to the Other (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000). In conflict-affected and crisis-impacted environments, these ideals manifest not in formal tourism encounters but through informal acts of emotional labour, hosting, and ethical responsibility.

To illustrate these dynamics, this study contributes to theory-building by proposing a definition of humanitarian hospitality based on theoretical foundations from the literature and qualitative insights from volunteers and aid workers. The proposed definition is:

“Humanitarian hospitality provides essential care, shelter, safety and psychological support to individuals affected by conflict, displacement or crisis, driven by a moral and ethical commitment to upholding human dignity. Humanitarian hospitality is unconditional, impartial and guided by principles of compassion, neutrality and empathy. It is delivered by volunteers and aid workers who extend hospitality in environments marked by extreme danger, scarcity, and trauma, focusing on the immediate physical needs and vulnerable populations’ long-term emotional and psychological well-being.”

This definition articulates and captures a multidimensional understanding of hospitality grounded in relational ethics, moral obligation, and emotional care, building on the presented literature review. Unlike conventional hospitality, which is often framed as a commercial or service exchange (Lashley, 2015; Munasinghe et al., 2022), humanitarian hospitality emphasises non-reciprocal, ethically driven care. It reflects what Berg and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2018) describe as the dual nature of hospitality: a site of inclusion and exclusion, welcome and boundary, care and control. While the concept is grounded in humanitarian principles such as neutrality, impartiality, and compassion (ICRC, 1979), it also intersects with the scholarly debates on volunteer tourism, disaster recovery tourism, and solidarity-based travel. These domains similarly explore how power, privilege, and vulnerability shape host–guest dynamics, particularly in spaces of trauma or displacement. However, unlike leisure-oriented travel, humanitarian hospitality is embedded in a sense of a duty of care and a commitment to human dignity during times of acute crisis.

Crucially, this definition reflects the dual focus of humanitarian hospitality, which supports those receiving and those delivering aid. In doing so, it addresses relational and emotional dimensions largely overlooked in mainstream humanitarian standards. By foregrounding dignity, empathy, and long-term well-being, humanitarian hospitality offers tourism and hospitality management scholars a novel lens to understand ethical engagement in post-conflict and crisis-affected settings.

3. Methodology

This study adopts an exploratory, conceptual orientation, focusing specifically on theory refinement. The empirical material does not aim to statistically validate humanitarian hospitality as a construct statistically, but to surface and generate diverse practitioner perspectives that inform and refine the proposed Humanitarian Hospitality Framework. The design is therefore situated within theory-building rather than confirmatory traditions of research. The research was structured in four sequential phases: (1) a literature review to identify conceptual gaps in humanitarian hospitality; (2) contextual analysis of

selected cases (Lebanon, Philippines, Ukraine) to explore real-world manifestations of relational and ethical dynamics; (3) a qualitative survey targeting ICRC and RCRC volunteers and aid workers to gather experiential and perceptual insights; and (4) an integrated thematic and sentiment analysis to identify recurring patterns and make a start on building the conceptual HHF.

3.1 Data collection

Contextual examples were selected based on their relevance to humanitarian hospitality principles and data availability. The selection of Lebanon, the Philippines, and Ukraine was guided by three criteria: (1) diversity in conflict types and humanitarian response models; (2) geographic variation across the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Eastern Europe; and (3) availability of documented examples illustrating key dimensions of humanitarian hospitality. These cases reflect protracted crises (Lebanon), natural disasters and conflict overlap (Philippines), and large-scale international armed conflict (Ukraine). They offer a varied yet coherent lens to explore relational dynamics and logistical challenges in humanitarian settings.

The contextual examples presented in this study are drawn from publicly available reports, organisational documentation, and secondary literature on humanitarian operations in Lebanon, the Philippines, and Ukraine. They demonstrate how humanitarian hospitality is enacted through emotional labour, informal hosting, and ethical engagement. While not formal case studies in the methodological sense (Stake, 1995; Woodside, 2016; Yin, 2009), these contextual examples provide empirical insights that support the theoretical framework of humanitarian hospitality.

3.1.1 Survey design and structure

This study also employed a qualitative survey to explore perceptions of humanitarian hospitality among volunteers and aid workers of the ICRC and RCRC. Focus groups and other traditional qualitative methods, such as individual interviews, would not work well for volunteers and aid workers in conflict-affected settings. Beyond time and scheduling constraints, in-depth interviews also raise ethical and logistical challenges in these contexts. Many participants operate in insecure or highly volatile environments, making synchronous, in-person, or lengthy interview formats difficult to arrange and potentially intrusive. In contrast, the qualitative survey method allowed volunteers and aid workers to participate at their own pace, from safe locations, and with control over the depth of their responses. This approach, therefore, balanced accessibility, ethical sensitivity, and data richness, making it a suitable method for exploring humanitarian hospitality in practice. According to Braun and Clarke (2021), respondents to qualitative surveys have control over their level of participation, and they can choose when, where and how much they spend on the survey, making this tool a more accessible method to allow a broader range of volunteers and aid workers to participate. The qualitative survey method has already been used successfully to understand the perspectives of other individuals with limited availability (Doidge *et al.*, 2024; Herrler *et al.*, 2022). Respondents to the survey were informed that the purpose was to explore how volunteers and aid workers understand and apply the concept of humanitarian hospitality (the definition presented earlier was shared with them) in their work and collect feedback on a formalised definition. They were then invited to give their informed consent.

The survey was structured to assess aspects of humanitarian hospitality: how hospitality principles influence aid effectiveness, psychological resilience, ethical dilemmas, and well-being challenges. The survey consisted of seven questions, combining multiple-choice, Likert-scale, and open-ended formats to capture quantitative trends and qualitative insights.

Demographic questions assessed years of experience (Less than 1 year, 1–3 years, 3–5 years, more than 5 years) and geographical experience (open-ended). To gauge conceptual understanding, participants were invited to define humanitarian hospitality in their own words. They indicated whether they found

it relevant to humanitarian work (Yes/No), with space for elaboration. A 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree to Disagree Strongly) measured agreement with a proposed definition of humanitarian hospitality, followed by an open-ended question inviting feedback. The anonymous and voluntary survey ensured diverse perspectives and minimised response bias. This design enabled a comprehensive analysis, integrating structured data with qualitative reflections to refine the HHF based on real-world insights.

The authors acknowledge that presenting a formal definition to participants before collecting all qualitative feedback introduces a clear deductive bias, a conscious methodological choice taken. The authors believe that a purely inductive approach of asking ‘what is hospitality to you?’ would have yielded data too broad for the paper’s specific purpose. The primary goal was not theory-generation, but theory-refinement: to test the resonance and components of a specific, theoretically-grounded definition with a highly specialised expert group. Providing a consistent conceptual anchor was essential for gathering focused feedback on the proposed framework, enabling the authors to test and refine its validity. The authors’ analytical stance adopts ethics as a second-order reflection on moral codes, enabling examination of practitioners’ reasoning without endorsing any specific moral system (Luhmann, 2019).

A pilot survey was conducted with five ICRC and RCRC volunteers and aid workers to assess clarity, question relevance, and survey flow. Based on their feedback, the following refinements were made before full distribution: clarified key terms by adding a brief explanation of humanitarian hospitality, refined Likert-scale questions to improve response clarity, and adjusted open-ended questions to elicit more targeted qualitative insights. These revisions improved response accuracy and engagement, ensuring the second iteration was more transparent and more effective in capturing meaningful data.

3.2 Participants and sampling

This study does not distinguish between formally contracted aid workers and traditional volunteers. Instead, it emphasises the shared principles of altruism, humanitarian commitment, and service ethos that often blur the lines between paid humanitarian work and voluntary service. Thus, this survey set out to include ICRC and RCRC volunteers and aid workers alike who are currently or used to be affiliated with these organisations. As Patton (2002) described, a purposive sampling approach was used to ensure participation from individuals, in this case with direct experience in humanitarian work in conflict-affected settings with the organisations mentioned above.

When designing and administering the qualitative survey, the authors followed widely accepted and institutionally approved ethical research guidelines where no personally identifiable information was collected, ensuring anonymity. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any point and the voluntary and confidential nature of their responses. No personal identifying information was collected, and data were stored securely and analysed anonymously once any contextual details which may identify individuals was removed. Given the non-sensitive nature of the survey and the professional roles of participants (volunteers and aid workers), the research was considered to pose minimal risk.

The survey was advertised on relevant groups and pages on Facebook and LinkedIn, and remained open from 25 November 2024 to 25 December 2024. The lead author, having worked for the ICRC in various roles and contexts over many years, used their extensive professional network to distribute invitations to volunteers and aid workers. One hundred ninety-one invitations were sent via Facebook Messenger, 151 via LinkedIn Messaging and 20 via other messaging tools. Recipients were encouraged to share the link with colleagues and friends who met the study’s inclusion criteria, ensuring a diverse and meaningful sample.

The authors were not aiming to achieve statistical representation but instead to focus on gathering diverse responses. The information power concept was employed to estimate the sample size (Malterud *et al.*, 2016). The information power concept indicates that a sample's information power concerning a research question inversely correlates with the necessary sample size contingent upon the researchers' experience, the quality of the dialogue, and the study's objectives. The authors monitored the sufficiency of the sample size throughout the data collection period. Based on the authors' experience and similar studies, the authors analysed the data once 145 responses were collected. They concluded that this was adequate for the study's aims of representing diverse geographies and operational contexts. The sample size is smaller than what would be required for generalisation; however, the rich qualitative data gathered offer valuable insights into the concept of humanitarian hospitality, providing a foundation for further research and refinement of the framework. Also, generalisation was not the goal of this exploratory study. While the survey grouped ICRC and RCRC volunteers and aid workers under the broader category of "volunteers and aid workers," it did not explicitly distinguish between formally contracted staff and unpaid volunteers. This was based on the study's conceptual focus on shared ethos rather than employment status. Future research could benefit from capturing this distinction more explicitly to explore potential differences in perception and experience.

3.3 Data analysis

Survey responses from volunteers and aid workers were imported into a Microsoft Excel sheet and then transferred to SPSS (version 28) for descriptive statistical analysis and ATLAST.ti (version 25.0.1.3294) for qualitative analysis. Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019) within a critical realist framework (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This approach acknowledges that the responses reflect participants' perspectives and representations of reality, shaped by their contexts. The analysis was inductive and primarily semantic, focusing on participants' explicit statements. However, the authors acknowledge that their own experiential, social, and cultural contexts helped to empathise and understand the responses but unavoidably also shaped their interpretations. While focusing on surface meaning in coding, the discussion incorporated reflexive interpretation to make sense of broader patterns. The interpretation of these patterns and the subsequent development of themes were guided by the paper's composite ethical framework, allowing the authors to systematically analyse the data through the theoretical lenses of the Ethics of Care, Derridean hospitality, and formal humanitarian principles, ensuring that our analysis was grounded in established ethical theory and in the primary data.

A structured coding tree was developed to organise emerging themes and formed the basis for the conceptual model presented at the end of this paper. The thematic analysis reflects the dual focus of this research (beneficiary care and volunteer well-being), identifying relational and ethical patterns that shape humanitarian engagement. The first theme, Conceptual Understanding of Humanitarian Hospitality, captured how respondents defined and interpreted the term, its perceived relevance, and its ethical and relational dimensions. The second theme, Relational Dynamics in Humanitarian Work, explored volunteer-beneficiary interactions, aid delivery's emotional and psychological aspects, and the power dynamics involved in maintaining impartiality. The third theme, Operational Challenges in Implementing Hospitality, highlighted resource limitations, security and access issues, and institutional constraints. The final theme, Perceptions of the Proposed Definition, categorised responses based on agreement, suggested revisions, and criticisms of the definition. The coding process was revisited iteratively until the authors discussed, established, and confirmed the final themes.

The thematic coding process followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach: familiarisation, coding, generating initial themes, reviewing, defining/naming themes, and producing the report. The lead researcher conducted initial coding, and a collaborative discussion followed with the co-authors to

resolve discrepancies and refine the final themes. This reflexive approach acknowledges the valuable subjectivity of interpretation while ensuring analytical rigour.

3.4 Researcher positionality

The lead author conducted this study drawing on prior experience as a staff member within the ICRC, where they worked in several field missions and held roles in finance, administration, human resources, and protection, focusing on safeguarding the rights and well-being of individuals affected by conflict, including both detainees and civilians. This professional background provided unique access to global networks of volunteers and aid workers, shaped the selection of illustrative cases, and informed the interpretation of relational dynamics in humanitarian settings. While this insider perspective enriched the depth and relevance of the data, the authors maintained reflexivity throughout the research process, critically interrogating assumptions and triangulating field insights with scholarly literature. To ensure trustworthiness, all survey responses were anonymised, and interpretations were discussed collaboratively between the authors to reduce individual bias.

4. Results

This section presents the findings derived from the analysis of survey responses. It is structured to provide insight into the respondents' experiences, perspectives on hospitality in humanitarian work, and their agreement with a proposed definition of humanitarian hospitality. In doing so, the results address a central gap in the existing academic literature; while humanitarian logistics and operations are well documented, the relational, ethical, and emotional dimensions of hospitality in humanitarian contexts remain underexplored.

4.1. Participant profile

The survey results reveal significant experience levels among respondents, with the majority reporting extensive backgrounds in humanitarian work. Of the 145 respondents, 76% indicated they had more than five years of experience in the field. Mid-level experience, defined as three to five years, was reported by 10% of respondents, while early-career respondents, with one to three years of experience, constituted 11% of the sample. Only 3% of respondents had less than one year of experience. This distribution underscores the depth of expertise among participants, providing a robust basis for evaluating the integration of hospitality concepts into humanitarian work.

Respondents have worked in diverse regions, reflecting the global scope of humanitarian operations. The top ten countries where participants reported significant involvement included Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, the Philippines, Jordan, Yemen, Sudan, Syria, Switzerland, and Pakistan. Iraq emerged as the most frequently mentioned country, with 52 respondents highlighting their work there. Afghanistan and Lebanon followed, with 39 and 30 mentions, respectively. The geographical distribution perhaps reflects the prevalence of humanitarian crises in these regions and the lead author's extensive professional network, influencing participant outreach. The geographical distribution underscores a strong focus on conflict-affected settings and areas experiencing acute humanitarian crises, particularly in the Middle East and South Asia. These patterns align with the study's thematic emphasis on humanitarian responses in conflict (and often, therefore, displacement) settings; however, this study does not aim to provide a detailed operational analysis of specific locations. Additionally, as noted earlier, this study does not differentiate between ICRC and RCRC respondents in the geographic breakdown, as both groups were felt to contribute to humanitarian operations in diverse contexts, including conflict zones and natural disasters.

4.2. Perceptions of Humanitarian Hospitality

This study defines humanitarian hospitality as providing essential care, shelter, safety, and psychological support to individuals affected by conflict, displacement, or crisis, driven by a moral and

ethical commitment to upholding human dignity. It is unconditional, impartial, and guided by compassion, neutrality, and empathy principles. It is delivered by volunteers and aid workers in environments marked by extreme danger, scarcity, and trauma, focusing on the immediate physical needs and the long-term emotional and psychological well-being of vulnerable populations.

Survey results indicate widespread recognition of hospitality as a relevant concept in humanitarian work. A 5-point Likert scale assessed agreement with the proposed definition: 34% of respondents strongly agreed, 41% agreed, 16% remained neutral, 6% disagreed, and 3% strongly disagreed. 75% of respondents therefore agreed or strongly agreed, indicating a broad understanding of its importance in humanitarian activities. However, 19% expressed scepticism or disagreement, reflecting diverse interpretations of hospitality's role in aid work. The neutral responses suggest uncertainty or contextual variability, possibly influenced by cultural, environmental, and organisational factors.

The distribution of responses reveals additional patterns. The sample is heavily skewed toward more experienced volunteers and aid workers, with 76% having over five years of experience. Agreement responses displayed a strong central tendency, with notable differences in variance by experience level. More experienced volunteers and aid workers demonstrated more variance, with a broader range of responses and higher disagreement rates, while less experienced volunteers and aid workers clustered around agreement.

The distribution patterns across experience levels were analysed after respondents were presented with the proposed definition of humanitarian hospitality. The Likert-scale responses measuring agreement with the definition were collected first, allowing us to examine how experience level influenced agreement patterns. This sequence ensures that respondents' perspectives on hospitality in humanitarian work were shaped in response to a consistent definition, making it possible to compare how different levels of experience influenced their acceptance, neutrality, or disagreement with the proposed concept.

4.3 Agreement with the proposed definition

Respondents strongly agreed with the definition of humanitarian hospitality. The analysis of survey responses revealed that 34% of participants strongly agreed with the definition, while an additional 41% agreed. A neutral stance was taken by 16% of respondents, and only 9% disagreed or strongly disagreed. These findings indicate a high level of alignment with the definition, as evidenced by a combined positive response rate of 75%. Nevertheless, the neutral and dissenting views highlight areas for potential refinement or further clarification of the definition to ensure its resonance across all contexts.

4.4 Relationships, perceived relevance, and agreement

Statistical analysis provided further insights into the relationships between respondents' experience levels, their perspectives on hospitality, and their agreement with the proposed definition. This analysis used experience level as a proxy for assessing how prolonged exposure to humanitarian work influences perspectives on hospitality. While comparing and contrasting volunteers and contracted aid workers could offer further insights, the survey did not explicitly categorise respondents based on employment status. Future research could refine this approach by directly examining distinctions between volunteers and paid aid workers to assess the impact of humanitarian hospitality on psychological resilience and ethical decision-making. A weak negative correlation (-0.145) between experience and the applicability of hospitality suggests that more experienced volunteers and aid workers are slightly less likely to view hospitality as relevant to their work. Similarly, a weak negative correlation (-0.161) was observed between experience and agreement with the definition, indicating that more experienced volunteers and aid workers show slightly lower agreement levels. In contrast, the moderate positive correlation (0.491) between the applicability of hospitality and agreement with the definition highlights

a stronger connection; those who see hospitality as relevant are more likely to agree with its formal definition.

4.5 Qualitative insights and sentiment overview

The qualitative analysis of open-ended survey responses offered valuable deeper insights into how humanitarian volunteers and aid workers conceptualise hospitality within their roles. Many respondents associated humanitarian hospitality with providing basic needs, such as shelter, food, medical care, and psychological support, particularly for refugees and displaced populations. These services were framed as immediate, life-saving assistance crucial during crises. Respondent 113 described it as *“Providing care, shelter, and support guided by empathy”*. Respondent 142 emphasised, *“Humanitarian hospitality is the compassion towards the less fortunate attempting to provide for them their basic needs of food, shelter, and medicine”*. Beyond physical provisions, respondents stressed the importance of care, empathy, kindness, and dignity. For example, respondent 37 noted, *“Making people feel they are treated as human beings with dignity and care while affording them their needs at all levels including psychological”*. This human-centred approach reflects the ethical dimensions of the Ethics of Care, which prioritises relational value and dignity over the mechanics of transactional aid delivery.

Themes of dignity and inclusion were prominent in responses, with respondents highlighting the need to provide care equitably and impartially, transcending cultural, religious, or socio-political differences. These principles align closely with the core values of humanitarianism, such as neutrality and impartiality. Respondent 22 reflected, *“Hospitality is about helping others in their most vulnerable moments with kindness and generosity”*. Respondent 46 emphasised, *“Serve and support all humanitarian needs as much as we can with respect to the culture”*. However, some respondents highlighted challenges in implementing these ideals in practice. Respondent 17 observed, *“The humanitarian sector is very oriented on providing assistance, with spending rate being the core indicator rather than creating more sustainable opportunities”*, suggesting that humanitarian efforts are often evaluated based on financial expenditure and the quantity of aid distributed rather than long-term strategies promoting resilience, self-sufficiency, or sustainable development in affected communities.

The host-guest dynamic inherent in the concept of hospitality was explored by several respondents, applying it to relationships between volunteers and aid workers and the communities they serve, as well as among colleagues. While the survey did not explicitly distinguish between volunteers and paid aid workers, this emphasis on the host-guest dynamic suggests that relational aspects of humanitarian hospitality may be particularly relevant to volunteers. Future research could explore whether employment status influences perceptions of humanitarian hospitality, providing deeper insights into potential differences in relational engagement. As respondent 128 said, *“In humanitarian work, being welcoming means being reachable, available, and simple to interact with, both in person and digitally”*. This dynamic fosters solidarity and mutual respect within teams and operational contexts. Respondent 143 suggested, *“For me, humanitarian hospitality is taking the time to listen to what people have to say and working based on that while accommodating their struggles and challenges”*.

Psychological support was identified as a critical yet often overlooked aspect of humanitarian hospitality. Respondents underscored the importance of addressing trauma and fostering emotional resilience among affected populations. Respondent 71 articulated this need, *“Humanitarian hospitality is about creating a welcoming and supportive environment that promotes dignity, well-being, and social integration”*. Many respondents also highlighted the necessity of providing emotional and logistical support for volunteers and aid workers. For example, respondent 33 noted, *“Quality of hospitality has a direct impact on both physical and mental well-being of staff, hence having direct results on their work and ultimately the beneficiaries”*.

While “humanitarian hospitality” resonated with many respondents, it was unfamiliar to some, leading to diverse interpretations. Respondent 139 admitted, *“I don’t know this term. I have an understanding of hospitality but can’t imagine what would change by adding the adjective humanitarian in front of it”*. Others critiqued its alignment with existing humanitarian practices. As respondent 128 noted, *“Accountability to the affected populations covers what I would put under humanitarian hospitality”*. Practical challenges such as resource constraints, safety risks, and emotional fatigue were also highlighted as barriers to realising the ideals of humanitarian hospitality. For instance, respondent 84 observed, *“(humanitarian) hospitality is governed by donor requirements, which often limit its scope”*. This practical challenge is a clear example of Derrida’s conditional hospitality, where the ethical ideal of an unconditional welcome is constrained by institutional and financial realities that mediate the host-guest encounter.

Respondents recognised dual dimensions of humanitarian hospitality: providing care to beneficiaries and supporting volunteers and aid workers. Respondent 36 said, *“The concept should also apply within the organisation. (Volunteers and aid workers) spend their lives in their jobs, often far from family, and need to be in a safe and hospitable environment”*. This highlights the dual focus inherent in the Ethics of Care, recognising that the well-being of the carer is interdependent with the quality of care that can be delivered, signalling a broader need for volunteers and aid workers to receive the necessary support, well-being measures, and ethical workplace conditions while carrying out humanitarian work.

Addressing these challenges and expanding the concept to include physical and emotional support, humanitarian hospitality can serve as a framework for advancing human-centred and ethically grounded humanitarian practices. As respondent 40 suggested, *“(through humanitarian hospitality) we ensure that humanitarian work is not only about addressing immediate needs but also about fostering recovery through ethical practices”*.

Sentiment analysis of survey responses revealed a wide range of perspectives on humanitarian hospitality, with the majority expressing positive sentiments related to the principles of dignity, empathy and care. Many respondents highlighted how it aligns with fundamental humanitarian principles, including impartiality and neutrality, and its significance in promoting recovery and resilience in beneficiaries, volunteers, and aid workers.

However, neutral and negative sentiments reflected challenges in defining and operationalising the term. Some respondents questioned its uniqueness compared to established humanitarian frameworks, like “accountability to affected populations”. While these concerns are valid, this study positions humanitarian hospitality as a complementary rather than competing framework. Unlike accountability frameworks, which focus on ensuring rights and responsibilities, humanitarian hospitality emphasises humanitarian work’s relational, emotional, and ethical dimensions, particularly in how volunteers and aid workers foster human connection, trust and care in crisis settings. This distinction underscores the added value of humanitarian hospitality in bridging operational efficiency with human-centred care. Other participants highlighted practical obstacles, including resource limitations, donor-driven constraints, and safety risks. These challenges underline the opportunity for explicit definitions and practical guidelines to embed humanitarian hospitality effectively into humanitarian operations. Without clear conceptualisation and structured implementation strategies, humanitarian hospitality may remain an abstract idea rather than a practical framework that can contribute to and be systematically applied in aid delivery. Establishing definitions and guidelines aids consistency and enhances operational feasibility and impact, providing a stronger foundation for integrating hospitality within humanitarian policies and practices.

Additionally, the dual focus of humanitarian hospitality, providing care to beneficiaries while supporting the well-being of volunteers and aid workers, emerged as a key theme. This dual dimension emphasises the importance of fostering both human-centred care and organisational support to maintain ethical and effective humanitarian responses.

This paper does not aim to provide full empirical validation of the Humanitarian Hospitality Framework; instead, it introduces and conceptually grounds the framework as a starting point for future tourism scholarship. This study proposes humanitarian hospitality as a multidimensional framework that bridges the gap between essential material aid and emotional care, fostering a holistic approach to humanitarian response. While not yet an established concept, the findings suggest that humanitarian hospitality aligns with core humanitarian principles and offers a valuable perspective for advancing human-centred practices in humanitarian work. Further exploration is needed to refine its definition, assess its applicability, and address the practical and conceptual challenges identified by respondents.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study offer new perspectives that complement and challenge existing literature.

5.1 *Relevance of hospitality in humanitarian work*

According to the survey results, a large proportion of participants (81%) agreed that hospitality is important in the humanitarian context. They emphasised how it consists of core humanitarian values like compassion, empathy, and dignity. These findings align with Kant's (1903) notion of hospitality as a cosmopolitan right and Lashley's (2015) view of hospitality originating from cultural traditions and human connection. The humanitarian context, however, takes these concepts outside of their conventional hospitality management contexts. In conflict-affected settings, hospitality becomes a moral and ethical obligation, as Berg and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2018) underscored, where welcoming the other is tied to solidarity and survival. Equally, the respondents' emphasis on humanitarian hospitality's relational and emotional aspects aligns with Kelly *et al.* (2016), who identified hospitality as a critical component of emotional healing in healthcare settings. In humanitarian contexts, however, these relational dynamics become more complex, as Brun and Shuyb (2020) noted, where (un)conditional hospitality interacts with power dynamics, resource scarcity and ethical obligations.

5.2 *Ethical dilemmas and power dynamics*

The challenges respondents highlighted, such as resource constraints and donor-driven limitations, can be theoretically understood through the lens of Derrida's conditional hospitality. These practical constraints are the very conditions that create and enforce power imbalances. By necessity, they shift hospitality from an unconditional ideal to a managed process, where the aid provider (the host) dictates the terms of engagement, potentially reinforcing the beneficiary's dependency, a critique also noted by Rosello (2001). In humanitarian contexts, aid recipients are often placed in a position of dependency, leading to tensions between impartiality and relational care.

The ethical dilemmas noted by respondents, for example, balancing neutrality with emotional engagement, reflect the dual nature of hospitality explored by Lashley and Lynch (2013). In line with their insights, the results suggest that humanitarian hospitality involves both welcome and exclusion as volunteers and aid workers navigate complex relational dynamics while maintaining ethical commitments. These challenges are consistent with Heaslip *et al.* (2024), who identified safety, resource allocation, and bureaucratic barriers as key dilemmas in humanitarian operations.

These dilemmas are the very substance of ethical practice. They represent the reflexive element described by Berr & Kühne (2024), in which volunteers and aid workers must move beyond the subjective application of a single moral rule—for example, neutrality—and engage in difficult ethical

reflection on competing, equally valid moral claims, such as caring. The HHF is designed to provide a structure for this exact reflexive process. Beyond these dilemmas, it is important to critically reflect on the symbolic and political dimensions of humanitarian hospitality. Drawing on critical hospitality literature and humanitarian and postcolonial literature (Berg & Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2018; Causevic & Lynch, 2009; Lau & Mendes, 2024; Selwyn, 2025), the authors acknowledge the risk that acts of hosting the vulnerable may unintentionally reproduce saviour narratives or reinforce symbolic hierarchies of giver and receiver. Even when motivated by care, hospitality can assert moral authority or condition belonging, particularly in international-local encounters or North-South aid dynamics. These insights should urge us to approach humanitarian hospitality not only as ethical intent but also as a site of contested meaning and potential symbolic violence. Future applications of the HHF should explicitly incorporate strategies to mitigate saviourism, such as participatory decision-making, reciprocal engagement, and critical reflexivity among aid actors. Saviourism in this context describes the risk that humanitarian hospitality practices, even when motivated by compassion, may unintentionally reproduce or consolidate hierarchies of giver and receiver (Mostafanezhad, 2016). Future applications should also consider that the respondents' reflections were gathered after they were presented with our formal definition, which likely focused their attention on specific themes like care, dignity, and the host-guest dynamic more than they might naturally have done.

5.3 *Psychological and emotional support*

Identifying psychological support as a critical yet underexplored dimension of humanitarian hospitality extends the discussion in the current literature. As noted in the discussion of the results of this study, the relational dynamics between volunteers, aid workers, and beneficiaries support Brun and Horst's (2023) conceptualisation of relational humanitarianism, where their emotional resilience directly impacts their ability to provide effective care. This perspective highlights the interdependence between volunteer and aid worker well-being and the quality of humanitarian aid, suggesting that emotional and psychological support mechanisms should be integrated into volunteer and aid worker management strategies.

In addition, the acknowledgement of volunteers and aid workers' mental health challenges, such as compassion fatigue and burnout, aligns with the findings of Aldamman *et al.* (2019) and Lopes Cardozo *et al.* (2012), who emphasise the need for organisational support to address the psychological toll of humanitarian work. These insights suggest that the dual focus of humanitarian hospitality (beneficiaries, volunteers/aid workers) requires a more holistic approach to care, as also advocated by Beeckman (2016) in his discussion of the Red Cross Principles. Future research could further explore how relational humanitarianism informs volunteer retention, psychological resilience, and the ethical responsibilities of humanitarian organisations toward their volunteers and aid workers.

5.4 *Practical challenges and operational barriers*

The results identified practical challenges, such as resource scarcity and operational inefficiencies, as barriers to implementing humanitarian hospitality. These findings echo Kovács and Spens (2009), who highlight logistical complexities in humanitarian operations. Humanitarian logistics, which encompasses the coordination of aid distribution, supply chain management, and infrastructure support, is critical in crisis response, and its effectiveness directly influences the ability to implement humanitarian assistance. Ensuring that aid is delivered efficiently while maintaining ethical and relational care requires balancing logistical precision with human-centred approaches to support beneficiaries, volunteers and aid workers.

The focus on these challenges also aligns with the work of Cunha *et al.* (2024), who emphasise the dynamic nature of humanitarian logistics, requiring innovative solutions to adapt to changing contexts.

As humanitarian hospitality depends on the availability and accessibility of resources, logistical barriers can hinder its application, especially in conflict-affected and resource-constrained settings.

The findings underscore the tension between immediate disaster response and long-term recovery, as Kunz and Reiner (2012) noted. Respondents' call for explicit definitions and guidelines for humanitarian hospitality reflects a need for frameworks that integrate logistical efficiency with ethical and relational dimensions to ensure both operational efficiency and meaningful humanitarian engagement, bridging the gap between "what" and "why" in humanitarian operations, as identified by Oksuz and Satoglu (2023).

5.5 Conceptualising Humanitarian Hospitality

This study introduces the HHF as a structured approach to integrating ethical, relational, and operational principles into humanitarian response. While hospitality has traditionally been studied in commercial and domestic contexts, its role in humanitarian aid remains underexplored. The HHF expands this concept beyond material aid to include psychological and emotional support for beneficiaries, volunteers, and aid workers, recognising that effective aid delivery extends beyond logistics to encompass human dignity and care.

Figure 1 provides a visual summary of the framework's operational components, illustrating how humanitarian hospitality incorporates ethical foundations, operational components, relational dynamics, and temporal phases of aid delivery, ensuring that humanitarian actions remain efficient and compassionate. Unlike conventional humanitarian logistics, which focus primarily on efficiency and resource distribution, humanitarian hospitality emphasises dignity, empathy, and human connection, balancing logistical effectiveness and ethical care.

The framework is built on Ethical Foundations drawn directly from our composite theoretical framework, synthesising the relational responsibility of the Ethics of Care, the tensions of Derridean hospitality, and the formal principles of humanitarian ethics. Operational components address logistical barriers while maintaining a human-centred focus, integrating hospitality principles into aid distribution and service delivery. Relational dynamics highlight the importance of trust, respect, and psychological well-being in interactions between volunteers, aid workers, and affected communities. Finally, the temporal phases of humanitarian response, emergency relief, stabilisation, and long-term recovery demonstrate how hospitality can be applied across different stages of crisis intervention.

This framework offers a holistic approach to aid delivery by embedding hospitality principles into humanitarian logistics. It ensures humanitarian response meets basic survival needs and fosters human connection, dignity, and psychological well-being. The HHF bridges the gap between material assistance and compassionate engagement, reinforcing that humanitarian action must prioritise both efficiency and ethical care.

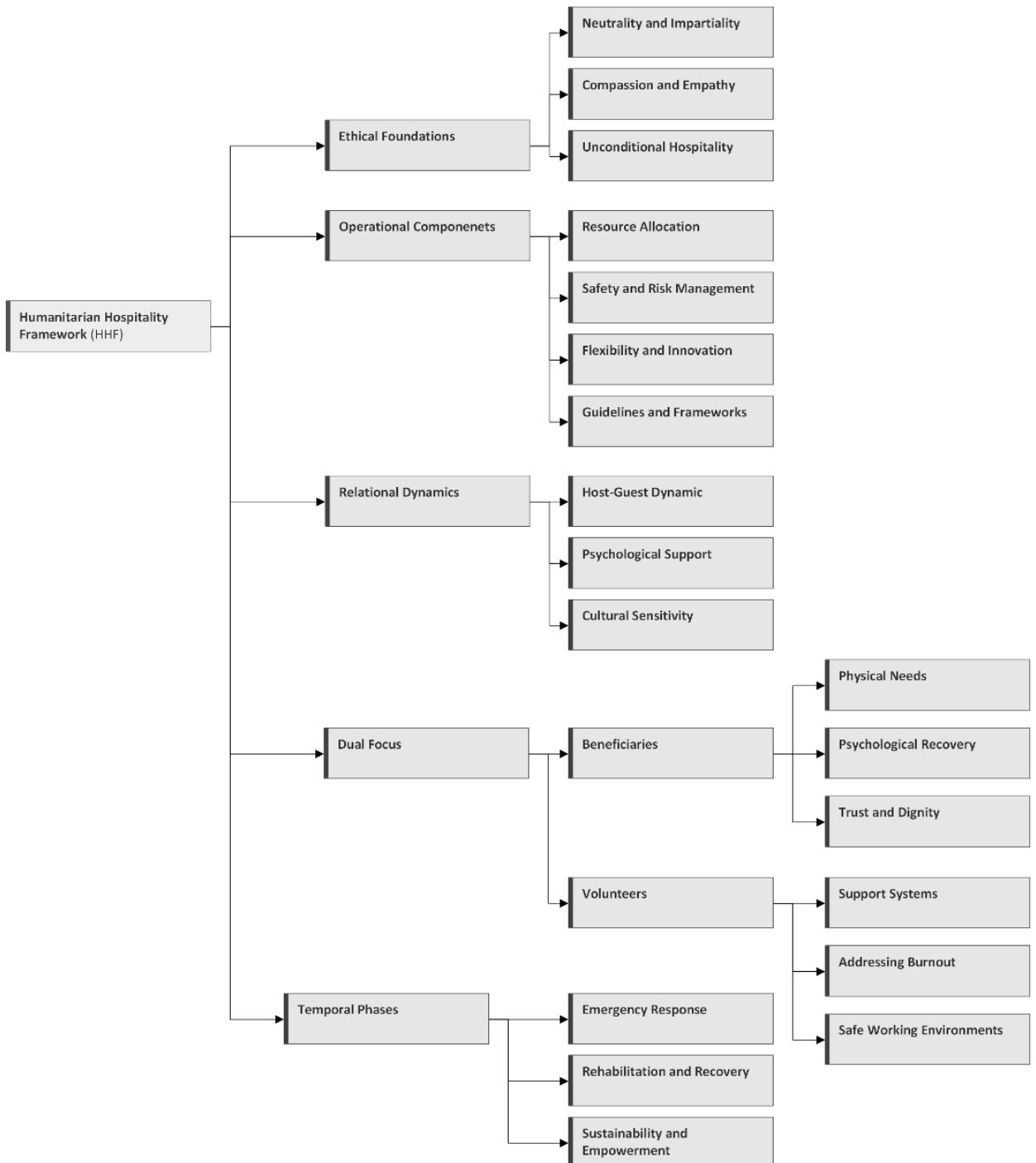


Figure 1: Mindmap visualising a summary of the HHF operational components.

6. Conclusion and implications

This study introduced humanitarian hospitality as a conceptual framework to analyse the complex relational ethics and care practices that emerge at the intersection of tourism and crisis. By examining the experiences of humanitarian actors through a hospitality lens, the research moves beyond

traditional commercial contexts to theorise how hosting, emotional labour, and dignity are negotiated in non-leisure, crisis-driven encounters. The resulting HHF provides a new model for understanding these dynamics, offering significant implications for theory and practice in tourism and hospitality studies. While the concept aligns with established care principles, the findings underscore the need for explicit guidelines and practical frameworks to navigate the complex realities of work at this intersection.

6.1 Practical implications

The study offers practical guidance for stakeholders at the nexus of tourism and crises. By embedding the HHF into their operations, organisations can foster a more human-centred approach that balances operational needs with ethical care.

For organisations managing volunteer tourism programs, this means developing robust training in care's relational and emotional aspects, including modules on active listening, empathy, and cultural sensitivity to equip volunteers and aid workers to navigate their roles' ethical dilemmas and power dynamics while maintaining principles like neutrality.

For destination managers and policymakers in post-crisis locations, the framework calls for policies integrating hospitality principles into recovery strategies, such as fostering trust-building initiatives, inclusive decision-making, and community engagement. Policymakers can use the HHF to develop resource allocation and safety guidelines that ensure tourism's return is both efficient and humane, strengthening relational connections that contribute to long-term resilience.

For all actors operating in this space, the framework underscores the critical need for psychological support and well-being for local and international volunteers and aid workers. Recognising that emotional resilience is essential, organisations must implement burnout prevention strategies, including establishing structured peer-support networks, integrating emotional resilience training into onboarding, and providing accessible mental health services to mitigate these environments' stress and compassion fatigue. By adopting this holistic approach, stakeholders can bridge the gap between logistical challenges and human-centred care, ensuring that crisis-affected tourism fosters dignity, trust, and ethical responsibility.

The HHF could be translated into practical tools such as training modules, ethical reflection guides, and staff well-being protocols to support implementation. Organisations could develop scenario-based training that helps volunteers and aid workers navigate ethical dilemmas using case studies rooted in the HHF's relational principles. Assessment frameworks could evaluate how well humanitarian operations uphold hospitality values like dignity, presence, and care for both beneficiaries and staff. These might include peer feedback mechanisms, self-assessment tools, or relational care indicators.

Importantly, the HHF also holds relevance for mainstream human resource management in humanitarian, hospitality and related service sectors. Concepts such as emotional labour support, trauma-informed leadership, and ethical care practices can be integrated into HR strategies to enhance employee well-being, retention, and resilience in high-stress environments. As such, the HHF offers a humanitarian lens and a transferable framework for building relationally attuned, ethically grounded talent systems in post-crisis and commercial contexts.

6.2 Theoretical implications

Theoretically, this study offers a novel multidimensional framework that redefines the intersection of ethics, operations, and relational dynamics within crisis-affected tourism. The HHF presented in Figure 2 provides a foundation for future research, enabling scholars to explore how hospitality principles can

inform and transform practices in volunteer tourism, post-disaster recovery, and solidarity travel. Unlike traditional humanitarian frameworks focusing primarily on logistics, the HHF uniquely integrates relational and psychological dimensions into its model. Central to this is its dual focus: it extends ethical responsibility beyond affected populations to include the volunteers and aid workers delivering care, ensuring a more sustainable and holistic response model. By centralising the well-being of the “host” alongside the “guest,” the framework offers a critical contribution to hospitality theory. Rather than attempting empirical validation, this study positions the HHF as a theoretical contribution that redefines the scope of hospitality within tourism research. It proposes a new research agenda by connecting humanitarian encounters with existing debates on volunteer tourism, solidarity travel, and post-disaster recovery, and invites further empirical exploration.

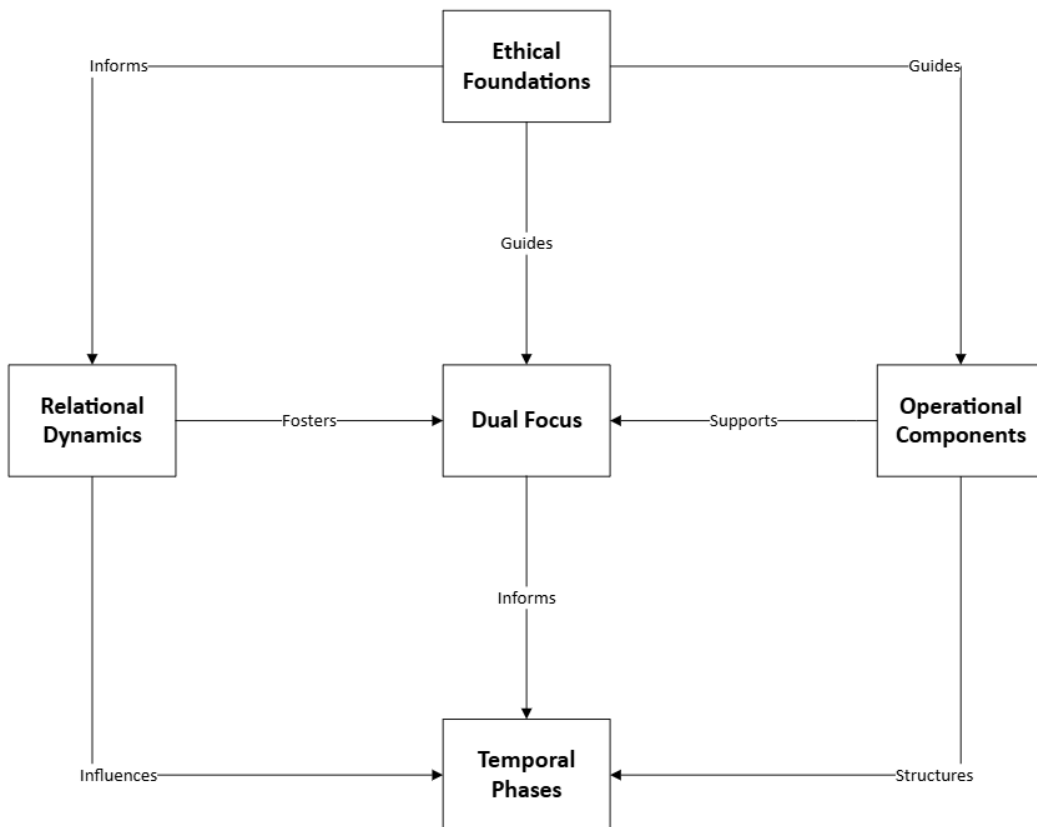


Figure 2: *Humanitarian Hospitality Framework (HHF)*

HHF serves as a foundation for ethical and relational approaches to crisis tourism and humanitarian aid, ensuring alignment with humanitarian principles. At its core, the framework emphasises a “Dual Focus”, recognising the need for physical and emotional support for beneficiaries, volunteers and aid workers. This approach ensures a balanced, ethical, and sustainable humanitarian response. The Ethical Foundations provide the moral compass for the entire framework, as shown in Figure 2. They explicitly ‘Guide’ both the “Dual Focus” and the “Operational Components”, and are grounded in our synthesis of the Ethics of Care, Derridean hospitality, and formal humanitarian ethics, ensuring that actions align with principles of dignity, neutrality, and relational care. These foundations provide a moral compass

that shapes relational interactions and operational decision-making. The “Operational Components” address practical challenges. These components are essential for integrating humanitarian hospitality into structured aid delivery and, as the diagram shows, they directly ‘Support’ the “Dual Focus” and Structure the “Temporal Phases”. These components are essential for integrating humanitarian hospitality into structured aid delivery, ensuring that immediate relief and long-term recovery efforts remain effective and sustainable. The “Dual Focus” sits at the heart of the framework, ensuring that humanitarian efforts prioritise the well-being of aid recipients and those delivering aid. This concept moves beyond traditional humanitarian models, extending the duty of care to volunteers and aid workers, recognising their emotional resilience as a crucial factor in sustaining humanitarian effectiveness. The “Dual Focus”, in turn, ‘Informs’ the “Temporal Phases” (spanning emergency response, stabilisation, and recovery), ensuring that humanitarian hospitality adapts across different stages of intervention. By integrating ethical considerations and operational support throughout these phases, the framework fosters long-term resilience in both communities and volunteers and aid workers. Finally, “Relational Dynamics” captures the interpersonal and cultural interactions. As the framework illustrates, these dynamics are crucial as they ‘Foster’ the “Dual Focus” (by building trust and solidarity) and also directly ‘Influence’ the “Temporal Phases”, ensuring that humanitarian hospitality remains contextually relevant throughout humanitarian operations.

This framework highlights the multidimensional nature of humanitarian hospitality, centralising the dual focus on aid recipients and humanitarian workers while ensuring ethical, operational, and relational coherence. The HHF thus redefines hospitality by extending the concept beyond leisure and commercial contexts. It positions hospitality as an ethic of care in situations where conventional tourism infrastructures collapse but relational encounters persist. This theoretical move links tourism and humanitarianism in ways not previously theorised in hospitality studies.

6.3 Limitations and future research

This study has several limitations that provide clear avenues for future inquiry. The research relies on qualitative responses from a single organisational network (the RCRC Movement), which introduces potential sample bias and limits generalizability to other forms of volunteer tourism or solidarity organisations. The geographical focus on Lebanon, the Philippines, and Ukraine may not fully represent the diverse cultural contexts where tourism and crisis intersect. Furthermore, as a cross-sectional study, it provides a snapshot in time; longitudinal research is needed to understand how humanitarian hospitality evolves through different temporal phases of a crisis. While the study treats volunteers and aid workers as a conceptual collective, future work could benefit from disaggregating by employment status to reveal nuanced differences in how hospitality is enacted. Methodologically, the study’s most significant limitation is the deductive bias inherent in its survey design. By presenting a formal definition to participants, the authors unavoidably framed those responses and influenced their qualitative feedback. Therefore, the findings cannot and do not claim to be an objective, inductive generation of the humanitarian hospitality concept. Instead, they represent an expert practitioner reaction to and refinement of a proposed definition. This deductive approach was a deliberate choice aligned with the goal of theory refinement, but the authors acknowledge that it sacrifices inductive discovery. As such, the authors call for future research to use a purely inductive approach, such as in-depth interviews followed by thematic analysis, before any definition is developed to capture a more organic understanding of the concept.

Future research could seek to validate and expand the HHF. Exploring relational dynamics in greater depth, particularly from the perspective of local communities and aid recipients, is essential for addressing power imbalances and developing a more nuanced understanding of the host-guest encounter in crisis settings. Comparative studies with other ethical frameworks in tourism can highlight the HHF’s unique contributions. At the same time, quantitative methods could strengthen their

empirical validation. Research could also explore how humanitarian hospitality adapts to the needs of diverse and intersectionally vulnerable populations. By advancing the HHF through these avenues, ethical tourism practice in crisis contexts can evolve into a more resilient and ethically grounded system.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this work, the authors used GPT-4.0 and Microsoft Copilot to enhance language, clarity and brevity. After using these tools, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the publication's content.

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