



Share Network

WELCOME & INTEGRATION OF MIGRANTS & REFUGEES



Credit: Citizens UK

Policy Recommendations for enhancing Community Sponsorship Programmes in Europe: Key lessons from Share's Quality Sponsorship Network's cross-country evaluations

SHARE Quality Sponsorship Network (QSN) Policy Brief

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WHAT IS THE SHARE NETWORK

The Share Network is an inclusive network of local communities and actors engaged in the welcoming and inclusion of newcomers in Europe. Share promotes and fosters safe pathways to Europe for migrants and refugees as well as their integration. We support and connect local initiatives, share best practice, and raise the voice to communities to inspire action and policy change.

WHAT IS THE SHARE QUALITY SPONSORSHIP NETWORK (QSN)?

The Share QSN project, implemented from January 2021 to June 2023 and co-funded by the European Union's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), supports pilot and ad-hoc sponsorship initiatives develop into sustainable, community-driven programmes, bringing together a consortium of actors in Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Spain and the UK who are all experienced in refugee integration and are currently carrying out private sponsorship programmes in their national contexts.

The project uses a multi-stakeholder, grassroots and bottom-up strategy fostering refugee participation, bringing all grassroots sponsorship stakeholders and the lessons they are learning to the EU level. The project is in close alliance with UNHCR's Three Year Strategy on resettlement and complementary pathways as well as the EU's Action Plan on Inclusion and Integration.

Coordinated by ICMC Europe's SHARE Network, the project is implemented in partnership with the Basque Government (ES), Caritas International (BE), Consorzio Communitas (IT), the Fédération de l'Entraide Protestante (FR), DiCV Cologne (DE), the Irish Refugee Council (IE), and Citizens UK (UK).



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Introduction

Community sponsorship and complementary pathways in Europe have provided a humanitarian response to the global refugee crisis since 2016. By engaging local communities and leveraging their support, these approaches facilitate the integration of refugees into their new communities. In 2021, as part of the Share QSN project, the Share Network, together with its strategic partners¹, commissioned evaluation research to gather meaningful insight about Community Sponsorship programmes in six European countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy and Spain). Qualitative data were collected from 159 individuals involved in the sponsorship programmes of 16 different localities² from November 2021 to June 2022. Although sponsorship programmes vary in each national context, findings allowed the identification of good practices and key recommendations that may contribute to enhancing and scaling up the programmes. While no evaluation was commissioned for the UK, data for the UK Community Sponsorship was obtained from a global evaluation undertaken from 2017 to 2020 by researchers of the University of Birmingham.

This series includes five thematic policy briefs from key issues that emerged from the evaluations. They provide evidence-based policy and programme advice aimed at policymakers and European, national and local actors interested in formulating or influencing Community Sponsorship programmes in Europe and the rest of the world.

Policy brief 1 addresses key challenges that impact the programmes at the governance level and provides some recommendations that contribute to improving their sustainability in the long term. Policy brief 2 focuses on the pre-departure phase, which is crucial for a good matching between sponsored refugees and sponsoring groups, managing expectations and assuring a good transition in the initial reception phase. Policy brief 3 discusses the arrival phase, which involves an initial and demanding stage in which sponsoring groups need to supply newcomers with essential resources and services, but in the medium term, support concentrates on structural integration aspects like language acquisition, education, employment and well-being. Policy brief 4 discusses the challenges faced when sponsored families need to prepare for the phase-out at the end of the programme. Finally, policy brief 5 sheds light on the initial impacts of the programmes in their hosting communities.

¹ Caritas Belgium BE, Fédération de l'Entraide Protestante (FEP) FR, Caritas Cologne DE, Irish Refugee Council IE, Consorzio Comunitas IT, Basque Government ES.

² The localities are: Roeselare, Erps-Kwerps (Belgium); Toulouse, Vernon (France); Cologne, Wuppertal (Germany); Clane, Dublin (Ireland); Treppo Ligosullo, Bolzano, Milano (Italy); Andoain, Arrigoriaga, Bilbao, Portugalete and Vitoria-Gasteiz (Spain).

I. An overview of community sponsorship programmes in Europe

Community Sponsorship programmes can be defined as public-private partnerships involving the collaboration between governments, responsible for ensuring refugees' legal entry, and community actors offering refugees financial, social and/or emotional support to settle and integrate into the host community³.

In the United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, Spain and Belgium, Community Sponsorship programmes are structured as resettlement-based sponsorship schemes. Identified by UNHCR, refugees are then selected by the European country's government. While Belgium, Ireland, and Spain select refugees within their government's resettlement quotas, the UK and Germany select refugees in addition to their respective resettlement, although in the UK there is currently no resettlement quota in place. The first European Community Sponsorship programme was launched in the UK in 2016, followed by the Basque country's 'Auzolana II Community Sponsorship programme in 2018. The Community Sponsorship Ireland (CSI) and the German 'New Start in a Team' (NesT) programmes emerged in 2019, and the Belgium Community Sponsorship in 2020. Following the success of the Basque government regional pilot programme in Spain, Sponsorship programmes were also launched in the regions of Valencia and Navarra in 2020. In the resettlement-based models, volunteer sponsoring groups are usually responsible for fundraising, securing accommodation and providing post-arrival support⁴, while civil society organisations operate as lead sponsors facilitating the matching process between refugees and volunteer sponsoring groups. In the Spanish regions, the national government selects the refugees while the regional government coordinates the matching process and provides financial contributions. Up to December 2022, around 1,300⁵ refugees were resettled through the Community Sponsorship programmes, including almost 1,000 in the UK⁶.

In Italy and France, sponsorship programmes operate in the form of Humanitarian Corridors or complementary pathway in addition to resettlement. Through this model, civil society organisations, in agreement with their respective governments, are responsible for identifying, selecting and welcoming refugees, who are initially admitted in the country on humanitarian visas. Developed between 2015 and 2017, the Humanitarian Corridors have resettled more than 3,300 refugees up to the end of 2022. Civil society organisations select the refugees to be welcomed according to vulnerability criteria and in collaboration with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). They are also responsible for coordinating refugees' arrival in the host countries and matching refugees with groups of volunteers responsible for providing assistance in the settlement process.

³ ICMC Europe, IOM, and UNHCR, "Private Sponsorship in Europe: Expanding Complementary Pathways for Refugee Resettlement", ERN+ Scoping paper, European Resettlement Network+ (ERN+), June 2017, <https://www.share-network.eu/articles-and-resources/expanding-complementary-pathways?rq=private%20sponsorship%20in%20europe>.

⁴ In the Basque country, volunteer sponsoring groups are only responsible for socio-cultural and emotional support, while the financial assistance is provided by organisations supported by the regional government.

⁵ For a more detailed comparison of the different programmes and number of arrivals see <https://www.share-network.eu/articles-and-resources/sponsorship>

⁶ See RESET <https://resetuk.org/news-and-campaigns/news/community-sponsorship-end-of-year-review>

The following sections presents a succinct overview and analysis about specific policy issues in the key aspects of the community sponsorship programmes and complementary pathways, along with recommendations for action.

A. POLICY BRIEF 1: ASPECTS OF GOVERNANCE THAT CAN CONTRIBUTE TO ENHANCING THE FUNCTIONING OF COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP PROGRAMMES IN EUROPE

The European Community Sponsorship programmes emerged in the context of the large displacement of Syrian refugees, driven by the desire of civil society to welcome refugees. Given the fact that Community Sponsorship emerged from an innovative ‘bottom-up’ approach, processes and mechanisms under which these programmes operate are not always clearly defined in national frameworks. Although at the European level, the European Commission invites states to adopt a common approach, Community Sponsorship programmes are nationally designed and context specific, implemented with the partnership between governments and civil society actors, varying across countries.

Depending on its design, Community Sponsorship programmes can be a legal pathway that offers protection places in addition to resettlement. Additionality contributes to offering complementary durable solutions to more refugees and persons in need of international protection in third countries, rather than just a programme to welcome refugees. Respondents in the evaluations pointed out Community Sponsorship programmes should not be implemented to shift states’ responsibilities to civil society, but to increase the number of protection places provided to refugees, enhance the integration support received, support social cohesion and foster a multi-stakeholder approach in assisting refugees.

This policy brief draws upon the Share QSN evaluations conducted in six European countries⁷, as well as evaluations undertaken in the UK Community Sponsorship⁸ and offers valuable insights to improve the governance and overall effectiveness of Community Sponsorship programmes.

Development of a national framework

The findings from the Share QSN evaluations conducted in the six European countries showed that most Community Sponsorship programmes lack a national framework to regulate the coordination and cooperation between governments and private actors. Not having clear roles and responsibilities set out was found challenging for volunteers supporting refugees, especially when sponsored refugees were denied equal access to the services provided to non-sponsored refugees, such as in Germany.

In Ireland, Germany and Belgium, sponsors also faced difficulties in setting out practical arrangements at the arrival of the sponsored refugees. Particularly, renting properties for housing was difficult due to the lack of recognition of sponsoring groups legal capacity and liabilities for supporting refugees.

⁷ As part of the Share QSN project, country evaluations were conducted in Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Ireland and Spain to assess the national programmes and their impact on the wider community. The link with all the evaluations is available in the following link: <https://www.share-network.eu/articles-and-resources/evaluations>

⁸ The evaluation reports conducted by researchers of the University of Birmingham UK are available in the following link: <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/superdiversity-institute/community-sponsorship-evaluation/highlights-and-insights.aspx>

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This situation has been corrected by the German government who as from 2023 supports sponsorship groups to secure housing.

The Basque regional government in Spain demonstrated that establishing an agreement between the social entities (lead NGO sponsors) and authorities can help prevent confusion regarding the extent and duration of support, manage expectations and clarify roles and responsibilities.

Recommendations:

- National frameworks should set clear duties and responsibilities of the actors involved, ensuring equal rights and entitlements for sponsored refugees as for non-sponsored refugees and avoiding discrimination against any group of refugees.
- National frameworks should be flexible enough to allow stakeholders to adapt to the changing needs of refugees or host communities, for example by assuming responsibilities for supporting refugees to alleviate volunteer sponsors' burden when dealing with practical arrangements like housing insurance contracts.

Local Authorities engagement

Many aspects of migrants' everyday lives depend on the capacity of the local governments to provide basic services, such as access to housing, education and health services, as well as other aspects of integration. A key finding of the evaluations is that early engagement with local authorities is crucial in facilitating the access of services for newly arrived sponsored refugees.

The Spanish and the UK cases provided evidence showing how early engagement with local authorities increases the efficiency of Community Sponsorship programmes. In Belgium, developing good relationships between the local authorities, sponsor groups and Caritas International was essential to guarantee sponsored refugees access to public services. Sponsors groups in Belgium also reported how local authorities' engagement helped sponsored refugees find long-term accommodation. Their engagement early on is vital to ensure services beyond the duration of the sponsorships. In Italy, even if the Humanitarian Corridors programme does not require the participation of local authorities, the evaluation found that, especially in rural contexts, elected representatives supporting the initiative contributed to expanding the involvement of all community members in welcoming and supporting the sponsored refugees.

Recommendations:

- Mechanisms should be established for the early engagement of local authorities in Community Sponsorship to ensure their active participation and commitment to the programmes.
- Incentives, such as funding or other forms of support, to local authorities that actively support and participate in Community Sponsorship programmes should be put in place.
- Collaboration, dialogue and multi-stakeholder cooperation between sponsors, supporting organisations and local authorities should be encouraged to ensure sponsored refugees have access to public services, including housing, education and healthcare.

Meaningful participation of migrants and refugees

Evaluations identified that Community Sponsorship programmes lack meaningful participation of the migrant and refugee community in the governance, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of sponsorship programmes and integration policies. Participants, particularly in France, highlighted the need to go beyond tokenistic participation and genuinely empower refugees to influence the core functioning of Community Sponsorship programmes. Lack of funds was identified as a significant barrier to provide sustained training to empower refugee participation in managerial roles in the French's Humanitarian Corridors.

In Belgium's Community Sponsorship Programme, the role of intercultural mediators has proved to be instrumental in enabling not only language interpretation, but also creating meaningful exchange and helping to build trust among newly arrived refugees. With initiatives like the *Peer 2 peer project* run by Caritas International, refugees receive reliable information about culturally sensitive issues from peers with similar or other experiences and, simultaneously, have the opportunity to meet other refugee families.

Evaluation findings suggest that refugee organisations have become accredited organisations coordinating and supporting groups of volunteers in the communities. In Ireland, Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs), for instance, are essential in creating a welcoming society for refugees. Run for and by refugees, RCOs support sponsored refugees to become more integrated into their local areas. In the UK, peer-to-peer sessions with refugees who have arrived previously through sponsorship were also found helpful in connecting new arrivals to the wider diaspora community, assisting sponsored refugees in navigating services and easing the transition to life in the host country.

Recommendations:

- Community Sponsorship programmes should go beyond symbolic participation and empower refugees to have a meaningful influence on the essential aspects of sponsorship programmes. This can be achieved by involving refugees in decision-making processes, ensuring their voices are heard, and their perspectives are taken into account.
- Funds should be allocated to facilitate the training, agency and empowerment of refugee participation in the management and operation of Community Sponsorship programmes.
- The important roles played by intercultural mediators and peer support initiatives in Community Sponsorship programmes should be recognised, supported and adapted in other programmes.
- Refugee organisations should be accredited to coordinate and support volunteer groups in communities.

Long-term sustainability

Evaluations across the six countries highlighted how the costs of running sponsorship programmes threaten the Community Sponsorship programmes' long-term sustainability. The state welfare system and the extent to which benefits are provided to people in need of international protection is a key feature that needs to be considered when defining stakeholders' obligations in the programmes.

Sponsors in countries such as Germany, Ireland, Belgium and France pointed out that high-cost obligations, like paying for rent or facilitating access to social housing, pose a significant challenge to their capacity to focus on providing socio-cultural and emotional support to refugees. Evidence from the evaluation of Italian's Humanitarian Corridors also suggested that the financial budget provided to sponsored refugees is inadequate, as reported by both social workers and volunteers as well as by sponsored refugees who saw the limited budget as an obstacle to their integration process. In the urban area of Milan, for instance, the intermediary support organisation - the Diocesan Caritas - decided to increase the budget provided to sponsored refugees as they considered the initially provided budget limited to meet the costs of living in a metropolitan city.

Recommendations:

- National and local governments should consider public funding to support sponsors' high-cost obligations and facilitate refugees' access to services. Financial support can alleviate volunteer sponsor groups' responsibilities and allow them to focus more on providing socio-cultural and emotional support.
- A more transparent and equal sharing of funding responsibilities between the public and private partners would allow all the sponsored refugees to receive an adequate budget without increasing intermediary support organisations' financial obligations.

Monitoring and safeguarding

The evaluations emphasised the importance of establishing effective mechanisms to monitor Community Sponsorship programmes and safeguard the well-being of both sponsored refugees and sponsor groups. In France, it was recognised that regional clusters played a supportive role, but limited resources and geographical distance hindered intermediary organisations' ability to monitor sponsor groups and families closely. Similarly, the absence of monitoring mechanisms in Belgium raised concerns. However, **volunteers highly valued specific tools like Caritas Belgium's permanent helpdesk, which provided valuable support throughout the programme.**

Monitoring and safeguarding measures are crucial to ensure the fulfilment of refugees' needs, as highlighted by lead sponsors in Ireland. Additionally, these measures are essential to prevent burnout among sponsor groups. In Germany, sponsors expressed concerns about their well-being due to the demanding responsibilities associated with supporting refugees. **A good practice identified in Ireland and the Basque country is to provide refugees with the option to leave the Community Sponsorship programme and be transferred to the national resettlement system in the case of sponsorship breakdown.**

Recommendations:

- Community Sponsorship Programmes' sustainability should be strengthened with systematic monitoring of the quality of key settlement activities (i.e., housing, education, health, benefits and jobs) as well as the protection of refugees' safety and well-being during the duration of the programmes.
- The monitoring results should be documented and disseminated among all stakeholders involved in the programmes.
- Safeguarding mechanisms (i.e., sponsorship breakdown, child protection, abuse, domestic violence) should be built into the design of sponsorship schemes and be clearly communicated to all actors involved.

B. POLICY BRIEF 2: PRE-DEPARTURE PHASE

The pre-departure phase is the first step in the sponsorship journey that lays the foundations for future integration processes. It starts with identifying refugee beneficiaries for whom the sponsorship programme is the most appropriate form of third country solution. In the Humanitarian Corridors, staff of the sponsorship organisations play a central role in the identification and referral of cases, while in the resettlement-based sponsorship programmes, UNHCR is responsible for the identification and referral of cases to the respective national government⁹. In all cases, the governments are responsible for security checks and admission procedures. In the resettlement-based programmes,

⁹ In the case of the UNHCR refugees are identified under the following UNHCR's resettlement categories: Individuals in need of legal and/or physical protection, survivors of torture and/or violence, individuals with medical needs, women and girls at risk, family reunification, children and adolescents at risk, and lack of foreseeable alternative durable solutions (<https://www.unhcr.org/uk/information-on-unhcr-resettlement.html>). In the case of the Humanitarian Corridors in France and Italy the general criteria followed for the identification involves: Interviews by the local operators of the promoter organisations; evaluation on the reliability of the personal history described by the potential beneficiaries; and assessment of the personal judicial situation by the public authorities in the countries of transit and destination (<https://www.humanitariancorridor.org/en/humanitarian-corridors/#phase-1>).

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the important task of matching refugee families with sponsor groups is carried out in coordination with the intermediary sponsorship organisations and the governments of the resettlement countries, whereas in the Humanitarian Corridors it is done without the involvement of the government.

During the pre-departure phase, basic information and advice on the journey and life ahead are of paramount importance for refugees and groups of volunteers. In all the programmes, sponsored refugees receive pre-departure cultural orientation training. In resettlement-based programmes, in some cases, governmental officers contribute to this activity if they have staff on the ground, but when this is not possible, IOM provides practical advice and information about the programme and the hosting countries.

Based on feedback from experienced sponsored refugees, there is an opportunity to improve cross-cutting issues that have emerged in these activities, such as providing clear and accessible information about the sponsorship programme, what it means to be supported by volunteers (autonomy), the type of integration support they will receive, and the locality (rural or urban) and community where they would be settled. In particular, the experience of sponsored refugees in the Basque Country highlights the importance of providing information clarifying the differences between sponsorship programmes and mainstream resettlement programmes, for example with regards to government support they will receive, social benefits, integration support upon arrival, housing, etc. Such information can help to manage refugees' expectations enabling them to understand the type of support that sponsorship can provide them. Finally, the pre-departure stage includes other relevant preparation aspects that impact the effectiveness of the programmes, such as the recruitment and training of the volunteers to ensure they are adequately prepared to respond refugees' needs and to avoid sponsor groups' breakdown.

The following section presents a list of common findings emerged from the SHARE evaluations with regards the pre-departure phase and offers specific recommendations to address identified challenges.

Selection and referral process of sponsored refugees

Evaluations indicated the need for more transparency on the selection criteria applied – particularly in resettlement-based programmes. Even in a country such as France, where civil society organisations are responsible for the identification of refugees to be sponsored, some civil organisations working in the field reported concerns regarding the selection criteria as they considered these to be too subjective. However, it was found that **the participation of sponsor organisations in the selection process in the Humanitarian Corridors in France and Italy was helpful to expand the reach of third country solutions to remote and less-known populations of refugees who may not have easy access to UNHCR processes.**

Sponsor groups in Belgium also commented on the lack of information on the criteria employed to select refugees, and how more information on the case profiles and particular vulnerabilities of the sponsored refugees would help them to better prepare to receive the families.

Recommendations:

- Governments and NGOs involved in the selection process should strive for greater transparency by clearly communicating the criteria employed to select refugees for sponsorship.
- More information should be shared with sponsors on the matching process and specific needs and vulnerabilities of selected families.

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- Collaboration and knowledge sharing between different countries and organisations involved in resettlement and complementary pathways efforts should be encouraged. Sharing best practices, experiences, and lessons learned can contribute to the development of more objective and effective selection processes.

Matching process

The matching process between sponsored refugees and volunteer sponsors was identified as an area for improvement across the six evaluated Community Sponsorship programmes. For instance, participants in Belgium, reported that an improved matching process should take into account both refugees' needs and the resources and capabilities of sponsor groups. In Ireland, accommodation suitability and size are key factors considered during the matching process. However, Irish sponsor groups pointed out that not always these criteria are adequately applied with refugee families matched with unsuitable accommodations. Such mismatching impacts negatively the sponsors' capacity of supporting refugees and sponsored refugees' integration process. In particular, when the matching process happen in the final weeks before travel such in the case of the Community Sponsorship programme in Ireland, sponsors do not have sufficient time to prepare to accommodate the needs of sponsored refugees. **In Belgium, when there is the possibility of a pre-departure video-conference between refugees and sponsor groups, volunteers felt this online meeting enabled them to better prepare to welcome refugees as they were more aware of families' needs. Such pre-departure encounters were also found to help reduce anxiety and help build mutual trust and relations between refugees and sponsors.**

In Germany and Italy, the role of intermediary organisations was considered crucial in facilitating the matching process as they knew the sponsor groups they trained. **Particularly, in the Italian Humanitarian Corridors, the deep knowledge of refugees' needs gained through pre-departure interviews enabled national coordinators in Italy to match refugees with the communities that best suited their needs.**

Recommendations:

- The matching process should be improved considering both the specific needs of refugees and the available resources and capabilities of sponsor groups as well as contextual considerations of the host community.
- Ensure that refugee families are matched with suitable accommodations to facilitate their integration process and enhance the capacity of sponsors to provide adequate support.
- Early matching and communication can contribute to a smoother transition in the host country and better support for refugees.
- Pre-departure video-conferences between refugees and sponsor groups should be facilitated to allow sponsors to understand the refugees' needs better and helps establish mutual trust.
- The collaboration and communication between intermediary organisations and national coordinators should be strengthened to facilitate effective matching.

Pre-departure orientation sessions

The evaluations found that the orientation sessions provided to refugees in the pre-departure phase are not sufficient to provide them with adequate information about the Community Sponsorship programme and the country in which they will be received. A specific example of this situation was found in the Belgium sponsorship. Refugees selected for the programme receive a 3-day orientation session delivered by Fedasil (Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers) and IOM (International Organisation for Migration), that information is complemented with an informative brochure on resettlement in Belgium in their own language. Nevertheless, feedback from intercultural mediators and volunteers indicated that newly arrived often struggle to retain the information received in training because they lack the necessary mindset to absorb and retain large volumes of

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information. The time gap between training and arrival also creates confusion between the mainstream resettlement programme and sponsorship.

Lack of clarity during the orientation session to understand the differences between mainstream resettlement and community sponsorship programmes were also indicated as a source of concern by sponsor groups in Ireland, the UK and Germany.

Recommendations:

- The orientation sessions provided to refugees in the pre-departure phase should be improved, incorporating interactive and engaging approaches to enhance information retention.
- Clear and concise materials that explicitly differentiate between mainstream resettlement programmes and Community Sponsorship should be developed and provided to refugees before departure.
- The time gap between training and arrival should be reduced.
- Refugees should be involved in developing orientation materials to ensure their perspectives and needs are adequately represented.
- Sponsored refugees should have the opportunity to revisit the information received and have additional orientation sessions once they arrive in the country as the pre-departure phase can be overwhelming to absorb and understand information.

Delays in departures

The delays in organising travelling arrangements for selected sponsored refugees, which were exasperated by the Covid-19 pandemic, created feeling of frustration especially amongst sponsors in Germany who had to cover the cost of accommodation while waiting for families to arrive. Similarly, in Ireland and the UK, volunteers reported having fund drained to hold an empty accommodation due to the refugees' travelling arrangements being delayed.

Recommendations:

- Efforts should be made to minimise delays in departures for sponsored refugees.
- Funding mechanisms should be developed to reimburse sponsors for accommodation costs incurred during waiting periods.

Sponsor group formation and training

One of the significant challenges identified across the countries participating in Community Sponsorship programmes is the lack of diversification in volunteers supporting refugees and the limited training provided to sponsors regarding, for instance, cultural differences and safeguarding.

The evaluations of Community Sponsorship programmes in Italy, Germany, and the UK revealed that sponsor groups still predominantly consist of white retired middle-class Christian volunteers. It is evident across all countries that there is a pressing need to enhance and diversify the range of volunteers participating in Community Sponsorship programmes. This diversification should encompass sponsors' backgrounds and individual characteristics, such as age, to ensure that sponsor groups possess a broad spectrum of knowledge and skills, enabling them to provide more effective support to sponsored refugees. In Germany, intermediary organisations play a role in recruiting sponsor groups by leveraging their existing networks to reach out to volunteers. However, the German evaluation indicated a general reluctance among the general public to participate in the programme, as they perceive refugees' resettlement activities to be the government's responsibility.

Although sponsor groups often receive some training on the culture of sponsored refugees, participants felt that it was not comprehensive enough to fully understand and navigate cultural

differences, especially since many volunteers lacked previous experience in engaging with individuals from the same refugee culture. Sponsors in Ireland and Germany emphasised that a better understanding of refugees' cultural background could significantly improve their relationships with the sponsored families and enable them to provide more tailored support. **In Ireland, the active involvement of a sponsored refugee in the Community Sponsorship programme was found to be essential, not only in informing sponsor groups and newly arrived refugees about cultural differences and assisting them in the settlement process, but also in promoting the programme at various levels, increasing stakeholder engagement and cooperation to overcome challenges.** In addition to enhancing knowledge of the sponsored refugees' cultural background, there is also a need to increase sponsors' understanding of the resettlement process and asylum-related themes, as highlighted by participants in the French evaluation. **In the UK, the presence of a national coordinating body has proven effective in providing sponsors with valuable training, fostering consistency in practices, and facilitating interaction between the government and civil society.**

Recommendations:

- Sponsorship recruitment strategies should consider reaching out to different groups of the civil society which have not been involved in the programmes so far, such as Universities, students' groups, refugee diaspora, schools, sports clubs, private companies and philanthropic organisations.
- Efforts should be made to increase the diversity of sponsor group composition in terms of their backgrounds, including ethnicity, age and socio-economic status in order to have a diversity of skills and backgrounds.
- Comprehensive cultural training and resources should be provided to volunteer sponsors. These should focus not only on the culture of the sponsored refugees but also on fostering cross-cultural understanding.
- Intermediary organisations should be provided with more resources and support to enhance their capacity to promote Community Sponsorship and engaging a diverse pool of sponsors.
- Sponsor groups would benefit from the experience of intercultural mediators and people with refugee/migration background.
- National frameworks should consider creating a coordination body to play a central role in providing training and facilitating interactions between the stakeholders involved in Community Sponsorship programmes.

C. POLICY BRIEF 3: ARRIVAL PHASE

The arrival of sponsored newcomers in the hosting country marks another phase of the sponsorship process. It includes the reception and the initial settlement process which constitutes the true 'learning-by-doing' phase for the actors supporting the sponsored refugee families and a radical change of life for sponsored refugees in their new communities. At the policy level, the main difference between resettlement-based Community Sponsorship (CS) and Humanitarian Corridors (HC) is that CS grants sponsored refugees the right to stay in the country upon arrival (Spain, Ireland, Belgium and Germany), while people welcomed through HC in Italy and France enter with a humanitarian visa to seek asylum.

In both models, the immediate post-arrival phase is characterised by newcomers dedicating a large amount of time to sorting out administrative procedures and facilitating access to basic services. In the medium-term, the sponsor organisations and volunteer groups are more focused on facilitating refugees' social and economic inclusion through support in essential aspects such as language learning, the search for employment and the development of social relationships. Having a

structured settlement plan and monitoring framework in place can support in making the post arrival phase run more smoothly.

Reception in the airport and accommodation

In almost all European Community Sponsorship programmes, sponsors are responsible for welcoming the resettled family at the airport. While in a few cases, volunteers and refugees can meet online before departure (Belgium, UK) in most of the sponsoring programmes, the reception at the airport is crucial as it is the first encounter between resettled refugees and their sponsors.

For the volunteers, greeting the newcomers at the airport is a milestone achievement after all the preparation work, they have undertaken before the arrival of the sponsored family and marks the start of a new phase of the resettlement programme. For the refugees, evaluations found that being welcomed at the airport by the volunteers makes them feel reassured and accepted in the new country. These feelings can have a positive impact on the integration process.

In countries such as Belgium, the UK and the Basque Country, the volunteers welcome the newcomers at the airport, together with some support workers from the lead organisation. **The research conducted in the Basque Country and the UK remarks how the presence of interpreters at the airport can contribute to easing tension and facilitating the welcoming phase.** In Germany, the sponsored families, instead, remain in a reception centre for some weeks before meeting their volunteer sponsors. Evidence from the German evaluation suggested that the delay in the encounter between sponsors and refugees and the lack of a reception at the airport makes newcomers feel less welcome.

Recommendations:

- Sponsored refugees should be greeted at the airport by their sponsors.
- The presence of interpreters when refugees are welcomed at the airport should be ensured.

Legal paperwork and migration status

Evaluations found that having their status recognised from day one allows sponsored refugees to start their integration processes immediately after arrival because they can access more services and feel more stable and safer. In France, refugees sponsored through Humanitarian Corridors are supported by sponsorship groups while their asylum claim is processed, but they can only access services, including social assistance, legal assistance and French language courses offered by the French Office for Immigration and Integration, once their refugee status is recognised. The result is that sponsored refugees were still strongly dependent on their sponsors even when they obtained their status. The process of receiving refugee status is complex and lengthy, with newcomers struggling to understand the necessary procedure due to the language barrier. In Italy, the research highlighted that sponsored newcomer who arrived through Humanitarian Corridors obtained their refugee status quickly thanks to the collaboration of public institutions. However, the difference in the waiting time between sponsored refugees arriving through the humanitarian corridors and ordinary asylum seekers, who can wait up to two years to have their status recognised, was found to create a two-tier system which advantages sponsored refugees over individuals who submit an in-country asylum claim.

Recommendations:

- Sponsored refugees arriving with humanitarian visas should have their status recognised shortly after their arrival in the host country and administrative challenges to obtain a permanent solution that guarantees their right to stay should be reduced.

Language barriers and acquisition

The language barrier is one of the main issues evaluations identified, especially during the arrival phase when sponsored refugees have to deal with the bureaucracy needed to settle in a new country. Therefore, the presence of an interpreter in the initial phase after arrival is essential, however, evaluations indicated that it was not always available or sufficient. The translation support provided by RSOs for sponsored refugees in Ireland, for instance, was not adequate and volunteers mentioned that they had to rely on Google Translate to communicate with sponsored refugees. The presence of workers able to speak refugees' language in the reception centres in Germany was also found to be highly appreciated by sponsored refugees.

The enrolment of refugees on language courses was also identified as a key challenge across the countries. In Italy, for instance, public schools offering language courses for foreigners (CPIA) are in urban areas and therefore, refugees in rural communities struggled to attend them especially due to the lack of transport. Low awareness about the NesT CS programme in Germany also led to delays in accessing language courses as service providers were unsure if sponsored refugees could enrol without paying additional costs. In the UK the quality of provision of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) courses is variable, problems emerged in terms of number of hours, access to lessons, proximity of colleges in rural areas and inflexible start times.

However, evaluations found that the presence of the sponsor groups with the interactions between volunteers and refugees and the work provided by sponsors, such as ad hoc and home-delivered language lessons, helped refugees in their language acquisition process. In Ireland, sponsored refugees praised the opportunity to practice the language with volunteers, which not only improved their communication skills but also their confidence in engaging in social life. The sponsorship groups' support is essential in providing refugees with language acquisition opportunities soon after arrival, especially in a country like France where refugees can register with government-provided language courses – which provide them with up to 400 hours of French lessons - only after receiving refugee status. Further alternative ways to learn and practice language skills in addition to formal language courses, were encouraged by sponsors, especially in rural areas where in-person courses were unavailable and during COVID. For instance, **in Italy, volunteers connected refugees with local associations, youth centres and faith communities, providing them with further opportunities to improve their language skills. During the pandemic, German sponsors linked sponsored refugees with university students through an online platform to allow them to improve their language.**

Nevertheless, in some cases, the speed at which refugees learn the new language seems not to meet the volunteers' expectations and can create frustration. The mindset of sponsored newcomers impacts their ability to learn a new language with refugees worried about their relatives in the country of origin unable to focus on acquiring the language.

Recommendations:

- The presence of professional interpreters during the initial phase after arrival should be ensured to facilitate communication between sponsored refugees and volunteers.
- Barriers preventing sponsored refugees from enrolling in formal language courses should be identified and addressed to avoid delays. For instance, awareness among service providers about the eligibility of sponsored refugees to access language courses should be raised.
- Alternative ways for sponsored refugees to learn and practice the local language beyond formal language courses should be promoted.
- Guidance and support to sponsors regarding realistic expectations of language acquisition progress should be provided.

Refugee-sponsor relationships

Evaluations across different countries highlighted that trustworthy relationships between newcomers and sponsors are built with their daily interactions, although, there were some challenges due to language barriers and cultural differences during the early stages. Training providing refugees and sponsors with an understanding of each other culture, including customs and norms, can mitigate challenges and create more trustworthy relationships. In Germany, refugees pointed out that trusting their sponsors is particularly important because sometimes volunteers have to handle their personal documentation. Training in data protection and confidentiality can better prepare volunteers to deal with their responsibilities and increase refugees' level of trust. Additionally, **when refugees and volunteers can meet online before arriving in the country as it happens in Belgium, the UK and sometimes in Italy, their relationships were strengthened because expectations were mitigated and trust was built in advance.** Regular follow-ups from social workers can further decrease the risk of sponsor-refugee relationship breakdown.

Recommendations:

- Adequate training should be provided to refugees and sponsors to understand each other's culture.
- Online meetings between refugees and sponsors before the refugees' departure can facilitate the building of trustworthy relationships.
- There should be regular follow-ups from an external social worker to monitor the relationships between sponsors and refugees.

Sponsored children support

The school enrolment of sponsored minors is essential because it can positively contribute to the integration of the whole refugee family. The evaluations found that while children may learn the host country's language quickly than older refugees, schools are often not adequately prepared to provide sponsored children with the support they need, especially with sensitive aspects such as dealing with trauma and mental health issues. In France, for instance, the programme aimed to assist arriving foreign-language children (UPE2A) is often insufficient in urban areas and unavailable in rural places. There is a lack of national effort in training qualified teachers to support children who are not native French speakers. Tension is often raised amongst teachers, sponsors and refugee parents who have high expectations for their children's education because resettled children are placed in a class according to their age rather than their language ability and knowledge level. In Germany, participants highlighted the need for additional support, especially for traumatised children, to help them perform in school. **In Italy, teachers with experience teaching foreign children were found better placed to support the learning process of sponsored minors.**

Recommendations:

- More information in the refugees' own language on the education system of the hosting country should be provided to sponsored parents to facilitate understanding and manage expectations.
- Additional support should be provided to identify and assist traumatised children in their learning processes.
- Training is needed for teachers teaching non-native speakers and children with refugee backgrounds. Platforms and resources should be available where teachers can learn from colleagues and share experiences.

Benefits and welfare system

Across national programmes, the economic support provided by the welfare systems and/or intermediary sponsorship organisations during the duration of the programme is often not adequate or easily accessible to refugees, who then have to rely on the volunteers in the sponsorships groups, especially with covering housing costs. In Belgium, for instance, sponsoring groups cover some costs and lend money to the sponsored refugees before the responsible institution for providing benefits assesses the family's socio-economic situation. While in France, volunteers offer economic assistance until the sponsored family has access to the support available to asylum seekers, which usually takes a couple of months. In Germany and the UK there is no access to government funds until the sponsored refugees are registered in the Social Security office, therefore volunteers have to cover the economic responsibility if the family has not reached economic independence. Delays in receiving housing benefits were also a challenge in Ireland, as council officers are often unaware of the CS initiative, and therefore sponsoring groups rely on benevolent landlords. As not all the sponsorship groups have the same available budget, there can be a wide difference in the financial support provided to refugee families. **In Spain, where refugees have to take responsibility for their rent and manage the budget given by the Basque government, the Auzolana II programme includes some minimum requirements of assistance that sponsored families should receive in order to mitigate the differences in benefits offered to sponsored newcomers.**

Recommendations:

- Financial housing support should be provided to secure housing and decrease sponsorship groups' economic burden.
- More public awareness of sponsorship programmes could reduce delays in accessing benefits.
- Minimum levels of assistance should be established to ensure no wide difference in the economic support the different sponsoring groups provide.

Employment

Several barriers were found to limit sponsored refugees' access to employment. Firstly, evaluations indicated the lack of language proficiency not only reduces employment opportunities, but it could also restrict access to employment services if interpreters are unavailable. Across countries, volunteers mentioned that employment support workers did not provide adequate assistance, leaving refugees with unrealistic expectations or plans to progress in their career development. Having previous qualifications recognised and mismatching between current qualifications and available opportunities were also indicated as a barrier for instance in Italy. For sponsored individuals in France, accessing employment is even more challenging because their asylum seeker status does not allow them to work until they are recognised as refugees. The low availability of jobs and poor transportation make it harder for refugees in rural areas to access employment. **Informal networks and word of mouth, rather than employment agencies, were identified as more successful in helping refugees find jobs in Italy and France.** However, even when refugees find a job, this tends not to match their previous qualifications and experience. Findings from Ireland further found that refugees took unsuitable jobs under their sponsors' pressure.

Recommendations:

- Governmental authorities should implement initiatives to support refugees in finding suitable employment that aligns with their skills, qualifications, and career aspirations.
- Sponsored refugees should be allowed to access employment at an earlier stage; Humanitarian Corridors should grant them the right to work upon arrival.
- The recognition of refugees' qualifications obtained in their country of origin should be facilitate.

Policy Recommendations for enhancing Community Sponsorship Programmes in Europe

- Career guidance sessions should be available to sponsor families to advise on pre-employment training needs, develop CVs, identify appropriate interview training needs, source suitable job vacancies, assist with job applications, etc.
- Job recruiting agencies should be made aware of Community Sponsorship programmes to help refugees connect with potential sources of employment.

Health

Sponsored refugees in the six countries where evaluations were conducted did not report any particular issues related to accessing health services apart from challenges due to language barriers. **The role of sponsorship groups demonstrated to be essential not only in facilitating health services access, but also in ensuring the sponsored newcomers' health needs were met with volunteers advocating for their sponsored refugees.** Additionally, volunteers provide assistance such as transportation to attend medical appointments and childcare. Only in Belgium, volunteers raised major concerns regarding the refugees' capacity to cover health insurance costs once the sponsorship agreements end. A volunteer in Belgium further noted that sponsored refugees were not reaching out for the appropriate health support when needed. Newcomers, for instance, tended to go to the emergency department when instead a routine doctor appointment was required.

Recommendations:

- Strategies to address language barriers that sponsored refugees face when accessing health services should be developed. This can include providing interpreter services or language support to ensure effective communication between refugees and healthcare providers.
- Sponsored refugees should have access to affordable healthcare coverage beyond the duration of the sponsorship agreements.
- Information on the health system should be provided to refugees in their own language, or with interpreters, to ensure they can reach out for the appropriate support.

D. POLICY BRIEF 4: PHASE OUT AND TRANSITION TO AUTONOMY FOR SPONSORED REFUGEES

The end of the sponsorship agreement should mark the transition to independent living for refugees. However, from the evaluations conducted it is observed that across all the Community Sponsorship programmes the duration of support – while it varies across countries – is often not enough and sponsor groups often need to extend their assistance beyond the agreed period.

Planning with the sponsored family as early as possible how the group's support will change, and what independence could look like, is very important to ensure that the sponsored families have a good progression towards independence.

During the phase out, sponsored families face numerous practical challenges that can critically impact their future life. The following section presents some key aspects that were mentioned by stakeholders participating in the evaluations across the six countries.

Housing at the end of the sponsorship programme

Finding available, affordable and appropriate housing at the end of the sponsorship programme is a central challenge for sponsored refugees. Uncertainty about accommodation can hinder newcomers' integration progress, especially if they cannot access council houses as in Ireland. However, sponsoring groups provide valuable support in helping sponsored families find a property that meets

their needs. In the case of Belgium, the municipality's intervention, which made rental accommodation available, was significant in easing the transition to independence for sponsored families. Refugees placed in rural areas, where often affordable houses are easier to be found, have to deal with the lack of services and transportation and poor availability of job offers. These challenges can affect refugees' decision to move to an urban area to find more opportunities for the future at the end of the sponsorship agreement. Racism can be another barrier that limits refugees' access to affordable houses, as documented in Ireland and Italy. However, Caritas Italy provides a property even after the sponsorship ends, allowing sponsored refugees to focus on language acquisition and employment. The Spanish sponsorship programme adopts the same approach, trying to house refugees in a municipality where they can stay in the long term. The research noted that the Covid-19 pandemic and the refugee crises of Afghanistan and Ukraine had worsened the sponsored refugees' ability to secure accommodation with more pressure placed on housing Afghan and Ukrainian refugees.

Recommendations:

- Strategies for increasing the availability of affordable and appropriate housing options for sponsored refugees should be developed.
- Sponsor groups should be supported in establishing networks with landlords, real estate agents and housing organisations to increase access to housing options.
- Intermediary support organisations can provide refugee families with advice guides for looking for accommodation through a private landlord or letting agent.
- It is essential that during the matching process, refugees' needs are taken into account in order to place them in areas where they can find accessible accommodation at the end of the programmes.
- Contingency plans to address the housing challenges that may arise during times of crisis should be developed.

Social Relationships

Evaluations highlighted how through sponsorship programmes, refugees could develop social connections with community members thanks to the sponsors' support. Research in the UK found that volunteers tend to mobilise their social connections to provide sponsored refugees assistance, organise social events and encourage refugees to participate in social activities. Volunteers' work allows refugees to engage and build social relationships with community's members who are not directly involved in the sponsoring programme, facilitating the integration process. Intermediary organisations also recognised sponsors' capacity to help refugees develop social networks and find more resources through established relationships, such as job and housing opportunities. The desire to build social relationships has been expressed by the interviewed refugees, who, for instance, in Germany, mentioned also relying on social networks to expand their connections. Additionally, sponsorship experience positively affected the social relationships within sponsor groups, increasing social connectedness and cohesion and expanding the resources available for welcoming refugees.

Recommendations:

- Social activities offer refugees opportunities to come in contact with community members who are not directly involved in sponsorships. These activities should be encouraged because they help refugees build social relationships, providing useful resources for the integration process.
- Socialisation within sponsorship groups and between different groups should be promoted through events or online platforms because it can increase social cohesion and expand the support for refugees.

E. POLICY BRIEF 5: IMPACT OF COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP ON THE HOSTING COMMUNITIES

Community Sponsorship programmes can have a transformative impact on the hosting communities, involving not only people who are directly involved in sponsorship but also members of the wider community. Through their experience participating in the sponsor groups people from the host communities learn more about the needs and issues concerning refugees. Sponsors also share the acquired knowledge and experience with their social network who are indirectly involved in supporting refugees' integration in specific processes such as schoolteachers, doctors and other service providers.

The transformative impact of Community Sponsorship can then lead to facilitate integration processes, enabling refugees to access services and rebuild their lives more easily as the wider community is more aware of their needs. It can also increase the social cohesion amongst the community members, bringing people together and developing social relationships. As a result, communities can become more welcoming and open to diversity. Hostile and negative views towards refugees have been challenged by sponsor groups educating their own communities on acceptance and inclusion. For the refugees, feeling welcomed can further help them to restore their sense of belonging and reciprocate the received support, giving back to their hosting community.

The transformative impact of Community Sponsorship programmes has been noted especially in small and rural areas, where tight social connections amongst community members can facilitate the involvement of the broader community in supporting refugees.

Findings from six case studies exploring the impact of Community Sponsorship on 16 European communities divided in urban and rural areas¹⁰ highlights benefits and challenges of placing refugees in both settings. Recommendations and good practice and positive transformative impact amongst all community members are identified.

Integration into the wider community

In most of the analysed cases, the engagement of members of the wider community starts before the refugee families arrive in the country with the mobilisation of volunteers who reach out to their networks for support and to organise activities to promote the sponsorship initiative. However, there is still little awareness of sponsoring programmes within the general public. In a few instances in France for example, a negative attitude towards Humanitarian Corridors emerged because of the amount of resources deployed to support a small number of refugees. In urban contexts in Italy, some public members also voiced their disapproval of the arrival of Muslim refugees. Despite these few occasions, **the role of sponsorship groups and faith-based communities in creating social connections between sponsored families and community members demonstrated to be essential in connecting refugee families and broader community members, promoting social integration and generating a welcoming environment. Rural communities, with wider involvement of their members, showed to be more able to facilitate refugees' social inclusion.** More significantly, the encounters promoted by sponsoring programmes contributed to creating a more positive attitude towards migrants and refugees and opened up the debate amongst the community's members on the opportunities of welcoming more refugees in the future.

¹⁰ The urban communities are: Roeselare (Belgium), Toulouse (France), Cologne (Germany), Dublin (Ireland), Milano (Italy) and Bilbao (Basque Country). The rural communities are: Erps-Kwerps (Belgium); Vernon (France); Wuppertal (Germany); Clane (Ireland), Treppo Ligosullo (Italy), Bolzano (Italy), and Andoain, Arrigoriaga, Bilbao, and Vitoria-Gasteiz (Basque Country).

Recommendations:

- Raising awareness about sponsorship programmes and refugees' needs is essential to guarantee the sustainability of the programme, but also to facilitate social integration.
- The sponsoring groups must be composed of a different group of volunteers in order to provide a wider participation of different community's sectors and increase the opportunity for refugees to develop social connections with the wider community.

Urban areas

An identified challenge of placing sponsored refugees in urban areas is the difficulty of finding adequate and affordable accommodation at the end of the programme. Some refugees need to move to deprived neighbourhoods in which they face poverty, reduced life expectancy and criminality. **In Ireland, members of the community who were not part of the Community Sponsorship and the Gardaí (National Police Service) rallied round a sponsored family to support them when they experienced an assault.** This assault highlighted the seriousness of the pre-existing issues with public order and safety in the area, which led to more focussed action from the Gardaí to address it. Similarly, in urban contexts in Italy, sponsors reported having encounters hostility from some members of the wider community, but **informative sessions about the programme and refugees' backgrounds organised with the help of community leaders (such as the local priest) before the refugee family arrived helped to mitigate negative attitudes.**

On the other hand, urban settings are better equipped to provide social services and jobs are better suited for migrant populations. For instance, teachers in urban in areas in Italy were found to have more experience in supporting children with a not-Italian background than educators in rural areas. However, in large and medium-size cities, access to services and opportunities for refugees may be delayed due to long waiting lists or little awareness about sponsorships, as it was found in the city of Roeselare in Belgium. Urban areas are also more ethnically diverse than rural ones, facilitating the development of relationships between refugees and people sharing their same culture.

Recommendations:

- Collaboration between sponsor groups, local authorities and housing agencies should be established to secure affordable housing options for sponsored refugees.
- Informative sessions involving community leaders should be organised to promote understanding, acceptance and integration of sponsored refugee families amongst community members.
- Sponsor groups should work closely with local law enforcement agencies to address public order and safety concerns in deprived neighbourhoods where sponsored refugees are placed.
- The diversity of urban areas should be embraced as an opportunity to facilitate relationships between refugees and individuals from similar cultural backgrounds through cultural exchange programmes, community events and language classes.

Rural areas

Evaluations found that rural communities tend to have fewer opportunities for refugees such as specialised settlement services, language classes, skilled employment, counselling services and lack of public transport. On the other hand, this kind of community may be more adequate for families with small children who could benefit from housing, individualised attention as well as safety. In the case of the Italian and French Humanitarian Corridors, members of local communities located in rural areas also perceived the settlement of young refugee families in their communities as a positive development to avoid demographic decline.

Refugees living in rural and small communities could experience isolation, hostility and racism due to a lack of exposure to ethnic and cultural diversity. **In smaller municipalities, local groups often offered**

refugee families the opportunity to participate in volunteering activities, and supported the establishment of links with local entities involved in various activities, to get to know the municipality and create new networks. There were some instances where negative attitudes towards refugees were reported in the French rural context, and were associated with limited knowledge of refugees' issues and fear of differences. However, these negative attitudes were mitigated when sponsors introduced refugees to the community's members. **Findings from the Italian evaluation indicated that rural communities demonstrated a distinct advantage in promptly disseminating information about the presence of refugee families amongst the wider community, leading to a more widespread and positive reception of the sponsored family. Similarly, in France, the capacity of sponsors to establish positive relationships with members of the wider community, including social workers, educators and local authorities, was found to have a positive effect on the sponsorship programme.**

Recommendations:

- Additional resources for specialised settlement services, language classes, counselling and access to skilled employment opportunities should be allocated in rural communities.
- Community engagement and integration through volunteering activities and connections with local entities should be facilitated to foster contact networks for refugees.
- Targeted communication strategies to promptly disseminate accurate information about the presence of refugee families in rural communities, emphasising positive contributions and dispelling misconceptions, should be developed.
- The positive impact of refugee settlement on rural areas, such as mitigating demographic decline and revitalising local economies, should be highlighted to encourage community acceptance and support.

II. CONCLUSIONS

The policy briefs presented in this document aim to serve as valuable tools for identifying complex policy issues in the European community sponsorship programmes, as well as promoting evidence-informed policy development. The identification and analysis of key findings from the evaluations undertaken of different sponsorship programmes in Europe provided an opportunity to examine their impact in five key topics. The first one addresses the governance level focusing on important aspects such as the need of a national framework, improving the engagement with local authorities and promoting the meaningful participation of refugees. Those aspects play a relevant role to secure the sustainability of the programmes in the long term.

Subsequent topics involved examining distinctive phases identified in all the sponsorship programmes. The pre-departure stage in community sponsorship involved key policy aspects that lay the foundation for a successful and well-planned programme. Some of the most important policy aspects addressed in this phase are the matching process, pre-departure orientation, and efficient communication and information sharing. The next phase is about the arrival of the sponsored refugees into their new communities. During this stage several policy aspects play a crucial role in facilitating the successful integration of sponsored individuals, this includes reception and welcoming, housing and accommodation, language acquisition, health and well-being, employment and financial support and benefits. In the final phase of the programmes, policy aspects are related to the need of incorporating more initiatives that facilitate the financial independence of the refugees, protecting their wellbeing and securing their future in their new communities.

A systematic discussion of the practical considerations and challenges associated with implementing the proposed policy recommendations by different stakeholders can be useful to improve programmes' design, implementation, and management, leading to better outcomes for both the sponsored individuals and the host communities.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCING COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP PROGRAMMES IN EUROPE: KEY LESSONS FROM SHARE'S QUALITY SPONSORSHIP NETWORK'S CROSS-COUNTRY EVALUATIONS

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The Share Network

The Share Network is an inclusive network of local communities and actors engaged in the welcoming and inclusion of newcomers in Europe and coordinated by ICMC Europe. Share promotes and fosters safe pathways to Europe for migrants and refugees as well as their integration. We support and connect local initiatives, share best practice, and raise the voice of communities to inspire action and policy change.



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