

Community Sponsorship in the United States (Bill Canny's notes)

Background

Until recently, community sponsorship in the United States, and especially private sponsorship, has mostly been informal (i.e., without facilitation by the government) or has occurred on an ad hoc basis, such as in response to displacement caused by World War II. Even though religious and charitable organizations provided support, much of this depended on the presence of family members already in the United States who could assist refugees with long-term integration. As Congress enacted a growing number of limitations on immigration during the twentieth century, this made it more difficult for private sponsorship to occur. Legal refugee status was not available on a continuous basis for all nationalities until the Refugee Act of 1980. The Private Sector Initiative (1986-1996) is the most prominent example of a private sponsorship program created with by the U.S. government. It allowed private organizations, not individuals to sponsor refugees, but they were entirely responsible for ensuring those refugees did not access public benefits, or else they would have to reimburse the government for the cost of those benefits. Eventually this program was discontinued as medical costs were increasingly difficult to cover by private organizations.

Today you have in the US the United for Ukraine program. On April 21, 2022, the Biden Administration announced the Uniting for Ukraine program, which would provide Ukrainian who were displaced by Russia's war of aggression the opportunity to come to the United States for a temporary period so long as they had a U.S. based sponsor who agreed to provide them with financial support during their time here. As of September 16, 2022, 128,904 applications have been filed by U.S. based supporters and 90,768 Ukrainian beneficiaries had been approved for travel. Ukrainian beneficiaries have 90 days to arrange their own travel and seek parole at the port of entry. In total, 54,815 Ukrainian beneficiaries have been paroled into the United States. The top three states within which sponsors reside are New York (18,368), Illinois (16,604), and California (13,168).

USCCB has established program in 4 dioceses – seeking to welcome with welcome circles - 100 families. Pay for housing, arrange medical care, daily food etc.. costs. At the same time the USG through a govt agency is offering a per capita reimbursement for resettlement agencies to provide 90 days of case management support, small amt of cash, - no housing costs or real stipends for food, etc.. Helping them access public services.

Additional reading:

- [Private Refugee Resettlement in U.S. History](#) (Niskanen Center)
- [Explainer: Private Sponsorship Programs for Refugees](#) (National Immigration Forum)

What is working well in the American context?

- Need for a rapid response to recent crises has been a springboard for community sponsorship
 - Whole-of-America interest in Afghans and Ukrainians—eagerness to be involved
 - Support from atypical partners (veterans' groups, Afghan diapsoria, SIVs)

- Interest of resettlement agencies and their community partners is growing – note our 4 dioceses pilot
- POWIR (Parishes Organized to Welcome Refugees) program has operated for more than ten years (tapping into/renewing longstanding role of faith-based networks); every dollar that we invest results in four times as much in cash and in-kind contributions from communities
- Implementing a tiered approach from one least involved to most (allows people to ease in):
 - Donors (basic goods)
 - Support teams (housing)
 - Co-sponsorship (majority of support)
 - Private sponsorship (entirety of support from sponsors)

What challenges exist in the American context?

- Rapid response to recent crises has also resulted in rushed rollout/implementation:
 - New staff who don't necessarily have experience in resettlement or community sponsorship
 - Scaling up sponsorship programs takes time (both private and co-sponsorship), and an effective sponsorship program requires training and support; capacity constraints have limited these (confusion around roles and expectations)
- Navigating how to make it a complementary system, so as not to lose the longstanding benefits of USRAP (regular refugee resettlement program in US)
- Currently, the only way to get refugee status (with pathway to permanent legal status and eventually citizenship) is through USRAP; therefore, initiatives such as Uniting for Ukraine and the Operation Allies Welcome for Afghans can produce long-term uncertainty for beneficiaries and their sponsors
- Because Congress delegated to the President the ability to set the refugee cap, there is nothing stopping the President from authorizing the entrance of an unlimited number of privately sponsored refugees; at the same time, the overseas processing of individuals is still dependent on the resources appropriated by Congress and execution by USG agencies
- The increasing costs of housing, healthcare, etc. are a challenge for individuals and organizations seeking to sponsor refugees
- There is no standardized system in place to vet sponsors (there are legitimate concerns for example for the safety of young Ukrainian women coming to the US)

What support would make the work more effective?

- Large-scale public information campaigns
 - Creation of accessible cultural orientation materials for a wide range of nationalities to help individuals prepare for receiving refugees
 - Perhaps a hybrid system within USRAP such as a co-sponsorship model,
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Co-Sponsorship Explainer

What is co-sponsorship?

- Co-sponsorship is a specific form of community sponsorship where community groups accept, in a non-legally binding written agreement with a local resettlement affiliate, the responsibility to provide the majority of R&P services in partnership with that local affiliate. In addition, each co-sponsor group must provide in-kind and/or financial contributions in support of the refugee household with whom they are matched.
- In the case of USCCB’s model of co-sponsorship, affiliates must choose at least 8 of 15 core R&P services to delegate to co-sponsors.
- Example of community groups: faith communities (parishes, synagogues, mosques), civic organizations (Lyons Club, Rotary Club), university communities, book clubs.
- Type of community actor: Community Group (group of volunteers)
- Partnership with & overseen by: Local resettlement agency
- Donations required: In-kind and/or financial contributions
- Clearly defined by the local resettlement agency
- Volunteer activities required Provides 8 or more R&P core services
- *If agency doesn’t wish to fully delegate these tasks, they can perform the services “in active collaboration” with sponsors
- USG is interested in the added value to the R&P program generated through co-sponsorship. Particularly:
 - improved refugee integration
 - increased housing and employment opportunities
 - strengthened community and private support
- PRM also sees value in sponsorship for communities themselves, for maximizing refugee contributions, and expanding public support for refugees and awareness of global affairs.
- USCCB/MRS Goals for co-sponsorship in 2023:
 - USCCB has established a segment within ORS that offers technical assistance and training to affiliates committed to expanding the number of refugees paired with co-sponsor groups. USCCB will leverage this structure, along with its long-standing history of supporting volunteer coordination, to guide its network in implementing co-sponsor initiatives.
- Principal Objective: USCCB will increase the number of affiliates (60% of the network) relying on co-sponsorship as an important mechanism to maintain or build its capacity to resettle.
- Fiscal Year # of affiliates with co-sponsor programs 35 (out of 57) # of co-sponsor groups 165 # of refugees served by co-sponsor groups 980

- Below are 15 R&P core services that may be delegated to (or done in active collaboration with) community groups. If a USCCB affiliate delegates 8+ of the following services, they have a co-sponsor program.

- Assist Catholic Charities in locating safe, sanitary, and decent housing
- Set up housing with essential furnishings
- Airport pickup with appropriate interpretation
- Provide a culturally appropriate, warm ready-to-eat meal
- Stock the pantry with groceries/food assistance
- Social security card application
- Public benefits application: Cash Assistance, Medicaid, and/or SNAP
- Enrollment in English language program
- Seasonally appropriate clothing for work, school, and everyday use
- In collaboration w/ Catholic Charities, health screening and immunizations
- Public benefits application: SSI, WIC, etc., if applicable
- School enrollment
- Selective service registration, if applicable
- Transportation Assistance (e.g., to and from job interviews and training)
- Cultural orientation provision

- Extra Wraparound Services

- Co-sponsor groups often assume responsibility for additional volunteer activities that facilitate newcomer integration. While not considered core services, they are an important element of wraparound accompaniment and care. Below are numerous ways that community groups can also contribute as co-sponsors in addition to core service delivery.

- Wraparound Support Services
- Mentorship
- Assistance setting up bank account
- English language tutoring
- School tutoring
- Job support and coaching
- Community navigation
- Other

THE PRIVATE SECTOR INITIATIVE: 1987-1995 (from Niskanen Center report)

The Refugee Act placed no statutory limit on the number of refugees who could be admitted, leaving the annual limit to be determined by the president.

President Reagan began exploring ways to increase refugee admissions beyond the number that congressional appropriations could support.

The concept, says Purcell, was initially implemented to help admit 2 or 3 thousand Vietnamese refugees between 1984 and 1986.

In 1986, after this initial proof of concept, President Reagan announced the creation of the Private Sector Initiative, a privately funded refugee program.

39 The program was announced as part of the Presidential Decision Directive that established the refugee limits for fiscal year 1987. In addition to the normal quotas for each region of the world, the directive created “an unallocated reserve” of refugee slots that could be used by people from any region. But dependent on the availability of private sector funding sufficient to cover the essential and reasonable costs of such admissions.”

According to Jewel LaFontant-Mankarious, the U.S. Coordinator for Refugee Affairs under President George H.W. Bush, the program was “founded on the belief that, in a time of significant constraints on all public budgets and expenditures, a privately-funded program would enable some refugees to enter and be resettled in the United States who might not otherwise be admitted because of limitations on the funded programs.”

A desire to prevent welfare dependency may have also motivated President Reagan. His outline for immigration reform in 1981 included a promise to “seek new ways to integrate refugees into our society without nurturing their dependence on welfare.”⁴³ Renewing the program for the 1988 fiscal year, President Reagan emphasized “that no federal program funds shall be expended for such admissions.”⁴⁴ He also added that “privately funded admissions may be used for refugees of special humanitarian concern to the United States in any region of the world at any time during the fiscal year.”⁴⁵

The Private Sector Initiative (PSI) allowed organizations in the United States to enter into MOUs with DoS to resettle refugees. There was no limit on the number or type of organizations eligible to apply. Sponsors were by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS).⁴⁷ Pursuant to PSI, organizations that signed up to sponsor resettlement could increase the number of admitted refugees by virtue of financing the resettlement. The MOUs required sponsors provide food, housing, medical insurance, and cash assistance.⁴⁸ According to the MOU signed by Conference for Jewish Federations (CJF) and HIAS, the sponsoring organization was: Responsible for the cost of admission (processing, transportation, documentation, medical examination), Reception and Placement and resettlement of all privately funded refugees for two years after admission of those refugees to the United States, or until they attained permanent residency status (i.e. green cards), whichever came first.

Sponsoring organizations also helped refugees prepare refugee applications, and provided information on the application process, including interviews with U.S. refugee officials. Resettlement costs for the organizations varied widely, ranging from \$1,500 to \$9,000 per refugee in 1992 (\$2,550 to \$15,300 in 2015 dollars). Publicly funded refugees cost the government about \$7,000 in 1989 (\$13,500 in 2015 dollars).

PSI refugees were designated as “unfunded” after they arrived in the United States, based on their likelihood of success in the labor market. Refugees with PSI sponsors did not “financially qualify for publicly funded medical, food, or cash assistance for two years after their admission to the United States or until they attain lawful permanent resident status.” They were also ineligible for special refugee-related service programs. Refugees who applied for benefits needed to present their I-94 INS Arrival Departure Record as identification. The I-94 form for PSI indicated that the refugee was privately sponsored and that private resources may be available.

When a PSI refugee applied for benefits, welfare offices would contact their sponsors to determine whether private resources were available. Sponsors were required to “counsel” the refugee and supply any support they needed. Theoretically, however, PSI refugees who needed benefits were eligible, though it is unclear whether or how often they made use of them. For example, the Rhode Island Department of Human Services Manual told its offices:

The sponsorship statement [...] should be regarded as lead information concerning possible income and resources that are available to the refugee. DHS and FS agency representatives are obligated to follow-up with the sponsoring agency to ascertain the actual availability of any income and resources and to use such verified information in the final decision on whether or not the refugee is eligible for assistance. It is inappropriate to simply deny an application filed by a sponsored refugee solely because of the statement on the I-94.

If a sponsor failed to meet its responsibilities, the refugee was entitled to federal benefits. Even then, the refugee remained the sponsor’s financial responsibility. The PSI MOU stated that “the sponsoring agency must reimburse the federal, state, and local governments for any assistance the refugee may receive.”

Between 1987 and 1993, at least five organizations signed PSI MOUs: the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF), the Zoroastrian Association of North America, the Vietnamese Resettlement Association, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) and the Conference for Jewish Federations (CJF).⁶⁰ According to Princeton Lyman, Assistant Secretary of State for Refugee Affairs from 1989 to 1992, Pentecostal Christians were also privately resettled in 1990, though no public record of this was found.

In 1991, the State Department officials testified that Assyrian Christians were going to bring in a certain number of privately sponsored refugees and indicated that they were attempting to recruit Ethiopian Christians. While there is no clear evidence that this occurred, the New York Times reported in 1992 that “refugee groups—Cubans, Vietnamese, Ethiopians, and the Zoroastrians of Iran—have gone beyond volunteer and social work to sponsor and subsidize refugees the Government will not admit... [i]n an unusual private sector immigration program.”

The vast majority of PSI-refugees were Cubans and Jews from the Soviet Union. In an effort dubbed “Project Exodus,” CANF registered as a VolAg and funded the resettlement of Cubans the Castro regime had stranded abroad. From 1988 to 1993, nearly 8,000 Cubans were resettled from Panama, Venezuela, Spain, Costa Rica, and the Dominican Republic. In the the late 1980s, the Soviet Union began to liberalize emigration. The United States responded by expanding admissions of refugees from the Soviet Union, with a preference for religious minorities. The numbers quickly reached unprecedented levels. From 1987 to 1990, the allotment for Soviet refugees jumped from 15,000 to 50,000, leading to dramatic cuts in refugee benefits. In 1990, the Bush administration recruited HIAS and CJF to fund the one-time admission of 10,000 Soviet Jewish refugees. Nearly 8,000 ended up coming to the United States, roughly 20 percent of all Jewish refugees in 1990.

PRIVATE SECTOR INITIATIVE OUTCOMES

From fiscal years 1987 to 1995, at least 16,016 refugees were resettled under PSI—

about 2,700 per year from 1988 to 1993. There were 7,802 Soviet Jews, 7,905 Cubans, and 45 Vietnamese and Iranians, though there may have been others, like the Jewish refugees, that were not included in the official PSI quota.

Initially, PSI sparked concerns that an increase in privately sponsored refugees would lead to reductions in publicly sponsored refugee admissions. In fact, the PSI and federal numbers consistently moved in the same direction, both peaking in fiscal year 1990.

Bill Canny, Preparation for Community Sponsorship Workshop Rome, Nov. 26, 27