

## Share Quality Sponsorship Network

### Conference on Multifaith and Wider Community Engagement in Refugee Sponsorship

May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2022

IN VIA, Stolzestraße 1A, Cologne

Germany

### CONFERENCE REPORT



Co-funded by the European Union's  
Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund

On behalf of the [Share network](#), the [Diözesan-Cartiasverband Köln e.V. \(DiCV\)](#) and [ICMC Europe](#) organised an in-person conference on “Multifaith and Wider Community Engagement in Refugee Sponsorship” that took place on the 25<sup>th</sup> of May 2022 in Cologne, Germany (see Annex 1 for the agenda). Co-funded by the European Union’s Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (AMIF) with additional support from a private donor, the conference was organised within the context of the [Share Quality Sponsorship Network \(QSN\) project](#) and sought to mobilise the enormous expertise gathered by Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) in drawing up community sponsorship schemes across Europe.

## Conference context

Across Europe, **churches and faith-based organisations have been at the heart of making community sponsorship a success**. Five out of the eight partners who collaborate within Share QSN are faith-based organisations: Caritas international in Belgium, Consorzio Communitas in Italy, the Fédération de l’Entraide Protestante in France, and the conference co-hosts DiCV and ICMC Europe. The three secular QSN partners – the Irish Refugee Council in Ireland, Citizens UK Charity in the UK, and the Basque government in Spain – also collaborate closely with local faith groupings to various degrees. While most sponsoring groups were formed by Churches or local parishes, the sponsoring groups themselves profit from diversity, joining volunteers from different faiths and secular backgrounds.

## Participants



*Iftakhar Latif (Waltham Forest Council of Mosques & UK Community Sponsorship Board) and Msgr. Ansgar Puff (Auxiliary Bishop of Cologne) in the Garden of Religions.*

Over 50 actors with relevant experience in community sponsorship and interfaith dialogue from Belgium, France, Ireland, Italy, Spain, the UK, and Germany attended the conference. Lead sponsors or supporting organisations, local volunteer sponsor groups and sponsored refugees who have experienced multicultural and/or interfaith engagement as well as refugee participants constituted the largest share of participants, but the conference also counted on the participation of strategic stakeholders such as the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) and other European secular supporting organisations as well as grassroots initiatives in Cologne.

## Key questions

Participants were invited to reflect on how to broaden engagement in community sponsorship beyond Christian faith-based groups and to explore how barriers preventing such engagement may be overcome. Against this backdrop, **the conference engaged in a conversation on some of the changes needed for broader and more sustainable engagement in sponsorship across different faith groups as well as secular actors** and the opportunities and challenges.

Participants were also invited to **exchange and share best practices in break-out sessions on subjects such as inter-faith and local community engagement, diversifying and strengthening sponsoring groups, refugee participation in sponsorship schemes and operational frameworks for safeguarding and strengthening refugee participation**. In respect to the Ukraine war, the conference also offered

a space to exchange best practices on **community-led welcoming initiatives, housing, and matching of refugees with volunteers**, whilst not neglecting the urgent need for protection of many other refugees, notably from Afghanistan.

## Welcoming Remarks



Participants lighting candles during an optional multifaith morning reflection © DiCV Köln/Jo Schwartz.

The conference was opened with an optional moment of multifaith reflection in the Garden of Religions surrounding the venue. Share QSN Refugee Advisor Mojib Rahman Atal read a poem by the Afghan poet Razeq Faani asking: “What is a refugee?” The last lines of the poem “A refugee is a man without rest, [...] a dove without nest.”, certainly resonated with participants throughout the day.

Participants were then officially welcomed to the conference by **ICMC Europe Director Petra Hueck** and **Monsignor Ansgar Puff, Auxiliary Bishop and Chairman of the Diocesan Caritas Association of Cologne**. Monsignor Puff has welcomed and supported an Albanian family with housing since 2014, when the Diocesan Caritas Association launched its [“New Neighbours Campaign”](#) (Aktion Neue Nachbarn) to welcome and integrate newcomers.



Petra Hueck (Director of ICMC Europe) welcoming participants © DiCV Köln/Jo Schwartz.



Mgr. Ansgar Puff  
(Archbishop of Cologne)  
addressing participants  
© DiCV Köln/Jo Schwartz.

The campaign supports volunteers, finances refugee aid initiatives and seeks to promote integration through language classes, integration into Catholic youth facilities, child day-care centres, schools, educational centres and projects for labour market integration and social inclusion. The project “New Neighbours, also at the Workplace” and “Welcome Colleague” has enabled the sponsorship and mentorship of over 600 migrant workers and/or trainees so far. **In the years 2014 to 2018 alone, the Archdiocese of Cologne provided a total of 37.8 million euros for refugee aid.** Participants were surprised to hear from Monsignor Puff that the Archdiocese of Cologne was able to provide **more than 100 placements for vocational training in church-led or church-affiliated bodies**. Many of which were transformed into permanent contracts. In terms of personal resources, the Archdiocese of Cologne can draw from an exceptionally large and active network of parishes and volunteers.

“Today, 22 full-time staff members act as coordinators for the local refugee work and are contact points to about 10,000 volunteers in the diocese”, Monsignor Puff explained, and this “structure proves its worth especially now in view of the arrival of many refugees from Ukraine”. Existing programmes could quickly be expanded and targeted to the **needs of people fleeing Ukraine** thanks to an **additional budget of 1.4 million euros** provided by the archdiocese.

**Mark Wiggin, former Director of Caritas Diocese of Salford, Chairperson of UK Welcomes Refugees, and Board Member of ICMC Europe**, continued the reflection on the **distinctive contribution of faith and faith-based organisations (FBOs) to community sponsorship in Europe**. He welcomed the conference as a space for FBOs and civil society to reflect among themselves how religious communities, faith, and spirituality may contribute to migration management. Churches, synagogues, mosques, temples and faith groups have **exceptional grassroots connectivity, being able to reach out and mobilise local communities for financial, material, and moral support and volunteering**, Mark Wiggin explained. Nor is “the faith-based sector [...] [a] stranger to bureaucracy, risk management and safeguarding”, he added.

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*If community sponsorship is to flourish, already engaged actors need to bring in other faith organisations and create new partnerships that engage the general public and civil society, including non-faith-based organisations such as universities and businesses*

Mark Wiggin, Chairperson UK Welcomes Refugees

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“At present, community sponsorship appears to be the prerogative of the established Christian faiths” and **Muslim communities often face higher barriers to integrate official sponsorship programmes when compared to Christian communities who can draw from long-standing state cooperation**, Mark Wiggin admitted. Counter-terrorism measures imposed by the UK government for instance,



Mark Wiggin (Caritas Salford)  
© DiCV Köln/Jo Schwartz.



Gabriela Agatiello (ICMC Europe)  
© DiCV Köln/Jo Schwartz.

may burden potential sponsor communities of Muslim faith psychologically and administratively. Therefore, changes should be made to open access to regular sponsorship programmes to non-Christian communities.

Gabriela Agatiello, Senior Policy and Project Manager at ICMC Europe, introduced participants to the [Share QSN project](#) which brings together a consortium of actors across Europe to support the development of sponsorship initiatives into sustainable, community-driven programmes. One of the aims of the project is to **engage, connect, and create spaces for exchange and learning for local European actors and communities**, using a multi-stakeholder, grassroots, and bottom-up approach fostering refugee participation.

Gabriela Agatiello underlined the mix of faith-based and secular partners in the project, thereby emphasizing that community engagement is not about religious engagement *per se*. Rather, “the goal is to support the continued leadership of Church actors while also making possible the engagement of

new faith and non-faith actors” in sponsorship, thereby broadening the sponsorship base and creating additional places of protection for refugees.

## Panel I: Examples of Successful Multifaith and Wider Community Engagement from across Europe

Moderated by Gabriela Agatiello from ICMC Europe, the panels sought to familiarise the participants with the different existing sponsorship schemes across Europe and the role (faith) communities play therein.

**Community sponsorship in Ireland, the United Kingdom, and Belgium are quite similar in the sense that NGOs are involved in mobilising, training and accompanying sponsoring groups, whereas volunteer sponsors remain the cornerstone of the programme by providing housing and funding as well as emotional and administrative support.**



Gabriela Agatiello moderating the panel discussion © DiCV Köln/Jo Schwartz.

Similarly, to the Irish and Belgian schemes, groups in the UK can apply to the central government to engage in the sponsorship programme since 2016. They need to raise 9 000 pounds and be able to provide adequate housing before the UNHCR can proceed with identifying the individuals and families to be welcomed. Right now, around 360 groups are at some stage in the preparation process, **Hannah Feldman from Citizens UK** reported. As a “community organising charity”, her organisation aims at mobilising broadly based alliances across the country, preparing for and supporting groups throughout the sponsoring process.

Belgium is nearing the end of its community sponsorship piloting phase that has been running on a smaller scale since 2020. So far 35 individuals have been sponsored, with the latest group having arrived in March shortly before the arrivals of refugees from Ukraine. No other arrivals are expected before September, **Lukas Kestens from the Belgian supporting organisation Caritas International** reported. Sponsors were mainly recruited through existing diocesan Caritas networks, but the organisation now reaches out to a broader public, mainly to migrant-led and diaspora associations. “We need to rethink our entire approach as new communities are involved and both new opportunities and challenges arise as we go beyond our well-known diocesan networks”, Lukas Kestens reported, adding that “refugee initiatives are often very dynamic, but also much less stable over time”.

The Irish community sponsorship programme has been launched in 2018 and is well supported by the state as well as UNHCR and three regional supporting organisations (RSOs), among which is the **Irish Refugee Council (IRC)** which was represented by **Rory O’Neill**. Around twenty families, mainly from Syria and Afghanistan, have been welcomed through sponsoring communities. The IRC, Irish Bishops

Conference, and other faith-based umbrella organisations are currently exploring enlargement of the existing sponsorship scheme.



Panellists from Ireland, the UK, and Belgium & Hannah Feldman addressing the audience © DiCV Köln/Jo Schwartz.

The case of the **Kildare sponsoring group in Ireland**, is a striking example of how community support stretches way beyond official sponsorship schemes. **Father Paul O'Boyle** has been for the past eighteen years the parish priest for a community of around 10 000 people in *Rathcoffey*, a village 1.5h away from Dublin. As Pope Francis over the years reiterates his call upon every parish to welcome one family, “we, with our Irish distrust of the central government, took the lead in forming a group of 10 people, building our capacities, and raising funds to become sponsors”, Father Paul told the audience. Language barriers were a huge challenge, and would not have been overcome that easily, had Father Paul’s group not been helped by native Arab speakers from the wider local community. Although making an official commitment for two years, the support has been running for much longer and yet, **“one parish, one family is very doable”** Father Paul urges, adding with a smile: “we are on a friendship model now.” Last week, he and his community welcomed seven Ukrainians to the parish hall continuing their commitment to welcoming refugees.

**Iftakhar Latif is the Waltham Forest Council of Mosques’** lead sponsor and explained that although his community of over 65 000 Muslims in the London borough could have welcomed several families on their own, the Mosques decided to inscribe their project in the long run, developing relations with other associations and Muslim communities in the area over three years prior to the first arrival. “We raised 14 000 pounds without any problem and have more than 10 000 attending prayer on Fridays, which means that calls for housing, interpretation, or a job can be easily spread on a large scale,” Iftakhar Latif said. He added: “but we would profit greatly from the professionalism and organisational skills from the Churches.” He admitted that “Muslim communities might still be less involved because there are additional counterterrorism requirements from the Home Office, which refuses to treat Syrians and Muslims the same as everybody else,” whereas welcoming refugees through community sponsorship would be “a fantastic opportunity to promote faith values in larger society.” He explained that there is a certain reticence to professionalising welcome and make it a paid job rather than keeping it a gratuitous service of fraternity.

**Bart Vercaemer** lives in a small **city of roughly 20 000 inhabitants near Gent, Belgium**. His sponsoring group was launched by the local parish priest who, once retired, contacted Caritas to fundraise around 20 000 EUR as starting capital. The priest could rely on long established links in the wider local community for occasional support or material donations but based the volunteer sponsorship group on a smaller core group consisting of four families composed of young adults, educators, health professionals, and public officials who would meet on a regular basis to coordinate support.

**The Basque Country regional pilot programme started in 2019**, when five families from Syria were welcomed to the Basque country. The Basque government takes a lead function and provides funding, whereas civil society associations organise the housing and coordinate groups of six to seven volunteers per family. “Beyond these core volunteer groups, a wider network is needed to provide for all needs”, **Inés Vicente Barbero from the [Asociación Loiolaetxea](#)** explained. She herself works as a social worker who is paid (with the support of funding from the Basque government) to mediate between the local community, volunteer sponsors, and sponsored refugees. Hearing others speak in the panel, she felt encouraged to reach out to other faith groups.

Following the example of successful regional programme in the Basque country, **Valencia in 2020 also started a regional sponsorship programme** welcoming five refugee families. Here also, the local government provides for financial needs whereas associations such as the **Jesuit Refugee Service**, for which **Carmen Alonso** works as a social worker, contribute with complementary counselling services. “Sponsorship in Spain is different from the schemes presented before: state welfare and rent is provided during the sponsorship period, intermediary organisations (such as her organisation) receive a salary from the regional government for their work supporting the families and volunteers, and the volunteer sponsors never need to fundraise,” she underlined.

**The French government in 2017 signed a protocol with the [Fédération de l’Entraide Protestante \(FEP\)](#) to implement a Humanitarian Corridors programme for refugees.** The FEP has welcomed 324 individuals from 2017 to 2022 and managed to renew the programme for another 300 people to be sponsored over the 2022-2025 period, their coordinator **Guilhem Mante** reported. “Our programme is very different from those in other European countries as the government only delivers humanitarian visas and remains very limited in the concrete implementation of sponsorship [...], the overall infrastructure is pretty much managed by FEP.”

The FEP has a team in Lebanon working in partnership with the UNHCR and other organisations to refer cases of vulnerable people eligible for international protection to the French consulate as well as preparing selected individuals for departure. In France, the FEP liaises with national authorities and coordinates a national platform of intermediate organisations that provide professional administrative or legal support to newcomers upon arrival. “At the heart of the project are the local sponsor groups who provide housing and create links with the wider community,” Guilhem Mante explained. “They often (but not always) are linked to parishes and indeed do the time-consuming work.” Micheline Helaleh agreed. Every two months, FEP organises a meeting for all volunteer citizen collectives (volunteer sponsors) engaged in sponsorship; “two hours of exchange via zoom to answer questions and share experience.”

In France, regional intermediary organisations bear the main responsibility in reaching out to volunteer sponsor groups and recruiting new ones. They often have difficulties reaching out beyond existing networks. Hearing about the British example encouraged conference attendees to further develop multifaith engagement in sponsorship. “We enjoy close cooperation between Catholic and Protestant churches and their affiliated organisations, but now we need to extend our engagement to other religious and secular actors”, Guilhem Mante admitted. Another idea



Micheline Helaleh (sponsored refugee, FEP), Veerle Steppe (Caritas Intl.), Salim Sebaa (cultural mediator, Caritas Intl.) © DiCV Cologne/Jo Schwartz.

advanced by Micheline Helaleh was to make previously welcomed families host themselves, or at least strongly involve them in supporting new arrivals. As she herself was welcomed by volunteer sponsors through the humanitarian corridors and has been through the whole process she finds “it helps to understand peers from the same culture”.

In 2018, 23 first refugees from Eritrea were welcomed to an Italian diocese, where they were distributed to different parishes with experience in working with migrants but for the first time became hosts providing accommodation and everything needed for living. Since then, more than 2500 people have been **welcomed to Italy through the Humanitarian Corridors**. “We are organised in a similar manner as the French”, **Sister Cristina Ripamonti from Caritas Ambrosiana** explained, “volunteers in the parishes are doing the concrete welcome and are supported by social workers from Caritas and other linked cooperatives and organisations such as the Board of Waldesian Churches or Sant’Egidio”.



Panellists from France, Spain, and Italy. Gabriela Agatiello, Sister Cristina Ripamonti I.J.S. & Sessen Berhane (Caritas Ambrosiana) © DiCV Köln/Jo Schwartz

**Sessen Berhane, coordinator for the cultural mediators in Milano**, came to Italy through the Humanitarian Corridors programme and has “known what it means to have no help.” Although upon arrival, operators from Caritas often explain how the programmes work, she is aware of the absolute necessity to have cultural mediators who can not only translate from one language into another but can provide a culture-sensitive introduction into their new life. “That the Caritas operators gain trust of the newly arrived refugees is absolutely essential” to successfully implement the programme and “to reduce secondary movements to another European country,” Sessen Berhane argued.

### **CONCLUSIONS ON THE STATE OF COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP IN EUROPE**

Community sponsorship schemes have been successfully growing and expanding in their piloting phase. Currently, many of the schemes are in the process of being consolidated. Nevertheless, a common concern for the European schemes remains: the long-term sustainability, especially in changing (geo)political contexts. Successful expansion of the schemes can be achieved through collaborations and partnerships across faiths and stakeholder types, linking actors from the local, regional, and national level in terms of fundraising, volunteer engagement (translators, cultural mediators, etc.), job or training placements, and outreach.



## Panel II: Opportunities and Challenges in Multifaith and Wider Community Engagement in the German NesT Programme

Irene Porsch, the Archdiocese of Cologne's Refugee Officer, provided a brief overview of the New Neighbours Campaign as well as the Diocesan Caritas' Associations engagement in the German NesT programme. The German national sponsorship programme called **Neustart im Team** ("new start in a team") was established as a pilot programme in 2019 and will be consolidated from 2023 onwards, NesT coordinator Nadine Dick from the Federal Agency for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) shared with the audience.



German panellists explaining NesT © ICMC Europe/Gabriela

The programme divides tasks between the BAMF, three coordinating civil society institutions (The Red Cross, Catholic Caritas, and Protestant Diakonie), and the mentor groups. Two out of the three coordinating institutions are affiliated with the church: the Catholic Caritas and the Protestant Diakonie. The three civil society institutions have established central contact points, so-called "Zentrale Kontaktstellen" (ZKS), which inform, train and accompany the sponsoring groups (in Germany volunteer sponsoring groups are called mentors). "We work with a team of 5 persons to provide information to the general public, reach out to interested or interesting NGOs, recruit mentors, train volunteers, and advise the groups", **Elena Knezevic from Caritas Germany** explained. For example, the ZKS is responsible for checking the plausibility of applications before handing them over to the BAMF. Upon the agency's confirmation the ZKS provides them with three compulsory training sessions. Through their website and social media accounts, they advocate for sponsorship and inform about their intercultural training opportunities. "From experience, groups who already engaged with refugees before starting the application process are best suited to start the process," Elena Knezevic further explained.

To ease with recruitment on new volunteer sponsor groups, the BAMF foresees starting in July 2022 to lower the group size requirement to minimum four mentors (volunteers) and reduce the requirement of providing housing to one year (compared to previously five people providing housing for two years), Nadine Dick added. As a liaising institution between the mentors and the BAMF, the ZKS is essential to ease recruitment and raise awareness about the programme and it would therefore be "essential to introduce new organisations or churches in the ZKS consortium" once the BAMF launches its call for new applications this summer, Nadine explained.

According to Irene Porsch, housing and financial requirements are one of the main barriers to an expansion of the sponsorship programme: "In Cologne, accommodation for locals already is hardly available and we had a group of volunteers which for two years tried to become a mentorship group but did not find any accommodation and could therefore not meet the minimum requirements." The DiCV Cologne, especially through its New Neighbours campaign, provides the three mentoring groups in the Archdiocese with funding in the realm of housing. Furthermore, the DiCV Cologne provides a vast net of counselling offices and support through trainings and capacity building. "Most sponsoring

initiatives are currently run by Church institutions and local parishes”, Irene Porsch stated, and it would be good to have other refugee associations participating in the sponsorship scheme.

**Ottmar Bongers, lead mentor in the sponsoring group of the Caritas circle of St. Gereon**, gave a strong testimony on engaging the wider community in the mentoring: “we have Muslim faith members in our wider parish who were able to help with translations [...] it is difficult to actually distinguish who belongs to the NesT mentoring groups and those engaged in the initiative as such.” For seven years, the parish had supported refugees before they themselves decided to become mentors. The two first refugees to have arrived through the NesT programme were two sisters welcomed by his parish mentorship group. They are now already welcoming a second family.

The Caritaskreis St. Gereon is a local grassroots initiative providing education for groups and people. More than 20 children are picked up from school and supported with homework by volunteers from the parish and beyond, weekly meetings are organised to offer support in navigating complex bureaucracy, neighbours are mobilised to organise leisure activities such as bicycle tours or repairs, guitar classes are facilitated and encounters outside of the sponsor circle encouraged. “We always try to keep the communication in person and do shared activities,” Ottmar said, “and our local network reaches well beyond the parish, we can count on a local community without which we would not be able to perform all that we do.” And he adds, “unlike many other activities where the people decide to leave the Church, we welcomed 21 new volunteers over the past three months.”



*Participants attending the panels © DiCV Köln/Jo Schwartz.*

**Masooma Torfa in her function as Share QSN Refugee Advisor** and speaker in the panel also believes that Muslim organisations should be more acknowledged in their contributions to refugee and migrant integration. According to Masooma, “Civil society organisations in Germany are - with 4 million employees - the biggest non-public employer, and faith-based organisation make up most of them,”. Yet, these are mainly affiliated to the established Christian churches and commonly referred to as the “social pillar” (Soziale Träger). The Muslim organisations often do similar things in terms of welcome, social, and even labour market integration, but in a manner are less visible to the general public. Masooma explained that if NesT were to facilitate ‘naming in sponsorship’ (the sponsoring of family members for example) and lower the financial burdens further, migrants and other refugees who have already settled in Germany could have a real chance to become sponsors in the future.

## Afternoon Networking Forum

After the lunch break, conference participants split into five parallel working groups to discuss in a more targeted manner opportunities and challenges in existing sponsorship programmes and formulate recommendations to overcome these. Discussion groups were facilitated by Share QSN partners and QSN refugee advisors.

Each of the breakout groups had an **assigned moderator who introduced the respective topic** and facilitated the sessions in a **participatory and interactive** way. Each discussion group, consisting of five to ten participants, noted (1) opportunities and challenges, (2) good practices, and (3) recommendations. The main takeaways from the different discussion groups were presented back to plenary by moderators and are summarised in the tables below.

### 1. Building Strong & Diverse Sponsoring Groups (led by Hannah Feldman, Citizens UK)

Lead sponsors and civil society/faith-based organisations often encounter difficulties in recruiting and building stronger, more diverse, and cohesive volunteer sponsor groups. Differences in cultural understandings or expectations lead at times to tensions within the sponsor groups and misunderstandings between volunteer sponsors and refugee participants. The practice of personal faith can be a profound need for participants, yet sponsoring groups and sponsored refugees do not always share the same faith.

Diversifying and building strong group dynamics can enhance integration prospects for refugees by offering them more diverse contacts within the receiving society, including their own faith community. Open engagement with differences makes sponsorship initiatives more sustainable and societies more resilient in the long term.

#### Central questions:

- How can the challenges and richness posed by diverse cultures and faiths across local communities and within sponsoring groups be articulated?
- How can organisations support the mobilising and recruitment of new volunteers? How can intercultural mediators and the wider community be better involved in sponsorship?
- And conversely, how can sponsor groups facilitate possibilities for refugees to connect with communities outside their volunteer sponsor group?

#### (i) Recruitment of volunteers

##### CHALLENGES

Recruiting diverse volunteers:

- Lead sponsors, civil society and faith-based organisations often struggle to find a lynchpin leader or institution who are gatekeepers to a vast network of volunteers and resources

##### TOOLS/APPROACHES

- Recruit from pre-existing networks

- Find organisations and people that are embedded in their local community. Organisations and people in every country have pre-existing networks (e.g. Citizens UK, volunteers from other micro volunteering initiatives)

#### BEST PRACTICES:

- Citizens UK proactively brings together different communities and networks into their partnerships
- Using online webinars and social media presence to raise awareness about work and benefits of volunteering

#### (ii) Disagreements within sponsor groups /between sponsored refugees and volunteers

##### CHALLENGES

- Different opinions on subjects relating to sponsoring may cause conflict in the group

##### TOOLS / APPROACHES

- Mediation, establishing a Code of Conduct, involving intermediate supporting organisations (i.e. Caritas, Regional Support Organisations, FEP, Citizens UK) and facilitating open and honest discussions are different approaches to deal with conflict and encourage cooperation.

#### BEST PRACTICES:

- Volunteer sponsors from Belgium and Germany recommended organising regular check-in meetings for sponsor group members to mediate any problems that may arise as well as with the sponsored family.

#### (iii) Sustained engagement from volunteers

##### CHALLENGES

- Long-term motivation of volunteers involved in the sponsorship-scheme

##### TOOLS / APPROACHES

- Engage and sustain volunteer sponsors by sensitising them to their motivation.
- Having volunteers reflect and articulate their self-interest and own needs in being a sponsor is key to a fruitful communication on behalf of all persons involved.

## 2. Refugee Participation & Agency (led by Anne Dussart, Caritas Intl. & Mojib Rahman Atal (QSN Refugee Advisor)

Participatory and co-creation/co-design approaches have not yet been widely developed in the context of community sponsorship and integration.



Working group in action © ICMC Europe/Gabriela Agatiello.

**Refugees themselves are seldom included in the design, development, implementation, and evaluation of policies that impact their lives.**

Formative evaluations of sponsorship have included a few interviews with (formerly) sponsored refugees, yet their feedback thus far has not been consistently and systematically included in the design and implementation of sponsorship programmes, whereas refugee voices provide unique expertise from lived experience. Often, refugees also have access to important diaspora or faith networks and dispose of linguistic and intercultural capacities of great value to other volunteers involved in sponsorship.

**Active participation of refugees in all phases of the programme, supports refugee self-reliance and contributes to a more forward-looking system.**

- Given their lived experience, what roles can and should persons with migrant background play in community sponsorship – e.g. as advisors, staff, volunteer sponsors, cultural mediators, in advocacy, interpreters, evaluators, or other?
- How can the ties of people with migrant background to their ethnic or faith organisations be best utilised to broaden and improve community engagement in sponsorship?
- How do existing programmes attempt to make participation more sustainable and meaningful throughout programme design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation?
- How can we avoid the tokenisation of refugee voices?

**Central insights**

- 1. Definition of the terms: refugee, newcomer, new citizen, woman, man,**
  - a. Above mentioned terms and legal denominations contribute to form an identity, which shifts the attention to the question: **“who are you?”**.
- 2. Empowerment and returning dignity of the forcibly displaced as fundamental goal**
  - a. “Refugees are people with important and enriching qualities”
- 3. Discussion of the term “help”:**
  - a. Do we help refugees? Do refugees help us?
  - b. Helping is an interdependent process.
- 4. Participation and empowerment**
  - a. Intercultural mediation through former refugees is a form of participation. It allows to formulate and include intercultural perspectives into the resettlement-schemes.

(i) Drawing strength from refugee identity

**CHALLENGES**

- Refugees can be pushed to erase their identities
- The connection to their cultural roots and to new society may cause conflicting identities, wider identities are possible

**TOOLS / APPROACHES**

- Connect refugees among themselves in grassroots / diaspora organisations
- Political and administrative participation: facilitate the connection of diaspora & migrant orgs to authorities and ensure their needs are heard

## (ii) Language barriers

### CHALLENGES

- Slow-paced language learning
- Inability to communicate well with receiving community

### TOOLS / APPROACHES

- Language cafés, language tandems, qualified translators

## (iii) Intercultural dialogue

### CHALLENGES

- Not enough intercultural mediation
- Cross-cultural misunderstandings

### TOOLS / APPROACHES

- Sponsors/host communities need to be sensitised to understand refugees' culture
- More encounters between refugees and host country nationals
- Acceptance of different definitions of integration

## (iv) Tokenism

### CHALLENGES

Using refugees for their stories only:

- Need to overcome "tokenism" especially in context of community sponsorship

### TOOLS / APPROACHES

- Develop ambassador programmes with meaningful impact
- Participation comes through recognition (of needs and skills)
- Trust to go beyond sharing of experience

## (v) Underrepresentation

### CHALLENGES

- Underrepresentation of refugees and migrants

### TOOLS / APPROACHES

- Explain power dynamics and hierarchies
- Develop awareness of what it means to give and receive

## (vi) Participation

### CHALLENGES

- Overburdening – e.g., when is a refugee 'ready' to participate?

### TOOLS / APPROACHES

- Don't put everything on refugees' shoulders
- Refugees should decide how and to what extent to participate
- Allow for different levels of participation

- be empathetic to refugees situation/provide support

#### BEST PRACTICES:

- In the UK and France, lead sponsors/intermediary supporting organisations organise peer group meetings for newly arrived refugees

### 3. Expectation Management & Phasing Out of Sponsorship (led by Guilhem Mante, FEP)

Linking pre-departure to post-arrival is essential. Thorough pre-departure orientation and post-sponsorship autonomy both rely on effective expectation management. In many sponsorship programmes across Europe, intermediary civil society organisations (lead sponsors, civil society contact points, regional support organisations) often find themselves supporting refugees financially and/or with practical emotional and integration support well beyond the envisaged sponsorship duration.



Working group in action © ICMC Europe

In France, preparing refugees and receiving communities before arrival, and connecting refugees to peers and the community during the first few months after arrival has shown to facilitate a smoother integration into the new community.

#### Leading questions:

- How can processes become more transparent to help reduce uncertainty at the beginning and towards the end of sponsorship periods?
- What information needs to be communicated to volunteers, sponsored refugees, and the local community to smoothen out the reception and integration of refugees and the phasing out of sponsorship initiatives?
- What other tools exist to support realistic placement expectations of all participants from the start to the end of the sponsorship period?
- What support is needed from actors at the national, regional and local level to facilitate expectation management and phasing out of sponsorship?

#### (i) Retaining autonomy of sponsored persons

#### CHALLENGES

- Mental framework: « saviour mentality » of sponsors can lead to conflicting expectations

#### TOOLS / APPROACHES

- Facilitating autonomy of newcomers/refugees is paramount
- Awareness amongst sponsors to « set own boundaries» regarding wishes/requests of newcomers/refugees
- careful selection of mentors/volunteer sponsors

## (ii) Framing expectations

### CHALLENGES

- Expectations from both refugees and volunteers need to be managed from the outset

### TOOLS / APPROACHES

- Basic premise “we will all do our best”
- Volunteer sponsor groups should not be overburdened with administrative tasks

## (iii) Matching process

### CHALLENGES

- Non-transparent matching processes (delays in matching, difficult for refugees in first country of arrival to project themselves and picture future reality in Europe, high needs refugees matched in rural areas with little services)
- This also negatively affects the phasing-out phase

### TOOLS / APPROACHES

- Clear criteria, transparency
- Match families from rural origins in rural areas and urban families in urban contexts

## (iv) Providing information

### CHALLENGES

- People in first countries of asylum do not always receive sufficient information

### TOOLS / APPROACHES

- Provide focused information, because there is limited capacity to retain or comprehend
- Give relevant and precise information on the circumstances in arrival country and community, adjusted to the pre-departure mental and emotional conditions
- Pre-arrival training for sponsors

## (v) Different cultures

### CHALLENGES

- Cultural shock upon arrival (on both sides)

### TOOLS / APPROACHES

- Manage this shock before any other obligation, especially of religious and cultural order
- Kick-off meeting with external mediator
- Organise peer group discussions

### BEST PRACTICES:

- In Belgium, cultural mediators from across the country meet regularly
- In France, two months after each arrival, refugees have a zoom meeting with previously sponsored persons



#### (vi) Developing autonomy

##### CHALLENGES

- Overreliance on the sponsor group

##### TOOLS / APPROACHES

- Provide information on essential needs and help (e.g. medics) from beginning – with translation from the outset
- Establish targets from one week to the other
- Avoid different behaviour “once the honeymoon is over”
- Have internally designated mediators in each volunteer group
- Professionalised intermediate organisations can support refugees directly with counselling and other needs.

#### (vii) Phasing out

##### CHALLENGES

- Finding adequate and affordable housing once the sponsorship period ends
- The host community must accept that refugees might move on (especially in small rural areas)

##### TOOLS / APPROACHES

- Involve local authorities from the beginning
- List goals for autonomy in collaboration with sponsored family

##### BEST PRACTICES:

- In Germany, the job centre validates accommodation from the beginning, so once the sponsorship period ends the state benefits take over, which guarantees a smooth transition
- In the UK, periodic interviews are held with the sponsored persons regarding their objectives for autonomy

#### 4. Safeguarding Tools & Practices (led by Mark Wiggin, Caritas Salford)

The three consecutive Safeguarding workshops were delivered by Mark Wiggin, former Director of Caritas Diocese of Salford and the Chairperson of UK Welcomes Refugees as well as a member of the ICMC Europe Board of Management.

##### CHALLENGES

The **safety and wellbeing** of refugees and all other actors involved is of primary importance to create quality and sustainable sponsorship programmes. Deliberate monitoring through regular check-ins with both refugees and volunteer sponsors, as well as safeguarding mechanisms (i.e. sponsorship breakdown, child protection, abuse, domestic violence) is important and needs to be clearly communicated to all actors involved.

Refugees and asylum seekers have the same fundamental rights to safety and protection as any other person and the fact that their citizenship status may not have been resolved does not alter this. The key questions the workshops addressed were:

- Does your organisation have a safeguarding policy?
- Would everyone know what to do if there was a concern about possible abuse?
- Are you recruiting workers and volunteers safely and carrying out checks where possible?
- Are you training and supporting your staff and volunteers?
- Do refugees know what to do if they have safeguarding concerns?

## DEFINITIONS

Safeguarding is a term closely associated with **protection** especially of children and vulnerable adults. In Europe, both the terms 'safeguarding' and 'protection' are used, with a strong movement towards using the term 'safeguarding'. Safeguarding is taken to be a more **active term**, that has broader connotations from protection, which has often been linked to the work of particular professionals, such as social workers. The generic meaning of the term safeguard, is to protect something from harm, using an appropriate measure. In relation to the field of preventing and dealing with abuse issues in society, safeguarding means that organisations, paid staff and volunteers as well as refugees themselves are all aware that systems are in place to reduce and illuminate abuse.

### Definition

- clearly state the scope of the policy and what it covers in terms of the range of safeguarding issues covered.

### Safe Recruitment

- set out what actions the organisations takes to safely recruit its staff and volunteers including reference checks, carrying out interviews, screening such as police and security checks.

### Reviewing policies

- It is recommended that your organisations safeguarding policies are reviewed annually to keep them up to date with good practice legislation and compliance with the law.

## GUIDELINES

### Training

- Making sure that everybody understands the policy and how to use it. Also, awareness raising about abuse and safeguarding measures is important to consider, as is training on boundary issues, cultural sensitivities and differences between different cultures.

### Raising concerns

- Staff, volunteers and refugees need to know how to raise a safeguarding concern and if necessary, how to take it to the next stage in procedures.

### Risk Assessments

- Analysis of the risks in delivering your service and those faced by the organisations, staff, volunteers and refugee beneficiaries need to be identified as well as the actions you need to take to mitigate and reduce these risks.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Everybody's responsibility – safeguarding is everybody's responsibility and not just the responsibility of a named or nominated person in your team!
- A Safeguarding Policy is an essential tool to set out how a project and organisation will take action to keep safe everybody involved in your project and organisation.
- A Safeguarding lead-person or champion in your project or organisation is an important appointment to ensure that good practice is developed.
- Curiosity – encourage people to be curious about the happiness of other people and what is making them happy and unhappy. Developing a sense of curiosity will help people to make the connection between the behaviours of people and possible abuse.
- Support groups –people who live in isolation of other people and their communities are often more vulnerable to abuse than those who have friends and a peer support group. Encouraging peer support groups led by refugees themselves is a strong counter-measure to isolation and enables the development of safe spaces to discuss sensitive issues.



Participants at the conference © DiCV Köln/Jo Schwartz.

## 5. Volunteering, Private Housing, Matching in the Context of the Ukrainian Crisis (led by Rory O'Neill, IRC)

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, approximately 6.4 million people have fled Ukraine (figures in May 2022). This has led the EU to activate the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) for the first time, granting all Ukrainian nationals a residence permit with rights to education, work, and accommodation for one year. It further gives Ukrainians agency over deciding where to apply for a temporary residence permit, allowing them to draw on their existing links with European countries either through family, work or friends. An incredible outpour of public support and volunteering initiatives have been witnessed in the past months: citizens all over Europe are donating clothes, food but also opening their houses to welcome Ukrainians. Initiatives, such as the latter, resemble community sponsorship in that they also are public-private partnerships.

The UK, where the TPD does not apply, has set up the Homes for Ukraine sponsorship scheme which allows Ukrainian nationals and their family members to come to the UK if they have been invited by a sponsor. A sponsor in the UK scheme – sometimes referred to as a host – is a person, a family or a community that can offer a Ukrainian national and their family a place to stay and is willing to confirm that in the refugee's visa application. The scheme allows Ukrainians to stay in the UK for up to three years.

### Leading questions:

- How have civil society organisations with knowledge on managing volunteers, private housing and matching of refugees with volunteers, been able to support these initiatives? What lessons learned from community sponsorship can be adapted to these initiatives?
- How could these initiatives impact community sponsorship schemes, in terms of both benefits & challenges? What could community sponsorship programmes learn from such initiatives?
- How can these initiatives be made sustainable (longer-term solutions)? How could they be extended to refugees other than Ukrainians?

### CHALLENGES

- Extending the outpouring of welcome to other nationalities
- Ensuring that housing offered is adequate
- Ensuring safeguarding

### TOOLS / APPROACHES

- Approaching volunteers and asking them to also support other nationalities
- Engage in vetting procedures, including performing a house visit, police-checks, offering safeguarding training
- Adapting sponsorship trainings to volunteers welcoming Ukrainians

The facilitators reported back from discussion groups to the plenary before Irene Porsch and Petra Hueck closed the conference with a short wrap up and thanks to all contributing parties, especially **Stephan Leo Joyce from DiCV** as well as **Gabriela Agatiello and Anna Wera Wilms from ICMC Europe** who have been central in organising the conference.



Guilhem Mante (FEP) reporting back in the plenary

## Main take-aways from the Conference

**Faith-based organisations, lead sponsors/supporting organisations and local volunteer groups consisting of both sponsors and sponsored refugees were able to reflect upon experiences and exchange best practices in Cologne.**

“It was great to finally meet in person, to greet the organising team and meet delegates from various regions. The wealth of shared experiences, diversity of actors, and variance of different regions all added to the enrichment of one's experience taken away from this conference,” a conference participant shared. After Covid, the return to an in-person exchange was certainly most appreciated by all participants.

While community sponsorship programmes are still quite small in Europe, they are gradually expanding - some preliminary take-aways from the Cologne Share QSN conference can help further expand and improve sponsorship in Europe:

## KEY LESSONS LEARNT

- **Engaging different faiths and the wider local community in community sponsorship makes programmes more efficient and sustainable over time**, facilitating not only social but also very concrete challenges such as labour market integration;
- **Outreach strategies to mobilise/engage new sponsor groups** need to be defined/thought out early on by supporting organisations;
- **Potential opportunities in multifaith engagement** ought to be seized with regards to sponsor group recruitment, fundraising, as well as volunteering for translation or other support as well as general awareness raising about sponsorship;
- **Creating more synergies between Muslim, Jewish and Christian network organisations'** ought to be explored;
- **Multi-stakeholder partnerships and more diverse sponsoring groups help to smooth out the sponsoring process**, and present good opportunities to find job or training placements through community networks;
- **Migrant- and refugee-led associations should be at the heart of programmes, from their conception over monitoring implementation up to evaluating outcomes;**
- **Comprehensive preparation and orientation of prospective sponsors and newcomers prior to arrival** is needed.

### Quote from conference participant:

“We made new friends and hopefully this will bring the multifaith aspect of this work more freshness and vitality. The conflicts in our world seem to be never ending; as a result the chain of refugees whether political, economic or those affected by trauma of displacement due to wars is something which will continue in the near future. There is an ever increasing need to engage communities rather than just relying on governments, as it is the only way to face the far-right extremist elements of our society.” (participant Qaiser Malik)

## Annex 1. Conference programme.

<b>9:00 - 9:20</b>	<b>Opening &amp; Welcome</b> Petra Hueck (ICMC Europe/Share network) Auxiliary Bishop Ansgar Puff (Archdiocese of Cologne, Germany)
<b>9:20-9:35</b>	<b>The Role of Faith &amp; FBOs in Sponsorship</b> Mark Wiggin (Caritas Salford, UK)
<b>9:35-9:45</b>	<b>Introduction to Share QSN</b> Gabriela Agatiello (ICMC Europe/Share network)
<b>9:45-11:15</b>	<b>Panel I: Examples of Successful Multifaith and Wider Community Engagement from across Europe</b> Moderator: Gabriela Agatiello (ICMC Europe/Share network) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ireland: Rory O’Neil (Irish Refugee Council) &amp; Fr. Paul O’Boyle (Sponsor Group Kildare)</li> <li>• United Kingdom: Hannah Feldman (Citizens UK) &amp; Iftakhar Latif (Waltham Forest Council of Mosques)</li> <li>• Belgium: Lukas Kestens (Caritas Internationalis) &amp; Bart Vercaemer (Sponsor Group Gent)</li> <li>• Spain: Inés Vicente Barbero (Asociación Loiolaetxea) &amp; Carmen Alonso (JRS Valencia)</li> <li>• France: Guilhem Mante &amp; Micheline Helaleh (Fédération de l’Entraide Protestante)</li> <li>• Italy: Sr. Cristina Ripamonti I.J.S. (Caritas Ambrosiana) &amp; Sessen Berhane (Refugee Mediator)</li> </ul>
<b>11:30-12:30</b>	<b>Panel II: Opportunities and Challenges in Multifaith and Wider Community Engagement in the German NesT Programme</b> Moderator: Irene Porsch (Refugee Officer Archdiocese of Cologne) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nadine Dick (BAMF NesT coordinator)</li> <li>• Elena Knezevic (NesT ZKS Contact Point for Caritas)</li> <li>• Ottmar Bongers (Sponsor Group Caritaskreis St. Gereon)</li> <li>• Masooma Torfa (Share Network Refugee Advisor)</li> </ul>
<b>14:00-16:00</b>	<b>Afternoon Networking Forum</b> Choice from different parallel discussions to share tools and practices on diverse topics, participants will be rotating twice to discuss three out of the topics below:
14:05-14:40 DISCUSSION 1	<b>Building Strong &amp; Diverse Sponsoring Groups</b> (led by Hannah Feldman, Citizens UK)
14:45-15:20 DISCUSSION 2	<b>Refugee Participation &amp; Agency</b> (led by Anne Dussart, Caritas International, & Mojib Rahman Atal, QSN Refugee Advisor)
15:25-16:00 DISCUSSION 3	<b>Expectation Management &amp; Phasing Out of Sponsorship</b> (led by Guilhem Mante, FEP)
	<b>Safeguarding Tools &amp; Practices</b> (led by Mark Wiggin, Caritas Salford)
	<b>Volunteering, Private Housing, Matching in the Context of the Ukrainian Crisis</b> (Rory O’Neill, Irish Refugee Council)
<b>16:00-16:30</b>	<b>Facilitators report back from discussion groups</b> <b>Closing Remarks &amp; Next Steps</b> Irene Porsch (DiCV Refugee Officer) & Petra Hueck (ICMC Europe/Share network)