

**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 - Report by Mark Wiggin, Volunteer Caritas
Diocese of Salford (UK).**

Introduction

The Canadian Embassy to the Holy See and the International Catholic Migration Commission, in collaboration with the Italian Embassy to the Holy See, the British Embassy to the Holy See, the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Holy See, and the U.S. Embassy to the Holy See, organised a hybrid in-person and virtual workshop on the Community Sponsorship¹ of Refugees on 26-27 September in Rome.

The two-day workshop attended in person by 130 representatives in-person (65) and online (65) was an opportunity for civil society and faith-based organizations, government representatives, NGO's, refugees, and other actors to share challenges and lessons learned to achieve sustainable, people-centred and high-quality community sponsorship programmes that ensure durable solutions for sponsored refugees. A key objective was to help participants consider how to scale up programmes in the future and adapt them to new needs. Participants heard from 5 countries about successes, but also key challenges and what those working at the grassroots would like to see in order to make these programmes more successful and more sustainable in the long term.

DAY 1 Exchanging Civil Society experiences with Sponsorship

The workshop opened with a moving testament from Anna Khrystych, a Ukrainian refugee.

The focus of the discussion on the first day was hearing from the five different civil society groups, most of them faith-based, who shared their experiences of where community sponsorship is active but at different levels of development and implementation. The five participants delivering community sponsorship represented the USA, Italy, Canada, Germany and the UK. Three key questions were asked:

¹ Community sponsorship of refugees is a partnership between governments who facilitate legal admission for refugees, and private or community actors who provide financial, social and emotional support to ensure that new arrivals are welcomed, supported and integrated into host communities. This type of partnership, pioneered in Canada over 40 years ago, is currently being implemented in different forms in almost 20 countries.

1. What is working well in your context?
2. What challenges are you facing?
3. What support would make your work more effective?

Each civil society participant was invited to set out their responses to these three questions. The answers to these questions set out below are a synthesis of inputs from the civil society participants present though please note that many are selected to represent my own views.

What's working well?

1. Community sponsorship a valuable stepping-stone to build and expand sustainable resettlement programmes and allow more refugees to access protection and durable resettlement solutions.
2. Community sponsorship, "naming", humanitarian corridors and university sponsorships are good examples of how destination countries can positively manage migration.
3. It is an example of effective government and civil society collaboration. The scheme complements and is in addition to those refugees resettled via national humanitarian schemes.
4. Through partnerships with governments and local authorities, the schemes bring additional capacities and resources to the integration of refugees through a shared responsibility between government, and civil society.
5. Community Sponsorship generates local networks and partnerships at grass root levels that can bring communities closer together to develop longer-term collaborations that often endure long after the official period of integration support for refugees has expired.
6. Sponsorship builds important social capital – among sponsors, between sponsors and newcomers, and within communities – and creates 'trusted messengers' who can share positive stories about newcomers within their own peer group.
7. Sponsorship can increase public support for refugees and promote positive narratives that can challenge negative stereotypes and build social cohesion; it promotes sponsors and refugees alike to tell their own good news stories about welcome and resettlement;
8. Volunteer training and support is good through there is room to widen the content further to include for example PTSD (trauma) support and wellbeing.
9. Participating members of the community get to know each other and work towards a common goal; for example, the scheme can strengthen parish groups and widen dialogue between a parish and their community.
10. At its core, sponsorship relies on community compassion, problem solving, and creativity –characteristics that give these programmes an inherent potential to build community.

11. Community sponsorship builds intimate forms of community connection that have positive impacts for refugees and welcoming communities alike.
12. The UK still offers some of the most generous resettlement terms of any developed country.
13. Consultation and surveys has been conducted by the Home Office and RESET to obtain the views of sponsors and participants in the scheme. In August 2022, a survey was conducted by RESET and the Home Office and was supported by the newly created Community Sponsorship Alliance – UK. Over 170 people completed the survey. The Community Sponsorship Alliance-UK has also held a separate focus group for families who have resettled through the scheme with a major finding that resettled families would welcome 'naming' as an addition to the established form of sponsorship in the UK.
14. The new Community Sponsorship Alliance-UK brings together stakeholders from across the Community Sponsorship movement to grow and improve the Community Sponsorship Scheme in the UK. Members include experts by experience, elected representatives of community sponsorship groups, Reset, and nominated lead sponsors. It also work closely with and receives advice from other organisations such as the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (GRSI) and the Refugee Hub as well as the Home Office.

What challenges are you facing?

1. If community sponsorship is to reach its potential to become a major pathway for the protection of refugees, a more ambitious vision is needed. Far more investment in infrastructure, collaboration between the parties involved and widening participation by others such as business and universities is also needed.
2. Without an ambitious vision and adequate financial investment, there is a danger that the growth of the scheme will be much slower than it needs to be and many more refugees who could be settled under the scheme will remain outside of the protection that this vital resettlement route offers.
3. Growth is a challenge – only approx. 700 refugees have benefitted to date since the scheme began in 2016. This contrasts dramatically with the Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme (Homes for Ukraine) that peaked at over 8,000 in the first week of May 2022. Arrivals have been lower since that peak, at just under 3,500 in the first week of June 2022.
4. Growing the number of lead or principal sponsors –those charities who are here for the long term – is essential to the success of the scheme. At present in the UK there are less than 20 lead sponsors compared to approx. 130 organisations that are members of the Canadian Sponsorship Agreement Holders.

5. In Community Sponsorship, the “lead sponsor” (the charity) is key to establishing appropriate boundaries between volunteers and refugee families. Without professionally managed boundaries and strong leadership, volunteers who may not have sufficient experience and knowledge in establishing such appropriate boundaries.
6. The time it takes – over 1 year - to move from application to arrival is a demotivating factor and is due to unnecessary bureaucracy as well as issues such as securing housing and obtaining consent from some Local Authorities.
7. Without guaranteed income to offset their costs, lead sponsors cannot plan ahead with confidence or scale up and sustain this important work. The principal sponsors are the lynchpin of the Community Sponsorship resettlement scheme. As the critical and pivotal animators of the scheme they need to be invested in if they are to work together more cohesively and strategically.
8. It is their willingness to participate, take responsibility and manage risks in territory traditionally the domain of the Home Office and Local Authorities that makes the principal sponsors so essential to the success of the scheme. Yet, Government or other funding grants do not currently extend to the principal sponsors.
9. Sustainability is probably the biggest challenge for lead sponsors. Even when The risks to lead sponsor stability and continuity depends on their long term resourcing.
10. There is a danger that community sponsorship may be used to strengthen the range of migration controls of a country while only slightly increasing resettlement via community sponsorship.

What support would you like to be more effective?

1. A sustainable financial investment in the sponsoring organisations themselves who deliver the scheme at the grass-roots. To facilitate this joint venture significant philanthropic, business and government investment is urgently needed.
2. Larger-scale community sponsorship requires a mix of significant government funding and philanthropic support. Strategic financial support is needed to invest directly in those sponsoring charities that are developing the scheme.
3. Governments and community leaders also needed to find ways to advance in this fragile new environment, and work together towards expanding sponsorship programmes. The major players in the refugee sector such as the Refugee Council and the Red Cross needs to be invited to pool their collective resources if there is going to be growth.
4. Streamlining the process – reducing bureaucracy / speeding up the permissions such as LA agreement means parity as a partner with Home Office and LA’s if co-design and co-production are to be meaningful activities.

5. Some civil society organisations prefer to offer a complementary role with local authorities rather than lead on the resettlement process. There is a need to explore further this blended model.
6. Widening eligibility to participate – Naming, Groups of 5 or even 4, non-charities etc. need to be brought in as options and alternatives to the current narrow model of sponsorship.
7. Involve refugees more themselves in the scheme so they can also participate fully and conduct monitoring and evaluations.
8. Continuing to invest in monitoring and evaluations of the scheme is vital if evidence of good practice is to be shared.

Day 1 summary of feedback by the moderator Philippa Hitchen

1. Vital to listen to **voices of refugees** themselves
2. Essential to increase **communications between the community actors/orgs and governments** and international institutions to streamline processes and cut waiting times for refugees being screened – no time to lose when people's lives are at stake – seen that there can be faster responses to Ukraine crisis, but others?
3. Important to tell the **success stories of community sponsorship** in order to challenge xenophobia and change public discourse around migrants and refugees
4. Crucial to **see refugees** not as a problem to be solved, but **as a resource**, enriching host communities through experiences, skills that we need in our western countries

The Challenges included:

1. Making sure that these community sponsorship programmes are **not seen as alternative** to government responsibilities for refugee settlement, but as an addition to them
2. **Manage expectations**, both of refugees and the host communities who may be enthusiastic at the start without clear grasp of longer term issues of relationship
3. How to provide **professional support** when problems arise, particularly psychological support for refugees coming from traumatic situations but also support for volunteers suffering burnout given the huge emotional investment
4. How to **step up funding** both from government and private partnerships, while respecting the independence, experience of community actors for a good division of

DAY 2 Enabling Sponsorship through national governments and International Organisations

The workshop opened with a moving testament from Mohtas Anwar Modier, refugee from Sudan who is a participant in Italy's University Corridor Sponsorship Programme.

The second day was a dialogue with government representatives, international organizations and refugees. **Julieta Valls Noyes, State Department Assistant Secretary (Population Refugees and Migration)** gave the key note address. She spoke of the 82,000 Afghans that have been recently resettled in the USA. A significant number of sponsors are from those Americans that served in the armed forces who have come forward to support the scheme. Uniting for Ukraine (U4U) has attracted 1000's of applications to help resettle Ukrainian refugees and "Sponsor Circles" – their Community Sponsorship response - has attracted over 140 sponsor organisations in 33 states and is 'unlocking civil society resources'. She concluded that, "Our own citizens will be our most important resource in the future".

Joanne Penrose Buckley, UK Deputy Director, Refugees Resettlement and Integration from the Home Office spoke of the importance of building on the skills and capacity of communities and volunteers. Whilst recognising the need to streamline the processes and administration of the scheme, it was essential to ensure that safeguarding and protection was not compromised. Going forward the Home Office is in an on-going partnership with civil society in the co-design and co-production of the scheme and is in a process of consultations and surveys to review current policy and practice.

Janine Romero Valenzuela, Resettlement/Community Sponsorship, Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community, Germany, shared the NEST Community Sponsorship programme began in 2019 that includes Groups of 5 that will be reduced going forward to Groups of 4 to encourage more take up of the scheme. Germany plans to take in 200 admissions through this scheme in addition to the 2,000 Ukrainians officially in their resettlement scheme.

Hannah Gregory, Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative, University of Ottawa, Refugee Hub shared the development of world-wide resources now available through their website. She reminded participants of the role of the Refugee Hub as a resource in itself to assist countries and sponsors grow the scheme and network together offering a go-to consultancy through an open-door approach to sponsors.

Christine Nathan, President, International Catholic Migration Commission, drew attention to the work of the SHARE + Quality Sponsor Network developed by ICMC since 2012 in Europe that brought together over the last 6 years the European actors in Community Sponsorship. She drew attention to a recently produced "Lessons Learnt" report on sponsorship available through the ICMC Europe website. Key

recommendations included managing expectations, the need for affordable housing and extending the scheme beyond the initial year to enable pathways to employment for refugees.

Jennifer Bond the CEO the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (GRSI),

brought proceeding to a conclusion with a global overview of the progress to-date of sponsorship, now taken up by over 20 countries around the world. She reflected on the variety of different models that all needed to be fine-tuned to each countries policies but also acknowledged that civil society needed the assurance that models were manageable and could be locally implemented by the sponsoring organisations. Collaborative working and partnerships were essential for the success of the schemes and financial support and funding was essential to create sustainability and scale up this critically important resettlement strategy.

Other contributions came from representatives of governments from Germany, Italy and Canada.

Concluding remarks and votes of thanks

Paul Gibbard, Chargé d’Affaires, Canadian Embassy to the Holy See and Monsignor Robert Vitillo, Secretary General to the International Catholic Migration Commission, thanked everyone involved in creating, participating in and organising the two-day workshop that brought together many of the key actors in the promotion of Community Sponsorship.

Participants

Danielle Albanese	Caritas Italy
Father Fabio Baggio C.S.	Under-Secretary, Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development:
Jennifer Bond	Chair, Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative and Founder/Managing Director Refugee Hub
Joanna Penrose Buckley	Deputy Director, Refugee Resettlement & Integration, Home Office, UK
William Canny	Executive Director, Migration and Refugee Services, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
Chiara Cardoletti	The UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR

Francesca Ferrandino	Interior Ministry (Civil Liberties & Migration), Italy
Oliviero Forti	Caritas Italiana
Anna Giustiniani	Project Officer, IOM Italy
Paul Gibbard	Chargé d’Affaires, Canadian Embassy to the Holy See
Hannah Gregory	Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative, University of Ottawa Refugee Hub
Laurence Hart	IOM Chief of Mission
Philippa Hitchen	Communications Officer, The Lutheran World Federation Moderator of workshops
Andreas Hollstei	former Mayor of Altena, Germany
Fiona Kendall	Humanitarian Corridors, Caritas Italy
Anna Khrystych	Ukrainian refugee
Michelle Mascoll	Director General, Resettlement Policy Branch, IRCC, Canada,
Mohtas Anwar Modier	refugee participant in Italy’s University Corridor Sponsorship Programme
Christine Nathan	President, International Catholic Migration Commission
Julieta Valls Noyes	United States, State Dept. Assistant Secretary (Population, Refugees, & Migration)
Cecilia Pani	Sant’Egidio, Italy
Andrea Pecoraro	UN Refugee Agency/UNHCR Italy Protection Associate
Alessandra Santopadre	Refugee Sponsorship Coordinator, Archdiocese of Montreal, Canada
Chiesa Valdese	Caritas Italy
Janine Romero Valenzuela	Resettlement/Community Sponsorship, Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community, Germany

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