



Regions and Cities as Sponsors

Conference and Look & Learn Visit

15-17 June, Bilbao, Euskadi

Coordinated by ICMC Europe, the [Share Network](#) provides a multi-stakeholder platform for mutual exchange and learning amongst regional and local actors to foster welcome, inclusion, and integration of newly arrived migrants and refugees in Europe. In 2021 it launched the [Quality Sponsorship Network \(QSN\)](#) to support pilot and ad-hoc sponsorship initiatives to develop into sustainable, community-driven programmes.

The QSN partnership is composed by the Basque Government (ES), Caritas International (BE), Consorzio Communitas (IT), the Fédération de l'Entraide Protestante (FEP), DiCV Cologne (DE), the Irish Refugee Council (IE), and Citizens UK (UK). One of the main objectives of the Share QSN Network is to widen engagement in community sponsorships by including regions and cities as active partners.

A leading example of **regional engagement** is the Auzolana (Basque for 'Welcome') pilot community sponsorship initiative that was launched in March 2019 to welcome five Syrian families in Basque municipalities: **Bilbao, Arrigorriaga, Portugalete, Andoain and Vitoria-Gasteiz**. The initiative is the **first community sponsorship programme, organized and led by a regional government**. The programme counts on the active participation of the UNHCR, the Spanish State Secretariat for Migration, civil society actors from Caritas Diocesana in Bilbao, Andoain and Gasteiz, and the Ignacio Ellacuría Social Foundation in Arrigorriaga and Portugalete; as well as local sponsorship volunteering groups which accompany the families' welcoming and settlement process, while coordinating integration efforts with the municipalities where refugees are hosted. The Basque pilot programme was evaluated in 2021 with evaluation reports available in [Spanish, Basque and English](#).

Since 2019, the **regional governments of Valencia and Navarra** have also launched sponsorship pilot programmes – under a similar approach as the Basque Government coordinated programme. To build on the successful first initiative, the Basque government will start a second programme to welcome Syrian refugees from Lebanon, with arrivals planned for May 2022.

Being both a pioneer initiative in the engagement of regional governments in complementary pathways, as well as an interesting example of multilevel governance, the conference and Look & Learn visit seeks to invite partners and interested stakeholders to learn and reflect upon the Basque, Valencia and Navarra experiences in building successful multi-stakeholder community sponsorship programmes. The conference and visit will bring together representatives of European cities and regions as well as other relevant stakeholders, creating a space for discussion, knowledge sharing, exchange of best practices and capacity building among participants. **The programme will focus on identifying successful regional and local approaches to sponsorship, welcome and integration and look at successful models of governance, sponsor and volunteer engagement and partnerships with local authorities.**

With an ongoing war in **Ukraine**, thousands of regional, local and citizen led volunteer initiatives are currently responding across Europe to house and support arriving refugees. The visit will therefore come at a crucial moment to take stock of these **first citizen welcoming and solidarity initiatives and explore how these interact with state-led responses and can add to new partnerships to welcome refugees.**



Agenda

Day 1	Look and Learn Visit <i>Venue: Bilbao Berrikuntza Faktoria - Mondragon Unibertsitatea (Uribitarte Kalea 6 - 48001 Bilbao)</i>
15.00h	Welcome and objectives of the meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Xabier Legarreta, Director of Migration and Asylum of the Basque Government ○ Petra Hueck, Director, ICMC Europe
15.30h	Look and Learn Field Visit to Bilbao <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Presentation of Auzolana II: Roles and responsibilities of stakeholders ○ Lessons Learned from Pilot Programme: Discussion with participants <p>Walking tour to a sponsoring community in Bilbao introducing key elements and actors of the program</p>
18.00h	End of the visit
20.00h	Dinner with all participants
Day 2	Community Sponsorship: Regions and Cities as Sponsors <i>Venue: Basque Government Headquarters (Gran Vía de Don Diego López de Haro, 85 - 48009 Bilbao)</i>
09.00h	Institutional Opening Moderated by Patxi de la Fuente Pereda, Directorate of Migration, Basque Government <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lide Amilibia, Vice Councilor of Social Affairs, Basque Government ○ Petra Hueck, Director, ICMC Europe/Share Network ○ Sophie Muller, UNHCR representative in Spain ○ Itziar Urtasun, Councilor of Development and Cooperation, City Council of Bilbao ○ Lehendakari Iñigo Urkullu, President of the Basque Country (video message)
10.00h	Panel I. Engaging Regions and Cities in Community Sponsorship: Opportunities and Challenges Moderated by Gemma Pinyol-Jiménez, Head of Migration Policies and Diversity, Instrategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Xabier Legarreta, Director of Migration and Asylum, Basque Government ○ Patricia Ruiz de Irizar, Director of Migration Policies, Navarra Government ○ Padraig McEvoy, Local Councillor in Kildare Count Council ○ Manon Koepp, Project Officer, Belgian Reception Agency (Fedasil) <p>Q&A</p>
11.30h	Coffee Break

**11.45h Panel II. Multi-stakeholder Engagement in Community Sponsorship**

Moderated by Gabriela Agatiello, Project Manager, ICMC Europe/SHARE

- **José de Lamo Pastor**, General Director on Equality in Diversity, Valencia Government (Generalitat Valenciana)
- **Rory O'Neil**, Integration Projects Manager and Community Sponsorship Lead, Irish Refugee Council on Regional Support Offices (RSOs)
- **Susannah Baker**, Founder, The Pickwell Foundation on Recruitment and Support to Sponsors within Regional Areas
- **Stephen Neher**, Mayor of Rottenburg, Germany (video message)

Q&A

13.00h Lunch Break at the venue**14.30h Panel III. Hosting Refugees in Emergency Situations: Responses from Citizens, Cities & Regions**

Moderated by Petra Hueck, Director, ICMC Europe/ Share Network

- **Evi Voet**, Coordinator City Service for Asylum and Refugees, City of Ghent
- **Ana Barrera**, Project Officer 'Family Welcome' with Fundación La Caixa, Spanish Secretariat for Migration
- **Karmele Villarroel Labanda**, Loturak programme, Fundacion Ellacuria, Basque Country
- **Carmen Díaz**, Vice Mayor and Councilor for Social Cohesion, Getxo City Council

Q&A

15.45h Interactive discussion on mobilising support for decentralised community sponsorship programme: Key areas for engagement and developing new programmes

Moderated by Petra Hueck, Director, ICMC/SHARE Network

Round 1

- **Tihomir Sabchev**, Cities of Refuge, University of Utrecht
- **Léa Enon-Baron**, Co-Director, ANVITA City Network (France)
- **Gisela Guari Canada**, Institutional Relations & Advocacy Officer, Assembly of European Regions (AER)
- **Maria Zabala**, Hosting, Integration and Durable Solutions Unit, UNHCR

Round 2

- **Giovanna Corbatta**, Programme Manager, Caritas Italiana
- **Marc Aguilà**, Councilor of Planning, Evaluation and European Projects, Sant Boi City Council
- **Alina Lyapina**, Co-Founder, Seebrücke/ Communications and Outreach Coordinator, Humboldt-Viadrina Governance Platform



	○ Hannah Feldman , Senior Projects Manager Sponsor Refugees, Citizens UK
17.00h	End of the day
20.00	Tapas/Pinchos <i>Plaza Nueva, Bilbao</i>

Day 3	Looking forward: Engaging cities and regions Venue: <i>Eusko Jaurlaritza-Basque Government Headquarters (Don Diego López Haroko Kale Nagusia, 85 - 48009 Bilbao)</i>
9.30h	Mobilising support for decentralised community sponsorship programme: Joint policy document on strengthening cities, regions, and community engagement <i>In breakout session defining main action points and areas for strengthening engagement of regions, cities and communities in community sponsorship, supported by practices.</i>
11.00h	Reporting on Key Findings
11.30h	Closing of the event