



Share Network
WELCOME & INTEGRATION OF MIGRANTS & REFUGEES

Strengthening Refugee Participation in Community-led Initiatives and Advocacy

SHARE Refugee Sponsorship Mobilisation Platform Meeting Report

November 2022



Diözesan-
Caritasverband für das
Erzbistum Köln e. V.



BERDINTASUN, JUSTIZIA
ETA GIZARTE POLITIKETAKO SAILA
DEPARTAMENTO DE IGUALDAD,
JUSTICIA Y POLÍTICAS SOCIALES

Background

On the 6th of October ICMC Europe and the Share Network hosted the second of a series of meetings of its Refugee Sponsorship Mobilisation Platform. As the name indicates, this inclusive platform brings together a wide variety of stakeholders including civil society organisations, faith communities, volunteers, cities and regions, migrant-led organisations, universities, private actors and refugees - to exchange practices and develop strategies and advocacy initiatives to improve and expand community sponsorships under resettlement and complementary pathways in Europe.

While in Europe, participatory and co-creation approaches have been developed in sectors such as healthcare and the social sector, these approaches have not been widely used in the context of legal pathways and integration, and refugees and migrants are seldom included as stakeholders in the development of policies that impact their lives. Even though community sponsorship schemes have been around for a few years in Europe, we see that the voices of refugees and local communities are rarely represented in the design, development, implementation and evaluation of the programmes. **The meeting therefore provided an opportunity for participants to exchange on how to strengthen and integrate refugee participation in community-led initiatives and advocacy, and built on Share's work on [participation](#) and specifically its [refugee advisor programme for community sponsorship](#).**

The meeting was attended by around 60 participants from across Europe, Canada and the US and was organised in two parts. The first part featured keynote presentations on participation and refugee engagement from the point of view of a sponsored refugee in Ireland, an intermediary support organisation in France, and a representative of a volunteer sponsor group in the UK.

This was followed by four breakout groups where participants discussed diaspora and refugee engagement in community-led initiatives; participation in advocacy at the local and regional level; refugee participation in complementary education pathways; and participatory research and evaluation of sponsorship programmes.

Keynote presentations: Good practices in the engagement of refugees and migrants

The journey from newcomer to a welcomer

Participants heard from Angham Younes, who along with her husband and daughter were the first refugee family to arrive in Ireland through Ireland's community sponsorship programme in 2018. She shared her journey from a newcomer to now being an active member of her community, raising awareness about the Community Sponsorship programme in Ireland (CSI) and supporting the welcoming of refugees through the CSI. She talked about the immense interest from the media and the local community when she first arrived with her family to Dunshaughlin, a town in the County Meath with a population of 4,000 persons. Their notoriety resulted in a warm welcome from the locals. Soon after having settled there, Angham became involved in welcoming other families through sponsorship, facilitating and easing the arrival of other newcomers.

She highlighted that the involvement of sponsored refugees in the programmes was logical, as having gone through it, they had a **good understanding of the programme, its benefits as well as its shortcomings**. She also noted the role sponsored refugees can play in **promoting the programme** to

the wider community, but also crucially to local, regional and national authorities. Not only is Angham engaged at the national level by giving basic training to volunteers, providing information to newcomers upon arrival and participating in the evaluation of the Irish CS programme, but she is also part of driving change at the European level by sharing her expertise as a member of the Share refugee advisor programme and advocating for better housing solutions with other Share advisors - a common challenge identified across Europe.

Below are some of the **opportunities and recommendations** she identified to support newcomers become welcomers:

- Skills that newcomers bring should be identified and valued;
- Resources should be put into developing the skills and capacity of newcomers to help other newcomers;
- Facilitating the participation of newcomers in welcoming initiatives can be empowering, it helps build courage and allows newcomers to give back to the community;
- Previously sponsored refugees are particularly well placed to address pre-conceived notions of both volunteers and refugees and also to break the language and cultural barriers that may arise.

Angham ended her intervention by emphasising that the key to engaging and welcoming newcomers is the friendship one has to offer.

Refugee participation in organisations implementing community sponsorship

Guilhem Mante, project coordinator at the [fédération d'entraide protestante](#) (FEP), a French faith-based civil society organisation that supports humanitarian corridors linked to sponsorship, described their work to facilitate the participation of newcomers and sponsors in their programme. Their journey of enabling participation started with the outcomes of an evaluation in 2020, which shed light on the lack of participatory approaches in their humanitarian corridors programme. FEP decided to consult **an external expert** on participation to co-design a participation strategy within the organisation and to oversee the process. Together they discussed **a common definition, how to change perspectives and narratives around participation within the team and together developed priorities for their participation strategy**. They wanted to create a greater decision-making role for refugees while strengthening the role of volunteer sponsors. It was hence decided to form two participation groups: one for the people admitted through humanitarian corridors and one for the members of the citizen collectives. The participation group for refugees is especially important in the first weeks of arrival, where newcomers need strengthened accompaniment. It convenes 2 months after each new arrival to freely discuss and exchange with one another about the experience of settling in France. FEP consciously decided to only have one employee as part of these meetings, who is herself an Arab speaker and familiar with the group as she is present at the pre-departure phase in Lebanon.

Below are some initial **recommendations** to enable participation in community sponsorship programmes based on FEP's experience:

- Organising peer-to-peer sessions between previously sponsored refugees and new arrivals in the first weeks is hugely beneficial – it helps new arrivals to better understand the programme, supports better management of expectations, and helps newcomers to feel less isolated.
- Organising a video call after 1,5 months after arrival with all the other newly arrived persons to freely discuss common challenges and thoughts on life in France helps to support integration and ongoing improvements of the programme.

- Mainstreaming participation should be the aim of any programme to ensure a systematic inclusion of the views and demands of those welcomed and benefitting from the programme.

Engaging Migrant and Refugee Communities in Welcome

Iftakhar Latif, a sponsor from the [Waltham Forest Council of Mosques](#) in the UK discussed how his community came to engage refugees in community sponsorship. He explained that they first engaged in an **outreach exercise to the local mosques and wider community**. Although the Council of Mosques has a large Arab Muslim community, the sponsor group still sought out resettled refugees to join the sponsor group to ensure that it encompassed voices from recently resettled to more established communities. Similarly, while they could have sponsored a family as an individual mosque they decided to reach out to other mosques as well and were thus able to fundraise far more than the minimum requirement after just one Friday prayer.

Iftakhar emphasised the enormous **resource and network** a mosque brings, with over one thousand people attending prayers every week. These personal networks can then facilitate outreach to schools, hospitals, translators and volunteer drivers.

Iftakhar concluded by highlighting that 90% of community sponsorship in Europe is Church-based so there is a great opportunity to ensure not only more religious but also cultural diversity in sponsor groups.

Below are some of his **recommendations** for creating more diverse sponsor groups

- Sponsor groups should take the time to reach out to the wider community to build their group, preferably with refugees or at least in close contact with them
- Volunteers should be given specific tasks according to their capabilities
- Outreach to schools, including primary schools, is important, not only to facilitate integration for the sponsored families but also to get the community on board and raise awareness among the younger generation.

Breakout Groups: Strengthening participation of refugees in all aspects of welcome

A. HOW TO ENGAGE DIASPORA AND MIGRANTS IN COMMUNITY-LED INITIATIVES

Mojib Rahman Atal, Evaluator at the German Institute for Development Evaluation; Lecturer of Migration Politics at TH Nürnberg; and Share Network Refugee Advisor led this breakout group. As a founder of the [Afghan Diaspora Initiative](#) his knowledge on the role that diaspora and migrant-led organisations can play was very valuable. Participants in the breakout room were asked to give examples of diaspora and migrant-led initiatives; the role the latter could play in community-led initiatives; and the benefits and challenges of engagement. Below are the main points that came out of the discussion.

Examples of engagement of diaspora and migrants in community-led initiatives

- Migrants can support families arriving through community sponsorship (in London, a Syrian diaspora organisation supports newly arrived Syrian families)
- Migrant-led organisations can support organisations such as is the case in Germany, where a migrant-led sports club supports a NesT mentor group (for more information see [here](#))

- Migrants and refugees can be engaged as cultural mediators to connect arriving families and support the sponsorship or resettlement process (in Belgium, Caritas International engages intercultural mediators with a migratory background)
- Refugees can be part of sponsor groups (this is the case for groups in the UK, Ireland and Germany)
- Diaspora organisations can support other organisations working on refugee integration at the local, regional and national level, including intermediary support organisations
- Migrant and refugee-led organisations can lead empowerment workshops for refugee women

Beneficial impact migrants and refugees can have on community-led welcome

- They can mobilise multi-faith actors
- They diversify the volunteer groups that welcome newcomers, facilitating integration
- They empower newcomers by being an example of successful inclusion
- They facilitate peer-to-peer learning and exchanges
- They provide a useful network for newcomers

Challenges to engagement of refugee-led and diaspora organisations in community-led welcome

- Lack of validation and recognition of degrees and certificates hinder refugees' access to positions
- Rural areas with little diversity struggle to engage refugees and migrants in welcome
- There is a need for more avenues to systematically incorporate newcomers in welcoming and integration initiatives, through paid positions or peer-to-peer support sessions.
- There is a need to work on building initial relationships and trust with refugee and migrant-led organisations

B. PARTICIPATION OF PERSONS WITH LIVED EXPERIENCES IN ADVOCACY TO LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Abdulrahman Bdiwi, Project Administrator at Citizens UK and Share Network Refugee Advisor and Khadeja Alamy, Voices Network Ambassador and Pickwell Foundation community-lead led the discussion on advocating to local and regional authorities. Both, having resettled to the UK, are persons with lived experience who are now engaged in advocating for community sponsorship to local and regional authorities, as well as being vocal actors on improvements they would like to see in the welcome and admission of refugees through community-led initiatives. Before going into the discussion, they clarified that there is a difference between awareness raising (e.g. sharing stories and information and promoting the programme) and advocacy (proposing changes and recommendations). Below are the main points that came out of the discussion.

Best practice examples of including persons with lived experience in advocacy to local and regional authorities

- In the UK, some local authorities reach out to persons with lived experience to collect feedback on community sponsorship programmes
- Organising Lunch and Learn sessions with intermediary support organisations and sponsored refugees to receive feedback on the programme and support provided by organisations and authorities

- Training for persons with lived experience to allow them to advocate effectively to local and regional authorities
- Training for persons with lived experience on how to build relationships with local authorities
- Including persons with lived experience in awareness raising

Challenges to participatory advocacy to authorities

- The negative experiences of refugees with authorities in their countries of origin can impact their enthusiasm to work with authorities in the new country
- Authorities are difficult to access for newcomers/migrants/refugees
- Language is often a barrier for migrants and refugees to voice their opinions
- Training is needed on the workings of the administrative system and laws in the host country

The benefit of having persons with lived experiences advocating to authorities

- It heightens the credibility of political demands on the basis of lived experience
- It allows persons with lived experience to be an agent of change, feel empowered and gain confidence
- It allows newcomers to think through the consequences of policies they advocate for
- It could unlock some hidden potential and skills of newcomers (e.g. public speaking)
- It allows newcomers to access a network and engage in work to benefit their peers

C. Refugee participation in advocacy on complementary pathways

Rudi Osman, founder of the Union of Exiled Students in France, led the breakout room on advocacy on higher education pathways. The Union of Exiled Students is an association run by and for exiled persons. The term 'exiled person' has been chosen purposefully by the Union to reflect the inclusion of any person who does not reside any longer in their home country for any reasons. 'Exiled person' therefore encompasses amongst others refugees, undocumented migrants and asylum seekers alike. The UEE's focus lies on making higher education institutions accessible to exiled persons wanting to start or continue their studies. Rudi himself is a refugee from Syria who had to rebuild his life upon arrival in France. Below are the main points that came out of the discussion.

How can persons with lived experience be included in advocacy for complementary education pathways

- Different levels of engagement were identified: Self-organisation, co-design, consultation, and sharing of success stories/tokenism
- Exiled persons can be part of consultations, advisory panels or focus groups in the setting up of complementary pathways
- Refugee-led organisations can also be partners in higher education programmes
- They can promote and raise awareness about different initiatives
- Migrant and refugee-led organisations can offer peer-to-peer support through buddy and mentorship initiatives
- Former exiled students can be reached out to for engagement in the development, implementation and evaluation of programmes.

Challenges to engagement of exiled persons in complementary education pathways

- No/ Not enough follow up with former exiled students
- Little consultation of exiled persons
- A lack of evaluation of the participatory aspect of complementary education pathways

- Programmes should engage a range of persons with different lived experiences (different home countries, different educational backgrounds, attending universities in urban vs more rural areas)

The benefit of engaging exiled students in advocacy

- Improved programmes based on evidence-based recommendations provided by exiled students
- Exiled students can raise awareness about the various opportunities
- It allows exiled students to become agents of change by being involved in programme design
- Exiled students can raise questions/blind spots of the programmes that otherwise might not be considered
- Ensures that exiled students' needs are at the heart of the programmes

D. PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

Angham Younes, Share Network Refugee Advisor and Megan Vine, Researcher for the Share QSN evaluation of the Irish Community Sponsorship Programme led the breakout group on participatory research and evaluation. Since both were engaged in participatory research in Ireland for the Share QSN evaluation their expert knowledge helped to guide the conversation.

Examples of refugee participation in research and evaluation

- The Irish Refugee Council engages sponsored refugees in their research
- The Share Network engages sponsored refugees in their evaluations of sponsorship programmes across Europe
- Diverse teams of researchers/evaluators are crucial for fruitful exchange and discussion
- Share network partners will share the results of the evaluations with the interviewees and target groups in their national contexts.
- The Share evaluations used a flexible research method allowing each national researchers to enable participation in the manner they thought suited best.

Challenges to engaging persons with lived experience in participatory research and evaluation

- Ethical considerations for researchers when engaging vulnerable refugees as interviewees and interviewees
- Returning research results to participants
- Encouraging participants to engage in research
- Lack of awareness in academia of participatory research
- Limited funding for participatory research
- Using people with lived experiences as researchers is not widespread enough
- Risk of treating refugee participants as objects of research rather than potential researchers
- Avoid false promises about research (e.g. need to be transparent about research only having long-term objectives or no direct impact)
- Risk of interviewing the same target group time and time again
- Not compensating refugee participants
- Risk of seeing participants only as sources of information

Benefits of engaging persons with lived experiences as researchers/evaluators

- Engaging persons with lived experience as interviewees helps to reduce the language and cultural barriers. They can also support research with their own point of view adding to the richness of the evaluation or research
- Engaging persons with lived experience as interviewees can create/facilitate a safe space for refugees to give 'unpopular opinions' and speak truthfully about their experiences
- Co-construction of research from the beginning avoids harm and ensures usefulness of the results
- As a researcher, engaging persons with lived experiences broadens the network that can be reached by researchers alone
- Engaging refugees in research/evaluation can have a gatekeeping effect: the focus will remain on the questions and needs of target groups
- Ensures inclusivity
- Ensures relevance and impact

Conclusions

The first part of the meeting brought together a sponsored refugee, a sponsor, and a representative of an intermediary support organisation. They each shared their experience and perspective on what can be done to enable meaningful participation of persons with lived experience in the implementation and evaluation of the different programmes. The second part of the meeting identified challenges, benefits and good practices of participation in several aspects of welcome: engaging diaspora and migrant-led organisations in the delivery and design of sponsorship; engaging newcomers when advocating to local authorities; engaging exiled students in the design and advocacy for complementary education pathways; engaging refugees and migrants in research, monitoring and evaluation of sponsorship. Although many challenges were identified, the benefits outweighed the obstacles to be overcome. Supporting newcomers, those who are directly affected by community sponsorship programmes, to have a genuine voice in implementation, advocacy, and evaluation does not only benefit the programmes by creating more evidence-based recommendations but also empowers newcomers by giving them a voice in shaping the programmes.

At Share, we are aiming to enable participation through our refugee advisor programme which unites sponsored refugees and migrants across Europe to discuss common challenges and advocate for change. Moreover, Share is hosting capacity building trainings in the upcoming months to support persons admitted through sponsorship, volunteers and intermediary organisations. The Mobilisation Platform will convene for a third and last time in spring 2023.

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 MOBILISATION PLATFORM

To expand legal pathways and build community engagement, the Share network facilitates the convening of the [Refugee Sponsorship Mobilisation Platform](#). The platform exchanges practices, builds strategies and joint advocacy initiatives to expand and further community sponsorships under resettlement and complementary pathways in Europe.

The Share Refugee Sponsorship Mobilisation Platform offers an inclusive space to gather a wide variety of stakeholders, including civil society organisations, faith communities, volunteers and volunteer groups, cities and regions, diaspora and refugee led organisations, universities, private business, foundations, and refugees.

PARTICIPATION AND THE SHARE NETWORK

In 2020, the Share Network began a new programme of work to mainstream participation in refugee and migrant inclusion across all the activities. Its priority is to map and assess participatory and co-creation practices for refugees and migrant integration across the EU, while creating its own refugee participation programme. Two Share tools for participation to guide its work and that of its partners and network have been created. The [Share Network Ladder of Participation](#) provides a framework in which to situate participatory work and assess the type and level of engagement. It also acts as a reference tool to guide the development of new participatory and co-creation activities. [The Share 10 Key Principles for Refugee and Migrant Participation](#) guides Share's training, capacity-building, pilot project and advocacy activities. In December 2021, Share convened an Expert Group meeting on [Migrant and refugee participation in the design, implementation and evaluation of social orientation and integration actions, as well as governance, in rural areas](#) to map and assess participatory practices with a particular focus on smaller and rural communities.

The [Share Refugee Advisor Programme for Community Sponsorship](#) supports 23 refugees and migrants from the Middle East and East Africa, some of whom have been welcomed via community sponsorship, to advocate on specific sponsorship topics. Refugee Advisors select sponsorship advocacy priorities, while Share coordinates the programme, provides strategic advice and input and ensures access to training and capacity-building. Refugee Advisors provide expert input and facilitation for Share events and discussions at national and EU level, and form part of the core membership of the Share Refugee Sponsorship Mobilisation Platform.

Programme

Time	Activity
14:15 – 14:45	Welcome and Introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share Network upcoming activities and updates on refugee advisor programme
14:45 – 15:15	Good practices of participation & engagement of refugees and migrants
14:45 – 14:55	Keynote intervention: The journey from newcomer to welcomer by Angham Younes, Refugee Advisor, Share Network
14:55 – 15:05	Refugee participation in community-led initiatives by Guilhem Mante, Project Coordinator, Fédération d’Entraide Protestante/Share QSN partner
15:05 – 15:15	Keynote intervention: Engaging migrant and refugee communities in welcome by Iftakhar Latif, Sponsor, Waltham Forest Council of Mosques
15:15 – 15:25	Coffee Break
15:25 – 16:25	Strengthening participation of refugees in welcome, advocacy, and research/evaluation of programmes Breakout room topics: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> How to engage diaspora and migrants in community-led initiatives led by Mojib Rahman Atal, Evaluator, German Institute for Development Evaluation/ Lecturer of Migration Politics, TH Nürnberg, Share Network Refugee Advisor Refugee participation in advocacy at the local and regional level led by Abdulrahman Bdiwi, Share Network Refugee Advisor, Project Administrator, Citizens UK & Khadeja Alamy, Pickwell Foundation Refugee participation in advocacy on complementary pathways led by Rudi Osman, Founder, Union of Exiled Students Refugee participation in research and evaluation led by Megan Vine, Researcher for Share QSN evaluation and Angham Younes, Share Network Refugee Advisor
16:25 – 16:55	Reporting back from breakout rooms
16:55 – 17:00	Wrap up