Workshop on Community Sponsorship of Refugees
Building the Future through Community Sponsorship of Refugees
Comparing experiences and learning from each other

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Sala Etchegaray

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First of all, let me express again our thanks to the organizers of this event. The expansion of community sponsorship programmes is at the core of UNHCR's work and of its commitment towards the expansion of complementary pathways, as also recently stated in our **policy document Third Country Solutions for Refugees**

UNHCR advocates for more community-based sponsorship initiatives and is working to promote this with civil society and governments in many countries in the context of **GRSI, together with IRCC, Refugee hub and the other stakeholders**

In relation to the **role of International organizations and of UNHCR** in particular, I would like to mention quickly at least 2 aspects in which UNHCR can play a central role.

Firstly, our support could be an added value in the **designing phase** of the CSs programmes.
Yesterday and today, we have seen and listened and we are testimony to the great potential of community sponsorship programmes not only in finding protection solutions for refugees but also in creating welcoming and inclusive societies.

But in the design phase of such projects, it is very important to keep in mind the **standards and legal and protection safeguards** that need to be ensured when dealing with people in need of international protection. We saw yesterday, for example, one of the differences between the Canadian programme and the US programme in that the former offers permanent residence while the latter offers, if I understand correctly, a humanitarian status for two years and then the person can apply for asylum but obviously this can generate uncertainty and anxiety in the beneficiaries.

In Italy, we have the very positive example of humanitarian corridors, whereby following transfer to Italy people apply for asylum and are channeled through the normal asylum procedure, benefiting from prioritized assessment of their claims. On the other hand, with university corridors, beneficiaries obtain a study visa, and apply for a study permit, and once they have graduated, they can apply for asylum. This, however, can take a long time for those who wish to access employment immediately.

Not all countries can have policies similar to the Canadian model that ensures permanent residence, but we should be ready to support and promote similar programmes, putting protection needs at the very center.

When we talk about community sponsorship, scenarios can be different, in terms of the profiles of beneficiaries, the legal status needed upon departure – whether it is refugees, registered refugees or simply persons in need of international protection- the legal status upon arrival, and more specifically whether there is immediate recognition

of protection as it happens for example in Italy under the Italian RST programme or whether an asylum request needs to be submitted, which can take months.

It is necessary that all these considerations are at the center of a community sponsorship programme, that the protection needs of the beneficiaries are met, that the principles of GC 51 are respected, first of all the principle of non-refoulement because all these considerations have not only a theoretical value but also a concrete impact on people's lives and also on their integration paths.

Therefore, international organizations such as the UNCHR can certainly provide support by knowing the **protection spaces from where refugees depart and where refugees arrive.**

Secondly, another aspect in which international organizations can play a role is **liaising with national authorities** in departing countries and destination countries, not only for political and policy reasons but also operationally speaking: UNHCR may be aware of regulations that can have an impact on similar programmes, or of the need to have authorization to leave, exit visa, or of the validity of specific documentation in certain countries or the existence of specific practices that even if not regulated by law can have a strong impact in the lives of refugees and can contribute to ensure integrity, transparency and efficiency of similar programmes.

Finally, and I go to conclude, the last point that I would like to mention is **networking**. In this sense, UNHCR, as other international organizations, can create links, connections, between authorities at national and local level, civil society organizations, refugee communities, private companies and many other actors that together can work in creating and establishing more opportunities and concrete solutions for refugees around the world.

Thank you.