

Director General Michelle Mascoll – Remarks

Building the Future through Community Sponsorship of Refugees

Day 2: September 27, 2022

9:00 – 12:00 EST / 15:00 – 18:00 CEST (Rome time)

- I want to thank you for inviting me today to say a few words about community sponsorship in Canada.
 - I've recently taken on the role of leading a new branch within Canada's immigration and refugee government department dedicated to resettlement policy. Part of our mandate includes continuing to refine our longstanding approach to private and community sponsorship, as well as promoting it around the world.
 - I understand you had a fruitful discussion yesterday exchanging civil society experiences in sponsorship, and my officials have shared some of the key insights with me as we look to learn from you as Canada continues this important work.
 - The discussion underlined the importance of grassroots organizations spearheading community sponsorship and the need to support and sustain these organizations. It also brought forward we are all at different stages in implementing community sponsorship programs and have a lot to learn from one another.
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- To provide you with some context about Canada's approach, one of the most inspiring chapters in Canada's immigration story is that of refugee sponsorship. Since 1979, Canada has resettled over 300,000 refugees through our Private Sponsorship of Refugees program.
 - Our programs have evolved over time, but what has remained at their core is engaging sponsors – including established organizations that are often faith-based, ethnic or humanitarian – to come together to welcome and integrate refugees in communities across our country.
 - In fact, working in partnership with individual citizens and community sponsorship groups has become part of the fabric of Canada's resettlement policy and programming.
 - The benefits are widespread. Our sponsorship programs have allowed us to help more refugees than we could through independent government initiatives alone. They have also allowed us to facilitate Canadians' ability to directly respond to global refugee crises. Our programs have enabled us to meaningfully engage with communities, including about the social, cultural and economic contributions refugees bring to Canada. Finally, they foster better outcomes and community ties for refugees.
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- Canada has set out important foundations for community sponsorship approaches. For example, we know they work best when:
 - they are tailored to meet the needs and context of local communities;
 - when the sponsor group is deeply responsible and deeply empowered as part of the process;
 - when government and community groups work hand-in-hand; and
 - when those with lived experience are engaged and involved at all stages of the process.

- Building on this experience, we have taken on a role as a global leader, through the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative or G-R-S-I, to share Canada's history and experience, and to support countries in designing new programs that meet their unique needs. This important initiative has opened up thousands of additional protection spaces for refugees around the world.
- Moving forward, we see opportunities to pause and reflect on our work, and to learn from our state and civil society partners.
- This is a time of enormous change, with the global pandemic having had a significant impact on our resettlement efforts around the world, and with new and emerging global crises creating an overwhelming global need for protection.
- In this context, Canada has responded and adapted our responses as required, but we recognize the need to further reflect. This includes thinking through how to ensure programs are able to rise to the challenges ahead, to harness the groundswell of support we have seen from private citizens and communities to welcome and support individuals from Afghanistan and Ukraine to come to Canada, and to ensure the voices of refugees are reflected in all our efforts.
- We continue to see an outpouring of goodwill by Canadians from across the country donating, volunteering, and supporting those affected by the crises in Afghanistan and Ukraine. The Government of Canada is supporting this goodwill by directing citizens to organizations in need and providing resources in their communities, as well as engaging businesses to support newcomers.
- As we rely on sponsors to enable community sponsorship to flourish, training and support for sponsors is paramount to equip sponsorship groups and communities with expertise and skills to support resettled refugees.
- We are also keen to continue to promote and learn from responses in other countries.
- It is our privilege to take part in this important session on how we can work together to build the future of community sponsorship, including through new and innovative connections to labour and education pathways.
- Community sponsorship remains a key lever for all of us to build global momentum and to increase the availability of protection options for more refugees around the world.
- Thank you for the opportunity to speak and I'm very much looking forward to watching the next panel.