

## **Building the Future through Community Sponsorship of Refugees**

*Comparing experiences and learning from each other*

**A hybrid in-person (Vatican City/Rome) and virtual workshop**

**26 – 27 September 2022**

### **Concept Note**

Communities around the world are often making remarkable efforts to support refugees fleeing conflict and other challenges. In the last 40 years, a deliberate process to link communities and refugees, providing new arrivals with financial, emotional, and practical help on arrival, has been pioneered in Canada and is now being implemented in almost 20 countries on four continents.

Community sponsorship (also called refugee or private sponsorship, or humanitarian corridors in some contexts) programmes can be broadly defined as “a public-private partnership between governments, who *inter alia* facilitate legal admission for refugees, and private or community actors, who provide financial, social and/or emotional support to admit, settle and integrate refugees into the community”.<sup>1</sup>

Community sponsorship programmes have proven to be more than just a complement or an annex to State-led resettlement. They have ensured that refugees are not only welcomed, but accompanied, empowered and loved; that the communities hosting them take ownership, responsibility and pride in doing what they do. At a time of wide-spread xenophobia and often structural racism, they create a critical mass of support for refugees and a powerful antidote to fear and hatred. Finally, such programmes generate a broad, whole-of-society approach and involvement in welcoming, receiving, and integrating newcomers. Thus, they foster a fruitful dialogue between government entities and many segments of civil society, including refugees themselves and the private sector, which provides vital financial support, in addition to government funding. While the benefits of community sponsorship are well-documented,<sup>2</sup> the challenges also are real, and not all programmes have been successful.

Ensuring the long-term viability of these programmes raises a number of important issues.

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<sup>1</sup> ICMC Europe, IOM, and UNHCR, “Private Sponsorship in Europe: Expanding Complementary Pathways for Refugee Resettlement”, ERN+ Scoping paper, European Resettlement Network+ (ERN+), June 2017, <https://www.share-network.eu/articles-and-resources/expanding-complementarypathways?rq=private%20sponsorship%20in%20europe>.

<sup>2</sup> See in particular <https://www.icmpd.org/file/download/55629/file/Connecting%2520the%2520dots%2520-%2520Understanding%2520community%2520sponsorship%2520as%2520a%2520network.pdf> and <https://www.communitysponsorship.org/>

- How can refugees, volunteers and sponsors not only be identified, but selected and vetted, trained, and constantly re-motivated?
- What is the best division of labor among central authorities, local authorities, civil society and potential private donors in each context?
- What can be done to ensure that refugees are full partners, with a clear focus on their direct and active engagement?
- What role might the private sector play?
- How can open and transparent lines of communication between all the players be developed and improved throughout the various phases of the programmes?
- What can be done to ensure constant learning and to adjust programmes based on lessons learned while ensuring those adjustments do no harm?
- And, perhaps most fundamentally, what is needed to grow these programmes (“scalability”) and to ensure their ability to become self-sustaining (“sustainability”)?

By inviting testimonies from five different civil society organizations, most of them faith-based, from five different countries where community sponsorship is active but at different levels of development and implementation, this workshop precisely aims at sharing experiences and learning from each other. This will be the main focus of the first day. On the second day, the interface between these same civil society actors, refugees, governments, and international organizations hopefully will contribute to upholding some essential “trademarks” of community sponsorships, including honest dialogue among all stakeholders and collective and shared ownership.

In summary, the two-day workshop will be an opportunity for civil society and faith-based organisations, government representatives, international organizations, refugees, and other actors to share challenges and lessons learned to achieve sustainable, people-centered and high-quality community sponsorship programmes that ensure durable solutions for and inclusion of sponsored refugees and to help participants consider how to scale up programmes in the future and adapt them to new needs.