SHARE

Fostering community sponsorships across Europe

WHAT IS THE SHARE NETWORK?

As part of the *European Resettlement Network (ERN)*, the *SHARE Network* promotes partnerships for refugee inclusion into local communities across Europe. Established in March 2012 and led by ICMC Europe, the SHARE Network provides a platform for mutual exchange and learning amongst local and regional actors working on or considering resettlement initiatives, and advocates for more and better resettlement and other complementary pathways in Europe.

The 2018-2019 SHARE Integration project, co-financed by the European Union under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), is a dynamic two-year programme of activities at European, national and local levels. This publication is authored within this project.

WHAT IS THE SHARE COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP WORKING GROUP?

To follow up on the current implementation of community sponsorship programmes and to identify best practices, the SHARE Community Sponsorship Working Group was established by ICMC Europe and Caritas Europa, and includes four additional organisations: Consorzio Communitas/Caritas Italiana, Caritas Salford, Caritas International (Caritas Belgium) and Secours Catholique Caritas France (SCCF). Several of these organisations are involved in existing community sponsorship programmes in Belgium, France, Italy and the UK. This publication builds upon previous *research* led by ICMC Europe within the European Resettlement Network as well as the outcomes of an *ICMC Europe conference*, which gathered together a wide range of faith-based organisations from both Europe and Canada. It also draws on numerous community sponsorship practices implemented by Caritas and other partners. A mix of desk research and qualitative interviews with volunteers and organisations involved in sponsorship was thus used to analyse existing and past programmes and to formulate recommendations on how to make future programmes more sustainable.

WHAT IS ICMC?

The International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) serves and protects uprooted people – refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants – regardless of faith, race, ethnicity or nationality. Since its creation in 1951, ICMC has identified and accompanied over one million refugees for resettlement. Additionally, ICMC provides expert resettlement personnel to UNHCR field operations through the ICMC-UNHCR Resettlement Deployment Scheme. Through its office in Turkey, the ICMC Refugee Support Centre (RSC) processes refugees for resettlement to the United States and Europe. The ICMC Europe office in Brussels works to promote and expand resettlement and local integration capacity in Europe.

WHAT IS CARITAS EUROPA?

The united strength of *Caritas Europa's* 49 members, present in 46 European countries, makes it one of the major social actors in Europe. We have a heartfelt commitment to analyse and fight poverty and social exclusion as well as to promote true integral human development, social justice and sustainable social systems in Europe and throughout the world. For this reason, Caritas Europa seeks to challenge the negative narrative around migration and the policies that aim to limit migration, expand border controls and reduce access to basic rights and protections for migrants and refugees.

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Foreword

"Transforming the lives of people who have lost everything, whilst utterly transforming the togetherness and vibrancy of your whole community to the soundtrack of jokes, songs and raucous laughter… What's not to like?"

— Sean Ryan, National Caritas Community Sponsorship Coordinator in the UK

Although migrants' spontaneous arrivals in Europe have decreased substantially in the last year, the debate around migration and refugees remains on top of the political agenda. Amidst a polarised context in which migrants are often scapegoated as the culprits of the societal and economic difficulties many citizens face, we aim with this publication to showcase examples of citizens across Europe who are contributing to the construction of a more welcoming Europe and spreading a more positive narrative.
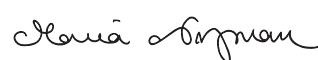
This publication analyses emerging community sponsorship schemes that constitute practical acts of solidarity towards people in need of protection. Echoing Pope Francis' staunch positioning to welcome, protect, promote and integrate migrants (the "four verbs") and his call inviting every community of Europe to take in one refugee family, pilot community sponsorship schemes to welcome refugees have sprouted across Europe.

These schemes share responsibilities between the state, local communities and actors in order to bring people fleeing war and conflict in Syria or Sudan, for instance, safely to Europe and to support them throughout their reception and integration paths. Some sponsorship schemes, branded as "humanitarian corridors", rely on the delivery of humanitarian visas, while others are anchored in UNHCR resettlement programmes.

Small, local communities are the powerhouse of community sponsorship. Ordinary citizens, local communities and actors on the ground, such as NGOs, churches, other faith-based organisations or public authorities are accompanying refugees from the day they set foot on new territory. The aim is to help them flourish in their new homes, schools, jobs, etc. Refugees are introduced to the sponsors' friends, families and neighbours, who welcome them into their lives and communities. Trips outdoors, potluck dinners, concerts, volunteering in local associations are some examples of activities that can lead to lasting friendships with the wider community in a spillover effect. Fostering human encounters and breaking communication barriers between people coming from very different backgrounds is one of the strengths of community sponsorship schemes. In addition to facilitating integration, community sponsorship can also be a catalyst for creating more tolerant and inclusive societies, even in small municipalities with little tradition of having received refugees before.

Well-designed sponsorship schemes have the potential to increase the number of protection places available in Europe. This can contribute to the Global Compact on Refugees that aims at expanding resettlement and complementary pathways for protection, including family reunification and community sponsorship programmes that are in addition to regular resettlement. We hope that the inspiring experiences of solidarity and human encounter presented to some extent in this publication will encourage governments to increase refugee admissions and foster integration across Europe, while keeping citizens and local communities in the driver's seat in fostering more welcoming societies.

Maria Nyman
Secretary General of Caritas Europa

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Fostering community sponsorships across Europe

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Executive summary

This publication considers community sponsorship within the broader policy context of legal pathways in Europe. Community sponsorship programmes welcome refugees by sharing responsibilities among state, regional and local authorities, and private actors. Such programmes have grown across Europe and have great potential to expand the admission of refugees into Europe in a safe and legal way. What is more, sponsorship programmes offer refugees tailor-made settlement support within local communities, facilitating smoother integration and social inclusion and creating welcoming communities – ultimately bringing about more positive narratives on refugees and migrants.

Sponsorship programmes foster new partnerships between governments and private actors. While resettlement has been primarily state-led, community sponsorship engages private citizens who make a humanitarian commitment of their personal time, energy, and often money, to welcome and assist an individual or a family in need of resettlement. With the adoption of the Global Compact on Refugees and the Three Year Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways, the time is ripe to develop and invest in community sponsorship.

This publication analyses the implementation of three approaches to community sponsorship which we have identified in several European countries. First emerging in 2013, and continuing today, these programmes have primarily supported Syrians and Iraqis, but also Eritreans and Sudanese. The three approaches include sponsorships linked to extended family reunification in Germany, Ireland and France; the Humanitarian Corridors in Italy, France, and Belgium, which rely on agreements with receiving states to issue a specific number of humanitarian visas; and finally, welcoming refugees who are identified and referred by UNHCR to the UK, Germany and Ireland.

Various elements of each programme have been successful and indeed should be replicated. Lessons learned from each of these experiences inform our recommendations for the sustainable design of community sponsorship in years to come. Based on input from the members of the SHARE Community Sponsorship Working Group, we examine a number of critical questions for the future of community sponsorship. How sponsorship schemes can create additional safe and legal admission pathways for refugees? To what extent sponsorship programmes can enhance social inclusion? What practical arrangements and partnership frameworks are needed for quality-control mechanisms which ensure the well-being of sponsored refugees?

This analysis leads us to propose several recommendations. First, clear objectives and targets for complementary pathways and resettlement should be established to enhance transparency. Likewise, the partnership framework between civil society actors and the state should also clearly define each actor's roles and responsibilities, the duration of support, and the safeguarding mechanisms in place. Enhanced transparency is also needed in the criteria used to identify and select sponsored refugees, and we argue that programmes should target both vulnerable refugees and family-linked cases. In addition, legal rights and entitlements must be clearly communicated to sponsored refugees from the outset. Importantly, community sponsorship programmes should complement, rather than replace, state service provision; this requires sustained government investment in social housing and refugee reception to avoid discrimination between groups and support broader social cohesion. Finally, civil society must be the main stakeholder in governing and developing programmes, and ensuring high-quality sponsorships. Civil society actors must coordinate both among themselves and with the government, and they must receive adequate funding by states, as well as the EU and other stakeholders.

Well-designed private sponsorship schemes can contribute to the increased admission of refugees into Europe and to better integration outcomes and more tolerant and welcoming societies. For that to happen, EU and national policy makers must seize this opportunity and tap into citizens' increased desire to proactively contribute to refugee protection and integration.

Community sponsorships within the context of increased protection needs globally

1

INCREASING PROTECTION NEEDS GLOBALLY AND SHRINKING ACCESS TO EUROPE

Globally, the number of people in need of protection due to persecution, conflict, violence, or human rights' violations has increased dramatically during recent years. According to UNHCR, more than 70 million people were forced to flee their home countries worldwide in 2018, meaning that 37,000 people became newly displaced every day.[1] Durable solutions for refugees are scarce. Most refugees remain in protracted displacement, defined as a situation in which 25,000 or more refugees from the same nationality are in exile in a given country for five years or more,[2] with little immediate hope of returning to their countries of origin.

Contrary to media narratives in Europe, which imply a high rate of arrivals into Europe, 85% of the world's refugees actually live in the Global South. Turkey hosts the largest number of refugees with 3.7 million, followed by Pakistan (1.4 million) and Uganda (1.2 million). In Lebanon, one out of six people is a refugee.[3] In comparison, in Europe, non-EU migrants make up only 4% of the total population, and among them, refugees comprise only about 0.4% of the overall population.[4]

Globally, less than one percent of refugees are offered resettlement, a durable solution in a third country, every year. Without other recourse, those in need of protection have thus embarked on dangerous journeys, often at the hands of human smugglers and traffickers, and often facing detention and treacherous conditions in transit, especially in Libya. What is more, an increase in external migration management and border controls has resulted in a significant decrease in arrivals to Europe over the past year. In 2018, nearly 145,000 migrants arrived in Europe, compared to more than 390,000 in 2016.[5] Restrictions on search and rescue operations as well as limited access to European ports have further resulted in fewer arrivals into Europe but higher death rates. In 2018, 2,275 people died or went missing in the Mediterranean Sea trying to reach Europe, an average of six deaths every day,[6] highlighting the urgent need for more and better solutions in the months and years to come.

SAFE AND LEGAL PATHWAYS AND THE GLOBAL COMPACT ON REFUGEES (GCR)

In the European context, safe and legal pathways of admission such as resettlement and complementary pathways are important solutions to the complex challenges. This publication will focus primarily on community sponsorship but it is also important to keep in mind the overall global context.

In the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants,[7] the UN Member States agreed to consider developing and expanding the resettlement and complementary pathways. Building on this commitment, the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR),[8] adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 2018, recognised that complementary pathways for the admission of refugees can facilitate access to protection, and are an expression of solidarity

with host countries and communities. Signatory states agreed to develop a Three-Year (2019-2021) Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways[9] that aims at making places available to refugees on a more systematic, organised and sustainable basis, as well as incorporating appropriate protection safeguards.

This strategy seeks to expand the availability of third country solutions for refugees and to guide the pledges and contributions that will be made at the first Global Refugee Forum in December 2019. As such, a multi-stakeholder and partnership approach with civil society, local communities, refugees, the private sector, academic institutions and other partners outside the traditional humanitarian sphere is a key aspect of complementary pathways.

RESETTLEMENT AS A DURABLE SOLUTION

Resettlement is one of three main durable solutions for refugees, together with their return to the home country and local integration in the country of first asylum. Resettlement refers to the selection and transfer of refugees from a state in which they have sought protection to another state where they are eligible for protection with respect to the principle of *non-refoulement*[10], and where they are granted permanent residence status and the opportunity to eventually become a naturalised citizen. Resettlement is a voluntary programme, with governments selecting refugees for resettlement that are referred by UNHCR based on the established UNHCR Resettlement Submission Categories.[11]

Worldwide resettlement places are far from meeting the global needs for durable solutions. UNHCR estimates that 1.4 million refugees are in need of resettlement in 2019 (a 17% increase from 2018), while only 92,400 refugees were actually resettled in 2018.[12] The recent reduction to the US resettlement programme has significantly contributed to the drop in the number of resettlement places available in recent years. By contrast, while the number of refugees resettled to Europe remains low,

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resettlement programmes to European countries have actually grown over the last few years.

The first EU resettlement programme was initiated in 2015 and granted EU funding to states for each refugee that was resettled to the respective country, a €5,000 or €10,000 lump sum per resettled person, depending on the country of departure. More recently, EU Member States, following the recommendation by the European Commission, have pledged to resettle 50,000 refugees by October 2019.[13] To further harmonise resettlement efforts and increase cooperation, a regulation on the EU resettlement framework was also proposed as part of the reform of the Common European

Asylum System (CEAS). According to the European Commission, between 2015 and 2017, 27,800 people were resettled to Europe and as of the end of June 2019, 32,071 refugees have been resettled as part of the EU scheme to resettle 50,000.[14] Both of these schemes mark a significant increase over previous years.[15] It is worth nevertheless noting that while the largest pledges came from France, Germany and Sweden, overall, commitments from most countries were quite modest and a number of EU countries decided to refrain from participating in the schemes.[16] In addition, while the increase in resettlement to Europe should be lauded, European contributions to global resettlement remain modest in relation to global needs.

Regrettably, several governments are also diverting resettlement from its humanitarian and durable protection functions by using it as a strategic 'migration management tool', whereby resettlement of refugees is focused on those countries that cooperate with the EU at reducing irregular arrivals (most notably the EU-Turkey agreement). At the same time, some of the countries engaging in resettlement are closing the EU's borders to prevent spontaneous arrivals of asylum seekers. There is thus increasingly a risk that safe and legal pathways, such as resettlement, are instrumentalised as a bargaining tool to prevent irregular migration and even infringe on the right to apply for asylum of those who come to Europe spontaneously.

MOMENTUM BUILDS FOR COMPLEMENTARY PATHWAYS AND COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP

Alongside resettlement, complementary pathways of admission have expanded during recent years in response to the Syrian conflict, reflecting the increasing desire of governments and civil society actors to engage directly in supporting refugees. Several European countries have launched humanitarian admission programmes in order to transfer people in need of protection out of conflict regions (e.g. Syria, Iraq) or for family reunification. Other complementary pathways include higher education scholarships, humanitarian visas and labour mobility schemes.

Germany initially took the lead in Europe, providing 35,000 protection places through humanitarian admissions in 2013-2014.[17] Humanitarian admission programmes have also been implemented in Austria, France, Ireland, Switzerland, and elsewhere, while student scholarship schemes have likewise been launched in Germany, France, the Czech Republic and Portugal.[18] In addition, – and the primary focus of this publication – private or community sponsorship initiatives have also taken place in the UK, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Belgium and France. Many of the recent sponsorship schemes have combined various elements of the programmes mentioned and cannot be easily placed into one category or another. As such, it is important to define the concept of community sponsorship and the associated terminology.

Private or community sponsorship is best known as originating in Canada, where the Private Sponsorship of Refugees programme (PSR) has been ongoing since 1978. In Europe, community sponsorships are a flexible concept that often has overlaps with resettlement, humanitarian visas, and family reunification programmes. In previous research,[19] private sponsorships was defined as "a public-private partnership between governments, who facilitate legal admission for refugees, and private actors, who provide financial, social and/or emotional support to admit, receive and settle refugees into the community".

Community sponsorship is therefore characterised by a variable sharing of roles and costs between the government and private actors, and indeed gives private actors a leading role in welcoming refugees into their local communities. Mutual responsibilities are defined within a framework (e.g. a government regulation or a memorandum of understanding) that defines (more or less flexibly, depending on the model) obligations, the duration of these, and the national and local implementation frameworks. By providing groups of citizens the opportunity to host a refugee or a refugee family, thus playing an active role in the newcomers' reception and integration, community sponsorship schemes can be a catalyst for increasing solutions for refugees, strengthening support for refugees at community level and - hopefully - combating negative narratives about refugees and migrants.

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

The terms "community-based sponsorship", "community sponsorship", and "private sponsorship" are often used interchangeably to mean the same thing. Throughout this publication, the term "**community sponsorship**" is used to reflect the vital role of local communities in initiatives that admit, protect, and welcome refugees in need of protection.

''I was born in 1939, so I am now 79 years old. My memory of World War ll is quite vivid: the sirens, running for air raid shelters, crying friends whose fathers had been killed or were 'missing', massive holes where a lovely building had been, and of course the food rationing, and the coupons for furniture and clothes. We see the devastation in Syria on the TV and our hearts are ripped open. So when Felicity suggested that we house a family, it was almost inevitable that I went along to the meeting and inevitable that I got drawn in."
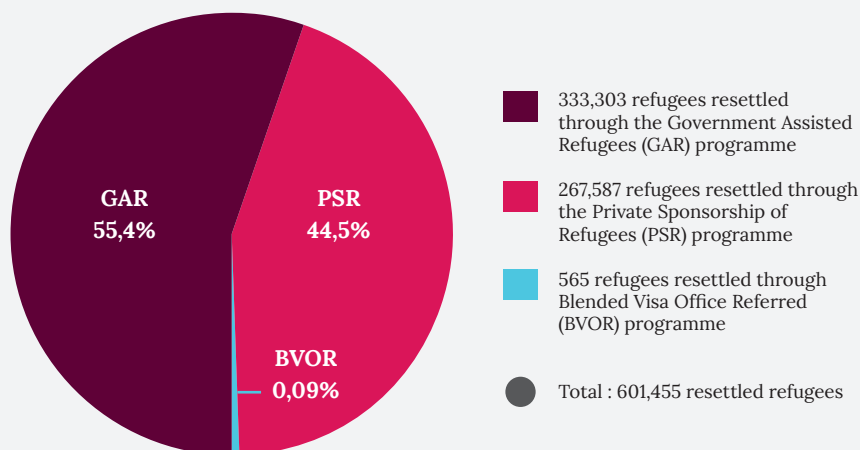
— Olive, a volunteer from one of the sponsoring groups in the UKBetter inclusion in the midst of polarisation on migration

THE PRIVATE SPONSORSHIP OF REFUGEES PROGRAMME, CANADA

The Canadian Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) programme is additional to Canada's traditional resettlement programme, the Government Assisted Refugees (GAR) programme. Each programme sets annual (or multi-annual) targets. More than 300,000 refugees have been sponsored since 1978;[20] and in recent years, sponsored refugees have comprised 45% of the country's total resettlement effort.[21] In most cases, sponsors can 'name' or identify the refugee they want to help bring to Canada. As a result, sponsored refugees often lead or join new sponsoring groups in order to bring additional relatives to Canada, which has resulted in the large majority - up to 90% - of privately sponsored refugees in Canada being family-linked.[22] In 2013, Canada launched another type of sponsorship programme, the Blended Visa Office Referred (BVOR) programme, which matches vulnerable refugees referred by UNHCR to sponsoring groups. The 2019 targets for these three refugee admission programmes are as follows: GAR (traditional resettlement) - 9,300; PSR - 19,000; and BVOR - 1,650.[23] A crucial benefit of private sponsorship in Canada has been better performance in integration outcomes.[24] Sponsorship has also played an important role in creating a more welcoming society and in fostering overall citizen support for refugees.[25]

Total number of resettled refugees in Canada between 1980 and 2015, broken down by programme (GAR, PSR and BVOR)

Between 1980 and 2015, Canada resettled 333,303 GARs, 267,587 PSRs and 565 BVOR refugees, totalling 601,455 resettled refugees.

GAR
55,4%

PSR
44,5%

BVOR
0,09%

333,303 refugees resettled through the Government Assisted Refugees (GAR) programme

267,587 refugees resettled through the Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) programme

565 refugees resettled through Blended Visa Office Referred (BVOR) programme

Total : 601,455 resettled refugees

Source: Government of Canada, Evaluation of the Resettlement Programs, 2016 (GAR, PSR, BVOR and RAP), 7 July 2016, p.9, *www.canada.ca/content/dam/ircc/migration/ircc/english/pdf/pub/resettlement.pdf*

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BETTER INCLUSION IN THE MIDST OF POLARISATION ON MIGRATION

This potential added value of sponsorship for integration outcomes is particularly important in Europe, where local and national governments, together with civil society, have been grappling with questions of how to best support newcomers and facilitate integration and social cohesion. Many countries have seen populist parties agitating against migration, and rising hostility, as well as violent incidents against refugees and migrants, particularly targeting Muslims. At the same time, many citizens feel concerned by integration outcomes and policies: the 2018 Standard Eurobarometer Survey found that 70% of Europeans thought that integrating immigrants is a necessary investment for their country in the long run.[26] And though integration is a national competence, EU policies and funding have aimed to support the efforts of European countries, for example, through the European Commission's 2016 Action Plan on the Integration of third country nationals, which sought to develop and strengthen Member States' integration polices.[27] Likewise, at the global level, the Global Compact on Migration (GCM), adopted by 164 countries, calls for fostering inclusive and cohesive societies, empowering migrants to become active members of society and promoting the reciprocal engagement of receiving communities and migrants. In this context, momentum has grown within both communities and governments to develop community sponsorship in Europe – which promises increased diversity and social cohesion at community level, as well as improved integration outcomes.

Building on the Canadian example, and together with increased global protection needs, several calls to set up community sponsorship programmes have been made. In September 2017, the European Commission recommended that the EU Member States "explore ways to establish private sponsorship schemes,"[28] and in October 2018, a feasibility study,[29] commissioned by the European Commission, explored how the EU could support the continued development of sponsorship in Europe. Furthermore, the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (GRSI) launched in December 2017 by the Canadian government, together with the University of Ottawa, UNHCR, the Open Society Foundations (OSF), and the Radcliffe Foundation, aims to share sponsorship experiences in Canada in order to support the development of appropriate models across the globe. Finally, as mentioned above, the GCR further builds on these commitments.

"Engaging in such a programme to support a family creates bonds among the members of the welcoming group and enables the residents of the village to view foreigners positively."

— Jacqueline Coutin, France

DESIGNING COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP PROGRAMMES: WHAT ARE THE MAIN QUESTIONS?

Community sponsorship schemes have developed considerably in Europe over the last few years (a brief history is presented in chapter two) in different forms. However, these initiatives remain mainly ad hoc pilot projects, and questions remain as to how to ensure sustainability of community sponsorship in the long term. How should sponsorship programmes be designed in order to maximise success? And how can communities hold governments accountable for ensuring the continuation of such programmes? At this stage six key issues remain unresolved or unexplored in the debate around community sponsorship:

1) **Fostering social inclusion and cohesion**: an issue that has not yet been sufficiently explored, particularly in European contexts, relates to the ways in which community sponsorship can bolster local solidarity and inclusion. Sponsorship can enable not only the social and professional integration of newcomers, but, by deconstructing 'the fear of strangers', it can also raise awareness about refugees and contribute to a shift in perspectives. Sponsorship programmes, therefore, must consider what measures to put in place in order to facilitate social inclusion at the local level.

2) **Additionality**: community sponsorship programmes that offer a pathway for admission, which is additional to resettlement, can expand the number of refugees who have access to protection, thereby enhancing global responsibility-sharing. At the same time, community sponsorship is also used to engage individuals

and communities in the reception and integration of refugees. As such, the question remains as to whether community sponsorship is, in essence, about providing additional pathways of admission, or a form of grassroots integration support, or both.

3) **The type of partnership between civil society and the (local and national) government**: policy makers and practitioners together must divide their roles and responsibilities, and must determine the type of relationship between the respective actors involved and each of their individual roles and responsibilities.

4) **Coordination structures for civil society actors**: different sponsoring programmes have set up different structures for collaboration between sponsoring groups, volunteers, lead sponsors, NGOs and other civil society actors. Future sponsorship programmes will need to consider which type of structures work best, with a view towards sustainability and the growth of initiatives.

5) **Ensuring minimum standards and quality control**: a key challenge in sponsorship is navigating the tension between regulation and flexibility, and future programmes must find ways to promote innovation and creativity while also ensuring quality standards and a safety net for vulnerable refugees.

6) **Whom to sponsor (the issue of 'naming')**: sponsorship has allowed for family reunification in some cases (e.g. see box above about the Canadian programme, where only about 8% of cases are UNHCR-referred). A key question for sponsorship is thus: who do the programmes target?

This publication considers these issues within the broader policy context of legal pathways in Europe. We present the three main approaches to community sponsorship that have so far evolved in Europe and argue that various elements of each have been successful and should be replicated. Lessons learned thus far in Belgium, Italy, France, Germany, Ireland and the UK, along with case study examples, both inform and illustrate recommendations for the successful and sustainable design of community sponsorship programmes in the years to come.

Community sponsorship in Europe

ORIGINS AND GROWTH OF COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIPS IN EUROPE

Before analysing how best to design future community sponsorship programmes, we must first look back at the development of the three approaches to community sponsorship in Europe. We have identified: family reunification-based sponsorship; Humanitarian Corridors; and resettlement-based sponsorship. As early as 2013, family reunification schemes in Germany, France, and Ireland involved elements of sponsorship, whereby relatives took on various financial and social responsibilities in order to bring their extended family members to Europe. A second approach is the Humanitarian Corridors, in Italy, France and Belgium, where faith-based actors established agreements with their respective governments to receive refugees who were initially admitted on humanitarian visas. And third, resettlement-based sponsorship schemes launched first in the UK (the UK Full Community Sponsorship programme), and more recently in Germany and Ireland; these programmes enable groups of citizens to support refugees who are referred by UNHCR and admitted within the respective resettlement quotas of each country (for the UK and Ireland), or in addition to it (Germany). More details on each of these approaches, as well as the successes and lessons learned from each, are discussed below.

FAMILY REUNIFICATION SCHEMES, STARTING IN 2013

The first experiences in Europe that featured elements of community sponsorship offered opportunities for Syrians (in most cases), in Germany, France and Ireland, to reunite with extended family members[30] who were residing in countries of first asylum, in addition to state resettlement programmes.

The largest of these schemes is the German Regional Admission Programmes (*Landesaufnahmeprogramme*), which started in July 2013 and had admitted around 25,000 people by mid-2018 (some 21,000 of whom had arrived by 2015). The programme, which is ongoing in five federal states at the time of writing, allows German citizens or residents (including refugees) to sponsor Syrian family members, who then enter Germany on humanitarian grounds and receive a two-year renewable residence permit. Sponsors must sign a binding declaration of financial commitment (*Verpflichtungserklärung*) covering most costs for five years. Similar to the German programme – but on a much smaller scale – the Syrian Humanitarian Admission Programme (SHAP) in Ireland allowed Irish citizens and residents to sponsor Syrian relatives who entered on humanitarian grounds and then received a renewable residence permit, as in Germany.[31] The programme was implemented for about six months in 2014, admitting 119 Syrians. Finally, a third family reunification scheme was started in 2014 by faith-based organisations in France, who were concerned about persecuted minorities living under the Islamic State.

It admitted a total of 7,344 Syrians and Iraqis in 2015-2016, who entered France on humanitarian visas and then applied for asylum.[32] The scheme allowed family members and (religious) organisations to cover travel and initial settlement costs, filling the gap until the new arrivals received refugee status and could access state benefits.[33]

Sponsorship as a means to reuniting extended family members is an important approach for policy makers to consider. The highly successful Canadian model teaches us that family reunification can enable the growth of community sponsorship initiatives. In Canada, family members account for the large majority of all sponsored refugees, and family reunification has been recognised as one of the most important factors in the success of the Canadian programme.[34]

In European countries as well, the desire to reunite with family is a strong motivation for engaging in community sponsorship. We can see this clearly from the German and French programmes, which, for example, brought in more than 27,000 people over a two-year period – all in addition to traditional resettlement. Any sponsorship model should foresee that sponsored refugees will, in the short or longer term, seek ways to have other family or community members join them.

"We are tired because my family (my mother, my father and my brother) is still in Lebanon and suffers so much. They need to come to France; I hope that you will be able to find a solution for them. I am sick and often hospitalised, I need my family to come and be with me, I need my wife, my granddaughter."

— An Iraqi man, who arrived in France from Lebanon through the French Humanitarian Corridor [35]

At the same time, family reunification schemes have also met challenges, especially with regard to the burden placed on sponsoring family members. In Ireland, sponsors were required to cover all costs for an indefinite period, and sponsored refugees were not eligible for social benefits. Similarly, in Germany, the declaration of commitment for the German Regional Admission Programmes initially required sponsors to cover all expenses for an indefinite period, but because of this heavy burden, the programme was amended to exempt the costs of healthcare (in 2014) and to limit the sponsorship period to five-years (in 2016). The legal status that sponsored

persons received in Ireland also came with uncertainty: sponsored refugees were granted a two-year renewable residence permit; however, the renewal procedures were unclear. As a result, a number of the sponsored refugees in Ireland applied for – and were granted – asylum, determining that refugee status was a more durable protection status, and the rights and entitlements attached to it eased the burden on their sponsoring relatives.[36]

In some cases, NGOs have stepped in to address these challenges. The German organisation, *FlüchtlingspatenSyrien* (meaning, Syrian Refugee Sponsors), formed in 2015, seeks to ease the financial
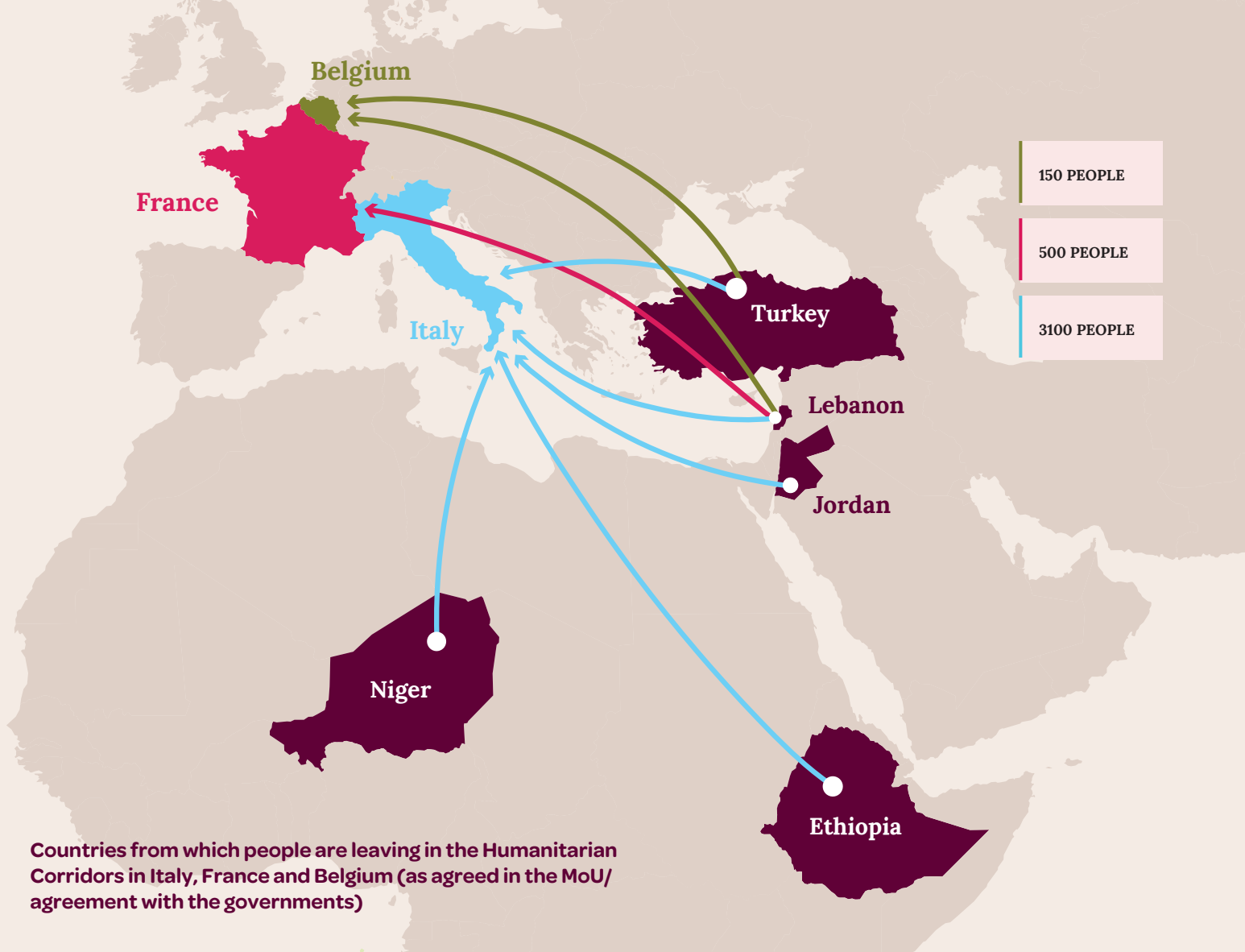

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burden on family sponsors by fundraising – usually small amounts, €10-€20 per month among locals.[37] And in France, for example, the Federation of Protestant Mutual Aid (FEP), began coordinating a Syrian refugee reception network, consisting of around 50 volunteer groups which provided accommodation and integration support. Likewise, the Order of Malta (*Ordre de Malte*) France began offering French language courses as well as employment and social support.

An important lesson learned for family reunification schemes thus relates to the role of families and NGOs. Not surprisingly, a key benefit of family reunification is that being welcomed by family members decreases the isolation experienced by newly arrived refugees. Refugees who are welcomed by family members can immediately connect to a network of people with whom they share a common culture and background, and who can help them navigate the new environment. On the other hand, refugees welcomed by family members may not connect as quickly with the broader local community, and conversely, the host community may not have the chance to connect with newly arrived refugees. Therefore, the community may not experience the unique social cohesion benefits of community sponsorship to the same extent as in other sponsorship approaches. Establishing close links with NGOs can bridge the gap between the refugee family and the wider community, as NGOs step into provide initial support and to accompany refugees in their new settings.

COORDINATED PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT FOR FAMILY SPONSORS IN FRANCE

Since 2014, *Ordre de Malte France* has implemented a programme which supports refugees who joined family and other community members in France, thanks to humanitarian visas. By December 2018, the programme had supported 766 refugees in nine French regions (départements). In Indre-et-Loire, where many of the programme's beneficiaries live, *Ordre de Malte* established a regional roundtable, bringing together regional authorities, health services and social housing agencies. This coordination mechanism proved to be so useful that it has now expanded to coordinate all refugee-related interventions in the area. At the same time, welcoming refugees requires significant resources, so building ties with people and organisations who can provide specialised support and pre-existing solidarity networks is helpful, and ultimately empowers the local community as a whole.

150 PEOPLE

500 PEOPLE

3100 PEOPLE

Countries from which people are leaving in the Humanitarian Corridors in Italy, France and Belgium (as agreed in the MoU/agreement with the governments)

HUMANITARIAN CORRIDORS, STARTING IN 2015

The second approach to community sponsorships are the Humanitarian Corridors programmes in Italy, France and Belgium[38] that were developed between 2015 and 2017, when ordinary citizens increasingly sought to express solidarity and support for refugees. In September 2015, Pope Francis invited "every parish, every religious community, every monastery, every sanctuary of Europe, to take in one family", a call which resonated strongly among faith-based groups and the media. One such group that responded was the Community of Sant'Egidio in Italy, which launched the first Humanitarian Corridors programme in 2015, together with other Catholic and Protestant organisations, aiming to move people affected by war to safety and to demonstrate an alternative to dangerous sea crossings. Notably, all of the Humanitarian Corridors programmes have offered protection places, which are additional to resettlement commitments.

In all three countries, the Humanitarian Corridors programmes were set up through a framework offering a memorandum of understanding (MoU) or an agreement between the government and civil society stakeholders, which sets out a specific quota of beneficiaries. In Italy, three programmes have been implemented under multiple agreements between the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Interior, and the Community of Sant'Egidio, the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy, the Waldensian Board, the Italian Bishops' Conference and Caritas Italiana.

Programmes were launched in December 2015 (with a quota of 1,000 people), in January 2017 (with a quota of 500), and in November 2017 (with a quota of 1,000). In spring 2019, a fourth programme was signed by the Italian Bishops' Conference (with the practical support of Caritas Italiana and Migrantes) and the Community of Sant'Egidio to welcome 600 refugees from Ethiopia, Niger and Jordan over a two-year period. Refugees living in Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan and Ethiopia have so far benefited from the programmes, and by May 2019, more than 2,000 people (1,549 from Lebanon and 498 from Ethiopia, Jordan and Turkey) had arrived in Italy.[39]

Partners involved in the Italian Humanitarian Corridors programmes received the 2019 UNHCR Nansen Award for their exceptional work assisting people who were forcibly displaced.

Following Italy's lead, the Humanitarian Corridors programme in France was launched in March 2017, under an agreement between the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Interior, and with the Community of Sant'Egidio, the Protestant Federation of France, the Federation of Protestant Mutual Aid, the Bishops' Conference of France and Secours Catholique Caritas France. The programme, which is ongoing, has a quota of 500 people from Lebanon; and more than 365 people have so far arrived in 2019. Finally, in Belgium, an agreement (declaration of intent) between the Secretary of State for Asylum and Migration and the Community of Sant'Egidio, in partnership with the recognised faiths in Belgium[40] was signed in November 2017;[41] and 150 refugees from Lebanon and Turkey had arrived in Belgium by December 2018.

"The community sponsorships are a drop in the ocean, but a drop which changes people's individual lives, both the refugees and the communities."

— Juliette Delaplace, coordinator of the Humanitarian Corridors for Secours Catholique - Caritas France

In all three countries, beneficiaries of the Humanitarian Corridors programmes are identified and referred by local partners in the countries of asylum. They are granted a humanitarian visa from the embassy or consulate in the country of first asylum, which allows them to enter the country of destination, and from there, they lodge a claim for asylum (as is the case in the French family reunification scheme described above).[42] The Humanitarian Corridors programmes are privately funded by the faith-based organisations,[43] as well as by the support of fundraising campaigns. The programmes cover all costs of selection, cultural orientation, travel, housing and initial settlement; and after beneficiaries of the programme receive protection status, they are eligible to apply for state benefits. In all three programmes, by covering the costs of travel and initial settlement, the sponsorship thus fills the gap between the time that the refugees leave the country of first asylum until they receive their protection status. [44]

Groups of volunteers are formed at local level to welcome a refugee family for a specific time period; and various tasks are divided among the group (e.g. transport, language support). Each of the faith-based organisations which have signed the

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Humanitarian Corridors MoU play roughly the role of 'principal or lead sponsors,' assuming overall financial responsibility and taking up the role of coordinating with local actors within their networks in order to secure housing, and identify volunteers and professionals who will provide support, as well as conducting post-arrival monitoring. In addition, these lead organisations have often played important roles during the pre-departure phase, including delivering cultural orientation to refugees and preparing host communities for the soon-to-arrive refugees, as well as matching selected beneficiaries to specific local communities (refer to chapter three for more on matching).

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REFERRALS FROM THE GANDHI CHARITY IN ETHIOPIA

One of Sant'Egidio and Caritas Italiana's local partners in Ethiopia, providing referrals for the Humanitarian Corridors, is the Gandhi Charity.[45] This NGO was originally established in 2003 and today works in refugee camps in Ethiopia and Sudan, and elsewhere in Africa and in Italy, supporting vulnerable children and youth, as well as victims of gender-based violence, and offering education and other humanitarian aid. The organisation's on-the-ground experience has made it an excellent partner for refugee identification and referral to the Italian Humanitarian Corridors programme.

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We have much to learn from the Humanitarian Corridors experiences in Italy, France and Belgium. First, they have succeeded in offering additional protection places to people in need. In addition, these programmes have also worked with a wide range of partners in countries of asylum, including churches, NGOs and UNHCR, in order to reach people who may not otherwise be able to access protection. These programmes also targeted people with specific vulnerabilities not necessarily eligible for national resettlement programmes (e.g. families with children, elderly). Furthermore, Humanitarian Corridors programmes have also succeeded in bringing people to safety relatively efficiently and quickly, with almost 2,500 arrivals to the three countries within a three-year period.

Another important success of the Humanitarian Corridors has been their engagement with local communities, building capacity for refugee reception across the three countries. For example, in Belgium, Caritas International built on its longstanding experience in case management, refugee resettlement and refugee integration to provide support to sponsoring groups. Caritas International in Belgium and Caritas France have visited welcoming groups and implemented group sessions in order to provide training and consultation – in the form of a helpdesk, which volunteers can call at any time – as well as providing ongoing monitoring. The Caritas support and training cover complex legal and social welfare systems, as well as helping sponsoring groups to promote the autonomy of refugees as they seek to regain control of their lives and their futures. Most of the sponsoring groups, largely parishes situated in smaller villages, have had no previous experience hosting vulnerable refugees and as such have found this support very valuable.

This engagement and capacity building has been crucial to the success of the corridors programmes, particularly when it comes to a local welcome. During the last few years, Italy has seen relatively high rates of so-called onward migration, where migrants or refugees continue their journey to other European countries, even though, for many migrants, their legal status is restricted to Italy and, increasingly, they may be returned by other EU countries to Italy. Onward migration has thus been a challenge among both asylum seekers and resettled refugees in Italy, especially in cases where migrants are not well informed of their respective rights and obligations regarding such travel. However, due to the strong local welcoming structures a mere three percent of refugees who arrived in Italy from Ethiopia, through the latest Italian Humanitarian Corridors programme (2017-2018), have reportedly migrated elsewhere.[46] This is a lower rate than for other refugee groups, and is thus an important achievement, demonstrating how the programme has facilitated a strong local welcome, security and longer term labour market integration possibilities.

"Welcoming refugees does not aim at changing these families nor integrating them into a supposedly French culture, which we find difficult to define ourselves (luckily enough, otherwise how boring would that be!). It aims at protecting these people from war and the risks of exile, and to support them as best as possible so that they can find their own path in France."

— Volunteer Victor Brunier, France

Given the success of the Humanitarian Corridors, it is worth considering how best to further develop and ensure longer term sustainability of these pilot programmes. One lesson learned relates to the MoU framework of these programmes, which limits each programme to a specific group of actors and a one-time quota of beneficiaries. Replicating or expanding the programme requires a new MoU. The MoU framework has been highly effective in rapidly establishing and implementing these innovative initiatives. However, moving forward, a more open framework could allow for new actors to get more easily involved, and for beneficiary quotas to increase.

In addition, it is worth exploring safety net provisions post-arrival. The Humanitarian Corridors programmes have each developed systems to support new arrivals, however, in many cases, the parameters and approach has varied from one faith-based organisation (e.g. the 'lead sponsor,' signatory to the MoU) to another. And while flexibility is helpful for experimentation and piloting, it is also worth ensuring safety nets are in place, especially as programmes grow to a larger scale. Ongoing training and support, such as the NGO-led support and training described above, can be an excellent way of ensuring a minimum level of quality.

Along similar lines, the identification and selection processes of these programmes have been somewhat flexible, building on referrals from partners in countries of first asylum. This has been positive, as discussed above, because it widens access to the programmes. However, it is also important that selection criteria (whether it be related to refugee status, vulnerability or something else) be both clear and transparent to refugees and sponsoring groups alike. And, it is worth considering the delivery of humanitarian visas. In some cases, relying on embassies and consulates to grant humanitarian visas can result in strained capacity and backlogs at these facilities.

For example, since the start of the French Humanitarian Corridors programme, the French embassy in Lebanon has not increased the number of appointments' slots available to apply for a visa – and its capacity was already strained before the sponsorship programme began. In addition, the procedures to apply for humanitarian visas and the criteria on which decisions are made have sometimes been unclear. French CSOs, for example, have expressed concern that the humanitarian visas delivered under the Humanitarian Corridors scheme are not always additional to the delivery of humanitarian visas outside of those programmes, and may make it more difficult for those outside of the Humanitarian Corridors programme to access these visas.

An important lesson to consider for the future, (likewise for family reunification-based schemes, which have also relied on humanitarian visas), is thus the importance of clear and transparent procedures and criteria for granting humanitarian visas.

RESETTLEMENT-BASED COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP PROGRAMMES, STARTING IN 2016

The third approach to community sponsorship in Europe is resettlement-based community sponsorship. The UK first launched in 2016 the Full Community Sponsorship Programme, followed by the pilot programmes in Germany and Ireland in 2018-2019. The UK and Irish programmes have to date offered protection places that are within existing resettlement commitments, and they have therefore not been additional resettlements. The German pilot project is additional to resettlement pledges, and the UK programme will be additional to resettlement starting in 2020.[47] All three of the resettlement-based programmes are similar to the Canadian Blended Visa Office Referred (BVOR) programme in that it is not the sponsor, but rather UNHCR, that identifies and refers vulnerable refugees, who are then matched with sponsoring groups who, in turn, are tasked with fundraising, securing housing, and providing post-arrival support. Sponsored persons in the three countries receive the same legal status as resettled refugees. The programme in the UK does not have a quota and arrivals to date are within the UK's resettlement commitment to receive 20,000 Syrian refugees between 2016 and 2020. The programme in Germany aims to bring in 500 refugees during 2019, while Ireland aims to support approximately 50 sponsored refugees.

In the UK programme, groups of citizens who wish to sponsor refugees must act in partnership with a registered charity or incorporated association, which underwrites the sponsoring group. In order to apply, sponsoring groups must meet several criteria and draft a detailed settlement plan, including a safeguarding policy (e.g. the procedures for vetting staff and volunteers, and the reporting mechanisms in case of harm).[48] The required criteria to become a sponsor comprise, among others, providing financial assistance for one year (i.e. £9,000 for a family), securing housing where refugees can live for two years (though state benefits cover the cost of housing),[49] and hiring a qualified English language instructor. In addition, the sponsoring group must obtain the consent of the local authorities where the sponsored refugees will live.
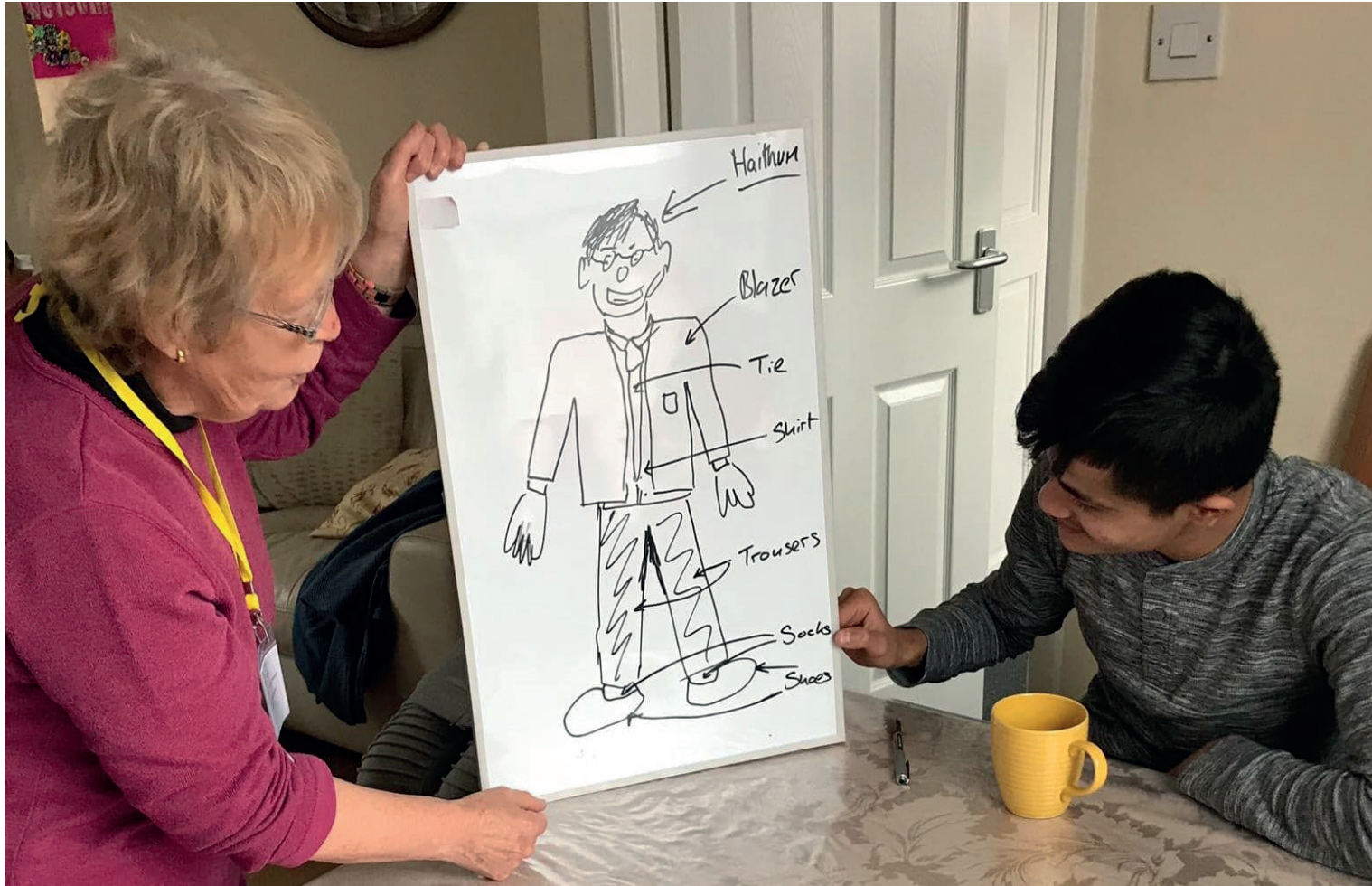
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The structure of the German pilot, under which refugees are expected to arrive in 2019, is similar but with some differences: first, it offers selected refugees the option to choose whether they want to be resettled under the regular resettlement programme, or through community sponsorship. It also requires a group of a minimum of 5 sponsors to draft a detailed settlement plan including a safeguarding policy, identify housing, raise the funds to cover rental costs for two years, and provide integration support for the first year. The housing must be affordable, according to local regulations defining average affordable housing costs,[50] however, it may take many forms, including parish-owned housing or co-housing approaches. Furthermore, sponsoring groups need to fundraise only 30% of the required rental costs when they submit their application, and the remaining 70% must be raised by the time the refugees

arrive. Refugees are selected through UNHCR resettlement submission criteria and come from Egypt, Ethiopia, Jordan, and Lebanon.

The matching of sponsors and refugees is carried out by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF). In addition, a Civil Society Contact Point (ZKS), funded by the Bertelsmann Foundation (*Stiftung*) and Foundation Mercator, brings together Caritas Germany, the Red Cross and the Evangelical Church for Westphalia. These organisations support sponsoring groups throughout the application process by delivering information sessions and training, and liaising between the BAMF and the sponsoring groups. The Civil Society Contact Point also advises sponsoring groups on their application and settlement plans, and flags potential issues, in addition to supporting post-arrival monitoring.

Finally, the Irish Community Sponsorship Programme developed under the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP),[51] was officially launched in March 2019. It is a partnership between the Department of Justice and Equality and five Regional Support Organisations (RSOs), who will each recruit community sponsorship groups to resettle 50 refugees over the course of 2019. The first sponsored family arrived in December 2018 from Lebanon and has settled in Dunshaughlin, a small municipality of around 4,000 inhabitants. In the Irish programme, sponsoring groups must be made up of at least five people, and are required to identify housing for two years (though rental costs are covered by state benefits), raise a minimum of €10,000 and draft a settlement plan, including a safeguarding policy. The RSOs, including the Irish Refugee Council, the Irish Red Cross and Nasc Irish Immigrant Support Centre, play an important role in providing training and monitoring of sponsoring groups.

As with the other approaches discussed above, the resettlement-based approach has also experienced a number of successes and challenges, which are important to consider when planning future programmes. As the German and Irish pilots are in their initial phases at the time of writing, this reflection focuses mostly on the UK Full Community Sponsorship Programme, however, where possible, we also include lessons learned from the newer programmes.

One strength of the resettlement-based programmes is that they provide for an open framework, which allows a wide range of actors to get involved, and the criteria and mechanisms for getting involved are transparent. In other words, anyone in the UK, Germany and Ireland could form a sponsoring group and participate in the scheme. In addition, the ongoing design of these programmes has been consultative, allowing for ongoing tweaking and adjustments based on inputs from a varied range of CSOs. A wide co-ownership of these schemes is important as they can allow sponsoring groups and NGOs to shape and influence good practices, as well as ironing out the frustrations that can arise.

In addition, the resettlement-based programmes have sought to ensure safety nets for sponsored refugees. Minimum standards with regard to housing, financial assistance and settlement support are regulated so that all sponsored refugees should receive a comparable base level of support. And, because local authorities must approve the sponsoring groups' applications in the UK programme, the municipality will serve as a safety net. The safeguarding requirements in each of the resettlement-based programmes also contribute to the safety net. Such mechanisms are important since sponsored refugees, especially children, can face barriers to reporting incidents or concerns due to their lack of familiarity with local languages and laws, but also because they may not feel comfortable reporting problems to the sponsors who have made special efforts to help them.

"We began with a core group of six, and we are now 25 volunteers forming different sub-groups in health, education, finance, housing, and employment. We worked with a Housing Association and secured a property in the heart of our parish. With the help of the whole parish community, the team furnished the house, created 'welcome packs', found interpreters, and organised English lessons. When people invest their time and energy into this scheme, it becomes personal, empowering and joyful. It gives the grassroots, the little people, like me, like our community, the power to change lives for the greater good. It is a wonderful feeling."

— Felicity, St Monica's, Flixton, UK

In addition, the resettlement-based programmes have also created strong frameworks for supporting sponsoring groups, through NGO projects, or even creating separate charities. The Reset charity,[52] for example, was established in 2018 (with significant funding from the UK Home Office) to offer training, consultation, and awareness-raising activities to sponsoring groups. Similarly, Citizens UK, a community-organising NGO with branches across the UK, that was one of the lead organisations which advocated for the establishment of community sponsorship and helped design the scheme, established the foundation, Sponsor Refugees,[53] in order to continue to promote sponsorship, as well as to support and mentor sponsoring groups.[54]

In addition, in the UK, where sponsoring groups must find an incorporated association to underwrite their application (a so-called lead sponsor), organisations and institutions like Citizens UK or the Catholic Church, which have wide networks and regional chapters, are able to disseminate their expertise by using their existing infrastructure to mobilise sponsoring groups in their respective areas. In Ireland, too, the RSOs expect to play an important role in mobilising local actors in their region. Furthermore, the UK is currently looking into a 'Multiple Sponsorship' model, which would allow 'lead sponsors' with relevant experience to sign an agreement with the UK Home Office to underwrite multiple sponsoring groups, rather than submitting separate applications for each one, thereby cutting down on the bureaucracy required of sponsoring groups. This model replicates, to some extent, the Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH) system in Canada, which has proven to be effective in ensuring quality, minimising bureaucracy, and mobilising a wide variety of sponsors from across Canada, and of different backgrounds.

Despite this potential, the resettlement-based programmes also face challenges. Most notably, to date, the UK and Irish resettlement-based programmes have not adhered to the principle of additionality (though this will change in the UK as of 2020). More broadly, experience with these programmes demonstrate that there is a need for increased transparency and consultation when it comes to setting targets for the number of refugees who will be admitted via traditional resettlement and via sponsorship, as well as during implementation of the programme.

In addition, the procedural requirements of these programmes slow them down considerably. The UK Full Community Sponsorship Programme, for example, had only brought about 300 refugees into the UK by June 2019, a full two years after the programme was launched.[55] This is a considerably slower rate than the Humanitarian Corridors' nearly 2,500 placements over three years. While the comprehensive procedures for vetting sponsoring groups does help to ensure quality sponsorships, several stakeholders involved have found that the complex procedures run the risk of deterring motivated people from developing sponsoring groups.

As Mark Wiggin, director of the Caritas Diocese of Salford points out: "*If volunteers are to offer their time, skills and commitment to welcome and support a vulnerable refugee family, they will not want to spend time and energy navigating a bureaucratic system that places onerous contractual obligations upon them and distracts from their main and vital role of welcoming and resettling refugees into their community*." Similar discussions have arisen in Canada, where the government has initiated new administrative requirements for sponsors in recent years – and has faced considerable pushback from sponsoring organisations and NGOs. These organisations, which have decades of experience sponsoring refugees, have argued that such requirements threaten Canada's programme and move it in the direction of a "remodelled resettlement programme, which is government-led, but privately funded".[56]

In addition, when it comes to the identification and selection of sponsored persons, the resettlement-based programmes all rely only on UNHCR referrals. This can be a challenge when depending on UNHCR missions, which may have strained capacity during crises. It also means that access to community sponsorship is more limited than in other approaches that allow sponsors to 'name' the refugees they seek to sponsor – often family members – or for local partners of sponsoring organisations to refer vulnerable people.

INITIATIVES WHICH INCORPORATE ELEMENTS OF SPONSORSHIP

In addition to the approaches described above, various elements of community sponsorship have also made their way into traditional resettlement programmes as well as other complementary pathways. For example, Caritas and the University of Bologna launched a University Corridors programme in early 2019, which will bring a small group of refugees (identified and referred by the Gandhi charity described above) from Ethiopia to Bologna, providing scholarships for university studies, as well as integration support and stipends for living expenses. The programme builds on an existing initiative at the university, which offers financial and academic support to asylum seekers (who are already in Italy).[57] Other universities across the country have expressed interest in developing similar initiatives. Indeed, experience in Canada shows that there is great potential to scale up university-based sponsorship: the Student Refugee Program of the World University Service of Canada (WUSC) has successfully sponsored 1,800 refugees for studies at 83 universities since the programme began in 1978.[58]

New innovative pilot projects also highlight the prominent role regions can play in supporting resettled refugees, as it is the case with the Basque country in Spain, where a pilot sponsorship programme named "Auzolana II" has also been developed. An agreement between the Spanish Government, UNHCR, the Basque regional government and four local Caritas and Jesuit organisations (Cáritas Diocesana de Bilbao, Cáritas Diocesana de Vitoria, Cáritas Diocesana de San Sebastián y Fundación Social Ignacio Ellacuria) facilitates the welcome and integration of refugees resettled from Jordan and included in Spain's resettlement quota. The four Caritas and Jesuit organisations provide support to the groups of citizens accompanying the families, each of whom is placed in a different municipality in the Basque Country (Andoain, Bilbao, Vitoria-Gasteiz, Arrigorriaga and Portugalete). Five Syrian families (29 individuals) arrived under this pilot in March 2019. Unique to the pilot is the strong partnership with the Basque regional government, which supports financing part-time staff as well as the social welfare income for the families (approximately €1200 monthly allowance).[59]

In addition, public-private partnerships – which are similar to sponsorship – can also be seen in medical and humanitarian evacuation schemes, carried out as part of resettlement programmes. Italy, for example, has conducted humanitarian and medical evacuations of around 300 vulnerable people from Libya and Niger in partnership with the Association Papa Giovanni XXIII. Similarly, Canada works together with private organisations in the Joint Assistance Sponsorship (JAS) programme, where vulnerable refugees requiring special assistance are matched with sponsoring organisations, and they receive income support from the government, as well as social and specialised services from the organisations involved.

These examples demonstrate that the unique advantages of community sponsorship can often be included as specific strands of resettlement programmes or can be extended to other parallel pathways (such as higher education scholarships or extended family reunification programmes) and forms of refugee protection, which enhance and/or are additional to resettlement.

We have discussed in this chapter the ways in which public-private partnerships for refugee admissions have grown significantly in Europe over the last few years. While not answering all the questions for designing a successful sponsorship programme, some elements as to how to do this have become evident based on these earlier experiences. Successful and sustainable community sponsorship programmes in the future will need to replicate a mix of elements of all three of these approaches. The remainder of the publication explores how best to put these lessons learned into practice in future programmes by drawing on different case studies of current practices.

COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP APPROACHES IN EUROPE, 2013-PRESENT

Programme	Approach	Year/s	Who Sponsors?	Who is Sponsored?	Commitments of Sponsor	Complementarity
German Regional Admission Programmes	Family Reunification-Based Programmes	2013 - present	Family members	Syrian family members of German residents and citizens	Full financial support for 5 years, excluding healthcare	Additional to resettlement
Irish Syrian Humanitarian Admission Programme (SHAP)		2014	Family members	Syrian family members of Irish residents and citizens	Full financial support (indefinite)	Additional to resettlement
French Humanitarian Visas		2014 - present	Family members and faith based organisations	Syrians and Iraqis in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey	Full financial support until granted refugee status (approx. 6 months)	Additional to resettlement
Humanitarian Corridor Italy	Humanitarian Corridors Programmes	2015 - present	Faith-based organisations and churches	Vulnerable persons (e.g. Syrians, Iraqis, Eritreans, South Sudanese, Somalis) in Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Niger and Ethiopia	Travel, housing, integration support for undefined period (usually 1-2 years)	Additional to resettlement
Humanitarian Corridor France		2017 - present	Faith-based organisations and churches	Vulnerable Syrians and Iraqis in Lebanon	Travel, housing, integration support for undefined period (usually 1 year)	Additional to resettlement
Humanitarian Corridor Belgium		2017 - 2018	Faith-based organisations and churches	Vulnerable Syrians in Turkey and Lebanon	Housing and integration support for 1 year	Additional to resettlement
UK Full Community Sponsorship Programme	Resettlement-Based Programmes	2016 - 2020	Registered charities	Refugees referred by UNHCR	Housing and integration support for 2 years	Within resettlement (not additional). Additional as of 2020.[60]
German Community Sponsorship Pilot		2019	Groups of at least five German citizens or residents	Refugees referred by UNHCR	Housing and integration support for 2 years	Additional to resettlement (resettlement and sponsorship pledges announced at the same time)
Irish Community Sponsorship Pilot		2019	Groups of Irish citizens or residents, supported by Regional Support Organisations	Refugees referred by UNHCR	Housing and integ ration support for 2 years	Within resettlement (not additional)

A new life for the Rossi family in Saluzzo, Piedmont Region

The Rossi family, originally from Eritrea, travelled from Ethiopia to Italy under the Italian Humanitarian Corridors programme in February 2018. Tobia and Maria, together with their two children, Alex and Adele, had fled Eritrea seven years earlier, after enduring horrific detention, and losing two children to war. When Alex was called up for compulsory military conscription, the Rossi family feared further danger, and embarked on a journey to Khartoum, Sudan, where they lived for eight months. Fearing violence and deportation in Sudan, however, they left for Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, where they stayed for the next six years. However, their future in Ethiopia seemed bleak, also with continued fears of deportation and almost no opportunities for resettlement. Fortunately, the family was able to travel on 27 February 2018 through the Italian Humanitarian Corridor programme to Saluzzo, Italy.

Saluzzo is a rural town, home to 16,968 residents in the Piedmont region near the border with France; many migrants who work in the agricultural sector live in the area. Staff of Caritas Saluzzo work, together with about 15 volunteers, to accompany the Rossi family during their adjustment to life in Italy, referring them to municipal services, visiting the local hospital, and assisting with registration for public Italian classes. The welcoming group has organised themselves according to their respective skills and backgrounds, with volunteer high school teachers providing guidance on education, volunteer doctors and nurses in charge of healthcare, and the professional Caritas staff assisting with legal aid. While there are challenges to sustaining a welcoming group comprised of both professional staff and volunteers, they are united in their common goal: supporting the refugee family to achieve independence.

And indeed, with this support, the family is well on their way. Alex and Adele are pursuing education. Adele is enrolled at the public high school and Alex, thanks to financial support from the sponsors, is pursuing a degree in nursing at the public university. Tobia and Maria, while learning Italian, have also begun volunteering for Caritas and other local associations. Maria volunteers as a cook for a 'Slow Food' organisation and every Wednesday, she lends a hand at an after-school programme for children with special needs.

Through their volunteering and the sponsoring group, the family is slowly building a network and participating in local community life, attending public events and celebrations. Though securing employment can be difficult in Italy, even for Italians, Tobia and Maria are confident that completing training courses and volunteering will help them find stable employment in the near future, and they are hopeful that their children can complete their education and find fulfilling work. After seven years of displacement, the Rossi family has finally found a new future and life in Italy, thanks to the Humanitarian Corridors programme and the commitment of Saluzzo's community members.

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New bonds at the Raynes Park Community Church preparing for the Anablusi family, Manchester

By Felicity Brangan, Project Manager from St. Michael and St. Bernadette's Community Sponsorship Team

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Sakkar and Noura Anablusi and their three children fled Syria in May 2012. In Syria, their house had been struck by shells and Sakkar had been temporarily detained by the Syrian government; the family fled to Lebanon after he was released. They spent more than six years in Lebanon before finally travelling to safety and protection in Whitefield, England, on 16 August 2018 – thanks to the UK's Full Community Sponsorship Programme.

Sakkar had been a farmer in Syria and his wife Noura had worked as an Arabic teacher. In Lebanon, Sakkar managed to find informal work – Syrians do not have the right to work in Lebanon – as a plumber. In Whitefield, Sakkar has started a community garden and hopes to pursue training to work as a plumber and obtain a British driving licence. For her part, Noura is eager to get back in the classroom and wants to volunteer as an assistant teacher in the local school. Their three sons, Shayesh, age 17, Haitham, age 16, and Daour, age 11, did not have the opportunity to attend school for much of their time in Lebanon, and are now re-adjusting to school. Daour, the youngest, has picked up English the fastest – often informally translating for his parents and older brothers.

With its population of just under 25,000, Whitefield is a small but vibrant town in northwest England, not far from the city of Manchester. The Anablusi family's sponsoring group grew out of the Raynes Park Community Church, when seven interested parishioners met for the first time in March 2017. Many more meetings followed to figure out how to fulfil the requirements set out by the Home Office. Slowly, the group grew and became friends. About 22 Whitefield residents are now involved and have organised themselves into five sub-groups (finance, housing, education, employment and welfare/health). The sponsoring group comprises a diverse group of residents, each with unique skills and experience to bring to the sponsorship: a nurse who

helps set up appointments with the National Health Service (NHS); a primary school teacher who has connections with local schools and teachers; and even an 80-year-old woman who has organised art workshops.

The sponsoring group carried out a great deal of preparation and planning even before the Anablusi family arrived. First, they found housing for the family, located close to essential facilities (e.g. school, transport, shops). They also established close collaboration with local authorities (e.g. those in charge of accommodation, well-being, resettlement, education and employment), with local refugees and Syrian community organisations, as well as with local mosques and other nearby churches. In addition to planning for the family's arrival, the sponsoring group also organised or participated in fundraising and community events, joining Ramadan celebrations with a local mosque, reaching out to Members of Parliament and the Bishop of Salford, as well as collaborating with other sponsoring groups. Engaging with such a wide range of actors meant that not only was the sponsoring group well prepared to support the Anablusi family, but the local community was as well.

In the months since Sakkar, Noura, and their children arrived in Whitefield, the sponsoring group has sought to help them re-establish their independence and autonomy. The family has been busy with appointments (visiting the hospital, setting up a bank account, accessing social services, and so on), orientation trips, cultural events, and, of course, schooling. Together with a volunteer, the family put together a plan of their goals, both professional and personal, as well as the tasks that they would like help with from members of the sponsoring group. Slowly but surely, mutual affection and trust has grown between the group and the family. Inspired by the family's upbeat attitude and enthusiasm, the sponsoring group has now begun advocating for Community Sponsorship and are looking forward to helping it grow further, across the UK.

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Strong volunteer network to lend a helping hand in Pertuis, France

In late November 2017, a young Kurdish family, comprised of five brothers and sisters, all between the ages of 15 and 25, arrived in Pertuis, a small town of 22,000 inhabitants in the Vaucluse region, close to Aix en Provence.

The family is from Kobane, a Kurdish city in Syria, and had been living in the suburbs of Beirut, Lebanon, with their father since 2012. However, when he passed away in 2016, they found themselves in an even more fragile situation. Due to their protection needs, Sant'Egidio selected them to participate in the French Humanitarian Corridors programme. The sponsoring group, *Fraternité Pertuis*, developed out of the local parish with the support of *Secours Catholique* (Caritas France). According to Marie-Claire

Falcone, a former lawyer who heads the local group, "*We were a group of people who didn't want to stay on the sidelines while there is an ongoing reception crisis and a climate of closing doors [climat ambiant de fermeture]. We wanted to be useful.*"

The welcoming group is comprised of around twenty volunteers. Marie-Claire explained: "*We wanted to engage as many as possible, believers and non-believers*." The group therefore structures themselves around different tasks and responsibilities, such as school, training, learning French, health, legal assistance, transport, and so on. "*Our group structure stays well in place,*" says Marie-Claire. "*Our actions (small steps) have slowly made their way into the hearts of the people. What is beautiful is the dynamics created.*"

Before the family arrived, the group arranged fundraising campaigns in the village. They raised €20,000, of which €12,000 was spent during the first six months until the family received refugee status and was able to access state benefits. The group has also secured housing in the village, next door to two members of the group. One of the group members, an Arab speaker, ensured translation. They have also offered a wide range of social activities, lunches, picnics and walks in the surrounding areas – even going together on holidays. While in the beginning the family preferred to stay with each other or with other Syrians, they are now at ease and participate regularly in the group's activities.

Preparing for higher education in Belgium: the Gabraeel daughters find their way

The sponsoring group also engaged with AGIR [act], a group of refugee and migrant assisting associations that together work for the reception of migrants and refugees in the Aix en Provence and the Bouches-du-Rhône areas. AGIR already assists over 70 other migrant and refugee families in the area, and thus agreed to offer the refugee family support, notably with legal advice services and assistance in complying with administrative procedures. While the youngest children are at school, the two eldest brothers are benefiting from 200 hours of French courses, offered by the state. They are also following employment training (GRETA) courses, offered by the employment office (*Pôle Emploi*) in nearby Aix en Provence. Learning French is a long process, of course. The eldest brother, Ali explains: "*I would like to have more interaction with others and I want to be independent and not be supported by the state*".

The family is now well settled in the community and their house has easy access to the bus network. Because there are no longer train connections between Pertuis and Aix en Provence, the family depends on the bus service (of less than half an hour in travel time), which is quite frequent and inexpensive. That being said, the eldest are now looking at obtaining their driving licences, in order to be more independent with respect to transport.

It has not always been an easy task to provide for a new future for the five siblings in the local community, but overall the family and the community are managing quite well, sharing responsibilities among the members of the group, the wider community and the state. It is still a bumpy road ahead, but one that will eventually lead to the autonomy and self-sufficiency of the family.

On 7 June 2018 Alaa and Sara Gabraeel, and their three daughters*, arrived in Kiezegem, a small municipality near the Belgian city of Leuven, home to about 1,200 residents. In the family's home town of Hasaka, in northeast Syria, the family feared for their safety because of the civil war and, in particular, their Christian faith. They fled in late 2015, first for elsewhere in Syria and then, in 2017, for Istanbul, Turkey. The Syrian Orthodox Church in Istanbul referred them for the Belgian Humanitarian Corridors programme and, given their protection needs and vulnerable circumstances, they were selected to take part in the programme. Before travelling, they participated in pre-departure cultural orientation sessions, delivered by Caritas Belgium and Sant'Egidio, which gave them a sense of what to expect after arriving in Belgium.

Meanwhile, in Kiezegem, a sponsoring group of ten volunteers had grown out of the local parish, linked to the Diocese of Vlaams-Brabant. Caritas Belgium provided training – not unlike the training they provided in Istanbul – in order to help the volunteers understand their role and the tasks ahead of them. The group identified housing in Kiezegem – provided by the parish – and divided among themselves various support responsibilities (e.g. administration, language learning, getting to know the local community, fundraising, and so on).

In cooperation with Caritas Belgium, the welcoming group reached out to several local institutions and authorities to inform them of the Humanitarian Corridors programme. After the family arrived, the welcoming group helped the family to navigate the various administrative steps required for their integration, as well as offering language lessons and recruiting local Arabic speakers who could serve as interpreters when needed. The three daughters, aged 15, 16 and 18, started school in September and are looking forward to pursuing further education. When it comes to future aspirations, they are eager to hone their Dutch language skills; all three daughters have also already identified professional goals, one aiming to become a university professor, one a translator and one a nurse. Time will tell whether they stick to these professional goals or find something new. But for now, the Gabraeel family is happy to be settling in to their new home – already communicating in Dutch with the welcoming group volunteers.

*Names have been changed.

Fostering social cohesion through community sponsorship

One of the most notable aspects of community sponsorship is that the unique way of welcoming has benefits for refugees and receiving communities alike. Studies on the Canadian private sponsorship programme have found that integration is better and faster for sponsored refugees than for refugees who are resettled through other schemes.[61] Initial experiences in Europe demonstrate similar outcomes. As was mentioned earlier, strong community engagement can help refugees take advantage of opportunities offered, invest in their longer term integration, and not seek to move onwards. In this chapter, we explore how best to foster positive social cohesion outcomes in new and emerging community sponsorship programmes.

Refugee integration is a multi-faceted process that involves mutual adaptation and accommodation between the receiving and arriving communities. Through the direct involvement of volunteers – whether through sharing meals, day-trips to the countryside, gardening, playing sports or simply chatting with neighbours – sponsored refugees are introduced into local communities and have the opportunity to build new relationships and social networks faster, thus facilitating social inclusion in their new environment. To some extent, this type of inclusion occurs naturally when local citizens are directly involved in welcoming new arrivals. However, sponsorship programmes can also deliberately foster positive interactions and facilitate better social cohesion.

PROMOTING THE WELCOME IN SMALL-SIZED MUNICIPALITIES AND RURAL AREAS

First, many sponsoring groups are located in small towns and rural areas, and it is thus worth discussing how best to facilitate social cohesion outside of larger cities, which tend to have more experience welcoming newcomers, as well as more diverse populations. In Italy, sponsoring groups are spread across approximately 80 municipalities in 20 out of 21 regions; in Belgium, sponsoring groups are in more than 50 municipalities in Belgium's three regions; in France, sponsoring groups hail from 22 municipalities in 22 of France's 96 départements; and in the UK, local authorities have volunteered to receive a certain number of refugees, both resettled and community sponsored refugees, resulting in some 275 out of the UK's 418 local authorities being newly involved in receiving resettled and sponsored refugees (up from only about nine municipalities involved prior to 2016).

"To thank us, the family invited us for a dinner that they had been preparing for a week… Their arrival also enriches the community. It brings another dynamic. We learn about things that seemed far away from us in the past."

— Volunteers in Belgium, Luce and Ria

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Many of these municipalities are small in size, or in rural areas, and have had minimal, if any, experience hosting refugees prior to the community sponsorship experience or engagement in resettlement.[62] And while it is important to be aware of this, and other challenges, small towns and rural areas can also be excellent places of welcome. Most notably, they are usually more affordable and have better quality low-cost housing options than big cities. Navigating administrative public services is also often more straightforward than in large cities with multiple offices and long waiting-times. Depending on the field of work, securing employment is sometimes less competitive, and, finally, in comparison to the anonymity of large cities, it is easier to get to know neighbours and meet community members in small towns or rural areas. The many direct contacts with volunteers have proven to have positive effects on the speed of acquiring language skills, while labour market integration is also easier due to informal networks that identify opportunities. The lack of specialised services in small municipalities often present a significant challenge; however, pooling resources within a region or province can help to address this (see below, in the discussion on placement and matching).

The lack of public transport can also be a challenge, especially at the beginning. Indeed, despite the challenges present in small-size towns and rural areas, community sponsorship has found ways to capitalise on the desire and energy of communities in these areas, while also building capacity and providing support where needed. This has positive implications not only for the sustainability of community sponsorship but also for resettlement and refugee reception more broadly. When cities and towns build capacity for refugee reception through community sponsorship, they are all the more willing and able to receive additional refugees in the future – not only through sponsorship, but also through other pathways.

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PRE-ARRIVAL PREPARATION OF REFUGEES AND HOST COMMUNITIES

One thing that can help foster social inclusion and cohesion (in small and large towns alike) is providing solid preparation to host communities and sponsored refugees before the latter arrive. Pre-departure cultural orientation, a common practice in traditional resettlement, refers to measures and interventions that provide refugees with information about the travel process upon which they are about to embark as well as the country of destination (culture, language, food, weather, socio-economic conditions and so on). Such orientation may last a few hours or a few days, and is delivered in the countries of first asylum, usually shortly before departure. They provide opportunities for refugees to discuss cultural differences, as well as to think ahead about how they can make the most of their new environment.

In community sponsorship, cultural orientation is an opportunity to carefully explain the roles and responsibilities of welcoming groups as well as settlement more broadly; and, it is also a chance to gather relevant information about sponsored refugees, in order to improve preparations in receiving communities and to help match sponsored refugees to appropriate communities (see below for more on matching).

The community sponsorship programmes in Europe have conducted cultural orientation in different ways. Unique to various sponsorship initiatives is that civil society has played a role in delivering cultural orientation: Caritas International (Caritas Belgium) provided thorough orientation training to sponsored refugees in Turkey, while Caritas Italiana delivered a formal cultural orientation to Italy in Ethiopia, for example. Experience in both community sponsorship and resettlement shows that cultural orientation is most effective when closely linked to the post-arrival phase, which is why the involvement of civil society actors who provide post-arrival services is so valuable.[64]

Indeed, all actors involved in community sponsorship, including the leading organisations and welcoming groups, should be familiar with the content and messaging in cultural orientation in order to ensure a smooth transition.

Welcoming groups and volunteers, interestingly, need cultural orientation just as much, if not more than, the refugees. In addition to an understanding of settlement-related issues, such as relevant legal processes, volunteers and welcoming groups should be prepared for intercultural engagement and other 'soft skills.' Training on the cultural and religious backgrounds of refugees,

"This family brought us a lot; it completely changed the bonds among us within the parish. When we unanimously decided to welcome a refugee family, regardless of their religion, we stood shoulder to shoulder and each one of us offered to help, happy to contribute. Excitement rose to a higher level when we received the official news that a family would soon arrive. From then on, we started loving this family, without knowing nearly anything about them."

— Gérard Clerc, volunteer in France

maintaining boundaries and respecting newcomers' privacy and autonomy, for example, is important. In many cases, the strong motivation of volunteers can overwhelm refugees, who may want some time and space to adjust to their new reality and rebuild their lives, and volunteers and welcoming groups need to be aware of this. Much of this preparation may occur through the training and support described above, provided by professional NGOs or government actors.

However, ideally, the preparation of hosting communities should go beyond just welcoming groups and extend to local schools, health providers, neighbours and other local stakeholders, who are likely to meet the newly arrived sponsored refugees. In Italy, for example, after securing housing for soon-to-arrive refugees, welcoming groups and leading organisations have informed neighbours about the Humanitarian Corridors programme, seeking to address potential fears and concerns about the newcomers.

DEVELOPING LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS THROUGH MULTI-STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

An important part of preparing local communities, therefore, involves reaching out to a wide range of local actors in order to inform, consult and seek support where possible. Indeed, community sponsorship creates space for new partnerships at local level, which can support refugee settlement in the community by broadening the support and social network on which they rely. Since local authorities are often the entry point for accessing public services (e.g. schooling, healthcare, social benefits), welcoming groups are most effective when they build good relationships with these authorities. After refugees arrive, they will need to visit the offices of each of these actors, often together with a member of the welcoming group, and it goes a long way to have a contact or focal point that is aware of the sponsorship programme.

This shows that sponsorships can ideally trigger a 'ripple effect' and lead to broader partnerships with local actors who were not initially involved. Similarly, relevant coordination platforms or community groups very likely already exist in receiving communities, and can provide a wealth of knowledge and resources. Diaspora groups, local organisations, trade unions, universities and small businesses can all provide new – often unexpected – opportunities and support.

To date, sponsoring groups have reported securing university scholarships, financial support, employment and language learning opportunities, which were not initially foreseen, simply by reaching out to a range of stakeholders and developing strategic partnerships.

DIVERSIFYING FUNDING SOURCES THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

Diversifying funding sources is necessary to ensure that volunteers do not bear all the financial costs associated with sponsorship themselves. Exploring partnerships with the private sector is one option, and indeed has proven useful both in terms of funding (e.g. Air France has assisted with airline costs along the Humanitarian Corridors in France), and in terms of sponsored refugees accessing employment or internship opportunities. Private foundations can also play an important role in supporting sponsoring groups and initiatives. In addition, adequate public funding is also crucial. In Canada, for example, the government provides grants to the Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs) and funds training. Different European funds, such as the Asylum Migration Fund (AMF) and the European Social Fund (ESF), might also be open to supporting community sponsorship and community cohesion efforts in the near future, and to promoting investments in the integration services and capacity of a particular region, in order to promote a more holistic approach.

MATCHING SPONSORED REFUGEES WITH RECEIVING COMMUNITIES

Another important action that sponsorship stakeholders can take, in order to foster social inclusion, is to carefully consider the matching of sponsored refugees to welcoming groups. Placement and matching are also important for resettlement, where European countries employ a variety of systems to determine where in the receiving country newly arrived refugees will be settled. Experience in resettlement teaches us that placement that is sensitive to the needs and potential of both refugees and host communities can positively influence future pathways to integration and build the foundations for receiving additional refugees in the future.[65]

Similarly, community sponsorship stakeholders often carefully consider how to match sponsored refugees with welcoming groups. Aside from taking into consideration family links when choosing the place where refugees could be settled, there are many factors to consider. First, sponsorship programmes must determine who is responsible for matching: civil society (lead sponsors, NGOs) or

government or, if possible, both. In the French Humanitarian Corridors scheme, for example, the lead sponsors have managed to coordinate among themselves, in order to ensure the sensitive placement of each arriving refugee. In addition, programmes should seek to make use of information on both the receiving communities and the available services (through welcoming groups' settlement plans and applications) and the refugees' profiles (through identification, selection and cultural orientation).

A variety of criteria should be used in this process. For refugees, this includes, first, housing (e.g. size, accessibility for people with special needs) and medical care (e.g. distance to a hospital or availability of specialised support, where needed). If possible, matching should also take into account cultural or religious backgrounds (e.g. distance to a mosque), as well as the education- and employment-related goals and desires of the refugees. For example, refugees who were farmers in their home countries may prefer placement in rural areas, while single, young people may

prefer urban areas, and young adults whose higher education was interrupted by conflict may hope to be near a university.

Receiving communities have needs as well, that sensitive placement can address. For example, regions with particular labour market needs can be matched with refugees who are able to fill open positions.[66] Refugees from rural areas might be more suitable for a future career in farming, for example. Alternatively, communities dealing with population decline can be matched with families with children, enabling local schools to stay open (such has been the case in a few communities in France). A regional perspective, which aims to place new arrivals in multiple nearby municipalities, has also proven to be valuable in resettlement, where cities can pool or exchange relevant resources (e.g. language classes) or where a regional actor can coordinate service delivery. Ultimately, of course, there is no 'perfect match,' and refugees and host communities will need to work together in order to make the most of their situation.

POST-ARRIVAL INTERCULTURAL ENGAGEMENT

A continued commitment to social inclusion and cohesion after refugees arrive has also proven valuable. Encounters between refugee families and host communities are not always easy: newcomers may experience culture shock, not to mention possible struggles with trauma, loss and ongoing conflict back home. On the other hand, sponsoring groups and host communities may have predisposed expectations, biases or prejudices about refugees, and they may be affected by beliefs and traditions that are new or unfamiliar to them. Nevertheless, these encounters, if carried out thoughtfully, can help refugees and host communities develop mutual understanding, and are essential to eventually breaking down fears and prejudices on both sides.[67]

In order to facilitate such interactions in a positive way, most sponsorship programmes have worked with cultural mediators. Trained cultural mediators act as interpreters, not only of language, but also of culture; they facilitate improved understanding and help to overcome misunderstandings or tensions. Cultural mediators often have refugee backgrounds themselves, so they tend to have a good understanding of what new arrivals may be feeling or experiencing. In addition, sponsoring groups and lead sponsors have also found it helpful to engage in intercultural or interfaith dialogue, mediation and training. Gatherings of multiple sponsoring groups and newly arrived refugees, together with cultural mediators, can help to bridge divides or overcome misunderstandings, and can create a safer space where refugees may feel more comfortable raising concerns or complaints.

LANGUAGE LEARNING AND ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT

In addition to good preparation and opportunities for dialogue, ensuring that language learning and employment opportunities are readily accessible will also help foster social inclusion in hosting communities, since both elements are essential to building social networks and regaining autonomy and independence. All of the sponsorship programmes have sought to facilitate access to language learning and employment in different ways. In the UK programme, the sponsoring group must identify a qualified English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teacher in their settlement plan, while in Belgium, France and Italy, sponsored refugees are eligible to participate in state-funded language classes (e.g. 400 hours of instruction in France). In addition, volunteers often facilitate language tutoring and informal conversation tables. In each of these programmes, it is clear that the intensive level of social interaction between refugees and sponsoring groups promotes language learning and leads to impressive improvement in the command of the new language.

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Sponsored refugees, like many other newly arrived migrants and refugees, encounter challenges securing stable employment. It is still quite early to examine employment outcomes of sponsored refugees in Europe. However, experience in Canada suggests that sponsoring groups can offer invaluable social networks, which help sponsored refugees to find employment faster than their counterparts who arrive through traditional resettlement.[69] Beyond finding a job, newly arrived sponsored refugees can also benefit from training opportunities, internships, volunteering and self-employment.

In this chapter, we have discussed approaches for fostering social cohesion in communities which welcome sponsored refugees. Indeed, community sponsorship offers important opportunities for strengthening local solidarity and inclusion, both directly, by facilitating the social and economic integration of sponsored refugees, and indirectly, by raising awareness about refugees and facilitating encounters between refugees and host communities.

While it may be too early to fully evaluate the sponsorship's impact and its ripple effects for social cohesion in Europe, lessons learned from Canada are significant on this front. Notably, following the push to resettle Syrian refugees in Canada during 2015-2017, approximately one in three Canadians reported sponsoring a refugee or knowing someone who had; and after decades of sponsoring refugees, a clear majority of Canadians (62%) believe that the country should continue to accept the same number or more refugees as in 2015.[70] The Canadian example demonstrates that the encounters which community sponsorship facilitate can help to deconstruct people's 'fear of strangers' and preconceived negative notions on migration.

"My wife had to stop her studies because of the war," says Robin. Khloud continues, "I want to continue studying here [in Belgium] but first I have to learn Dutch. In Syria, I was studying psychology for children. Here, I will perhaps study something more practical, in order to be able to quickly start working and earn money."

— Robin and Khloud, sponsored refugees in Belgium

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:: Chapter 4

Analytical perspective and the way forward

Future community sponsorship programmes must take into consideration the successes and lessons learned thus far, and should ideally replicate a mix of the best elements of each of the three approaches that have emerged. As mentioned earlier, a few key issues remain unresolved: additionality to resettlement; the partnership framework; the coordination structure of the civil society actors; quality control and minimum standards; and finally, the question of whom to sponsor ('naming'). This chapter explores these issues in more detail, based on lessons learned from the three approaches.

COMPLEMENTARITY AND ADDITIONALITY TO RESETTLEMENT

Depending on its design, community sponsorship can be a legal pathway that offers protection places which are in addition to resettlement and are for additional groups (e.g. nationalities or ethnicities, internally displaced people (IDPs)), as well as expanding integration capacity in new cities and towns in the receiving countries. Additionality, it also has the potential to enable the growth of sponsorship schemes because it can create an incentive that encourages potential sponsoring groups to become more ambitious in organising themselves to bring in a larger number of people than would otherwise be possible. In that sense, additionality allows governments to demonstrate additional solidarity and contribute to offering complementary durable solutions to more refugees – and for citizens to play a crucial role in facilitating that solidarity.

Of course, community sponsorship can still be valuable even when the protection places provided are not additional to resettlement. Indeed, protection policies, which take a holistic approach, incorporating resettlement and complementary pathways, are preferable to ad hoc policies, because they allow for better planning and use of resources. However, without transparency with regard to both pledges and numbers of arrivals, sponsorship runs the risk of becoming a mechanism for governments to neglect their resettlement commitments.

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PARTNERSHIP FRAMEWORK AND COMPLEMENTARVITY WITH THE STATE'S ASYLUM RESPONSIBILITIES

A second key issue for policy makers and practitioners designing sponsorship programmes is the type of partnership framework that the programme uses. Community sponsorship is, by definition, a public-private partnership. However, the type of partnerships have so far varied considerably in terms of their scope, the respective roles assigned to each actor, and the extent to which the frameworks are open and transparent to outside actors. As discussed above, the partnership frameworks of the three approaches to community sponsorship developed in Europe (i.e. in Belgium, France, Italy and the UK/Ireland and Germany) vary a great deal from one another with differing degrees of flexibility and openness in each model.

Aside from the baseline of the expected roles of government (e.g. granting protection status) and civil society (e.g. providing local integration support), there are many ways to set up the partnership between government and civil society and to divide roles and responsibilities. Financing structures, for example, can also vary considerably.

In some cases, a certain amount of money must be fundraised by each welcoming group, while in other cases, the lead sponsors provide full funding, or private companies fund elements of the programme.

More broadly, the partnership framework should reflect the complementarity of community sponsorship with the state's responsibility under the EU's asylum *acquis* and with the welfare system. Indeed, as explained above, the spirit of community sponsorship is to expand protection places in partnership with the state, and not to transfer the state's responsibilities to private actors. Community sponsorship programmes should guarantee access to durable legal status, thereby opening up access to the same rights and entitlements as non-sponsored refugees. In addition, it is important that volunteers complement, rather than substitute for, professional social workers. An enhanced collaboration between volunteers, social services and state authorities is thus essential, as is continued state investment in the social services and integration programmes for refugees.

RECOMMENDATION

The design of the framework should comply with the following criteria:

1) **Frameworks should be transparent** about who is responsible for what, and for how long, for the sake of consistency and clarity to refugees, welcoming groups and government actors alike. The legal status granted to sponsored refugees should lead to a durable solution and should provide access to the same rights and entitlements as other refugees.

2) **Frameworks should be open** to creating space for multi-stakeholder engagement and growth beyond an initial pilot phase in order to promote sustainability.

3) **Frameworks should set up flexible coordination and consultation mechanisms** in order to ensure trust between government and civil society. A coordination body can play a central role in providing training, harmonising practices, and fostering interaction between the government and civil society. At the same time, it is essential to maintain enough flexibility so that stakeholders can adapt to the changing needs of refugees or host communities. At heart, community sponsorship is a grassroots, community-led initiative, and the partnership framework must adhere to that spirit.

In addition, a community sponsorship partnership framework should **never be designed with the goal of shifting state responsibilities to private actors by reducing the role of the state in the asylum and reception of refugees**. The framework should **complement states' public services and integration programmes** by ensuring efficient cooperation and communication between all the actors concerned.

Working together to make community sponsorship work: coordination among all stakeholders involved.

COORDINATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY STAKEHOLDERS

Another essential issue for the success and growth of community sponsorship is the way in which civil society stakeholders coordinate with one another and gain ownership of the programme. Analysis of all community sponsorship approaches shows that the role played by welcoming groups often takes more or less the same form (i.e. financial contributions combined with settlement support). And indeed, welcoming groups can avoid 'reinventing the wheel' and can learn an enormous amount from other groups or actors who have already gone through a similar process. On a broader level, when civil society actors support one another, it can also help the sponsorship scheme to grow and develop. When one welcoming group forms, it encourages others in the same region or network to also form a welcoming group.

In addition, when sponsoring groups work together, they also become more effective advocates for the programmes. In Belgium, all of the major faith groups in the country were able to present a united front to the government in their advocacy

for the Humanitarian Corridors; and in Ireland, 15 NGOs formed the Refugee and Migrant Coalition, allowing them to advocate jointly to the government for sponsorship. Indeed, organised and united civil society coalitions have been instrumental in the establishment of just about all of the sponsorship schemes to date – and their continued unity will be necessary for the future growth and development of these schemes in the long term.

In practice, though, how best to facilitate coordination among civil society actors? Experience in both Canada and Europe shows that a number of different coordination mechanisms can be valuable. Practical or micro-level coordination structures may take the form of (on- or off-line) resources and toolkits, information sessions, hotlines in order to answer questions, as well as experienced staff or volunteers to review applications and help groups fill out required forms. We have seen this already discussed in numerous ways in this publication including, for example, the Reset charity in the UK, Caritas International's hotline in Belgium,

the German Civil Society Contact Point (ZKS) or the Syrian refugee reception network organised by the Federation of Protestant Mutual Aid (FEP) in France. On a macro level, civil society coordination may involve joint advocacy strategies to the government or structures that pool resources (e.g. one language teacher working with multiple welcoming groups, or sharing of IT solutions for safeguarding).

Such coordination structures have worked best in cases where a network already exists, so that the coordination structures can rely on existing infrastructure. For example, the Catholic Church in the UK has been able to identify one partner charity in each of England and Wales' 22 dioceses to act as a lead sponsor for potential welcoming groups. This has been valuable for a number of reasons: first, it allows for centralised oversight within each diocese. Second, policies and procedures can be shared readily across all sponsoring groups in each diocese; this, in turn, facilitates a unified Catholic model nationally, where each diocesan charity is represented on a national steering group and has the opportunity to share resources and exchange good practices. Third, the church's network allows ordinary citizens to avoid dealing with the complexities of registering as a charity themselves, or having to find their own charity sponsor. Finally, the network provides reassurance to the sponsoring group, the diocese, and the government that projects are being managed effectively by an experienced and effective charity, with whom there is already an established relationship of trust.[71]

Furthermore, sponsorship schemes which allow sponsoring groups to 'underwrite' other groups are also helpful for facilitating growth, as has been the case with the Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH) system in Canada and the potential multiple-sponsorship approach in the UK. These mechanisms enable organisations already active in community sponsorship to increase their reach and promote sponsorship more widely, while also cutting down on the local sponsoring groups' bureaucratic responsibilities, such as filling out forms.

STANDARDS AND QUALITY CONTROL

The coordination structures described above contribute to growth in programme quantity, but future sponsorship programmes also need to consider programme quality. Civil society and government actors must work together in order to ensure that sponsorship programmes adhere to minimum standards and base levels of quality, without stifling the organic creativity necessary for community sponsorship by creating burdensome and heavy bureaucratic procedures.

Future programmes must learn from the experiences described in chapter two and should build in structures for safeguarding, monitoring and evaluation, and supporting sponsors, while also leaving room for grassroots experimentation. Such structures may take the form of monitoring and evaluation systems, or requiring settlement plans to be described in the applications (as seen in the UK and German programmes).

MONITORING & EVALUATION

Community sponsorship programmes have so far set up multiple evaluations, which will no doubt contribute to valuable learning in the months and years to come. The Italian Humanitarian Corridor from Ethiopia is the subject of a five-year (2018-2023) qualitative research study by Notre Dame University (USA) in partnership with Caritas Italiana. The study aims to understand whether, and how, the project will contribute to refugee integration in Italy, analysing refugees' experiences and exploring the factors that enable or hinder integration. The study includes interviews with all the adults involved in the programme (refugees, volunteers, professionals, interpreters, cultural mediators, etc.) at both the beginning and end of the research period, as well as five to ten more in-depth case studies. Other programmes have also set up evaluation mechanisms. In Germany, for example, the research centre of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) is planning to conduct a process evaluation on the immediate outcomes of the pilot programme. The French Humanitarian Corridor has sought to learn from a questionnaire targeting sponsoring groups and refugees at least three months after arrival. The French questionnaire obtained an 80% response rate, demonstrating that not only are the findings of such evaluations valuable, but also that participants in community sponsorship programmes (i.e. refugees and sponsors) are eager to provide feedback and contribute to the programmes' continued improvement.[72]

Housing is one example where we can see the balancing act between fostering creativity and ensuring minimum standards and quality. The Irish and UK programmes primarily require sponsors to secure affordable housing (covered by state benefits). In the UK, the housing must also adhere to certain other standards (e.g. having a private entrance). As described above, however, severe affordable housing shortages (e.g. more than 70,000 families are on the waiting list for social housing in Ireland[73]) pose a challenge and can slow implementation. In the Italian Humanitarian Corridors programme, by contrast, sponsors have more flexibility in housing provision; though still challenging, the programme creates more room for innovative solutions. Liaising with housing associations and finding low-cost or free accommodation through parish communities or local social networks, for example, have proven effective: only 15% of sponsored refugees lived in housing rented from the private market in the 2018 Italian Humanitarian Corridors programme, while 85% accessed low-cost or free housing via diocese or community contacts.[74] In contrast, the German pilot programme is attempting to land somewhere in the middle: housing must be affordable, but many different types are possible, and sponsors only need to fundraise part of the cost in order to submit their application. As such, the German pilot is seeking to strike a balance, such that the minimum standards are met, but sponsoring groups are not slowed down by extensive administration or rigid parameters.

RECOMMENDATION

Civil society and government must work together in order to ensure that **safeguarding and accountability mechanisms exist** and that sponsorships meet the **minimum standards**. At the same time, **flexibility** is crucial so that sponsoring groups can maintain their motivation and develop creative, grassroots solutions.

SHARED HOUSING IN ITALY

Italy has seen a number of innovative approaches to housing for sponsored refugees. For example, in the Tuscan city of Lucca, a retired teacher offered to lend her summer home – for free – to a sponsored family from Syria. And in Rome, the *Casa Miriam-Betlemme*,[75] a small co-housing building in which families experiencing temporary crises (often health-related) live together with families who offer accompaniment and support, is hosting a sponsored Somali family.

Another notable example is the Caritas project, *Protetto - Rifugiato a Casa Mia*, and its continuation, Fra Noi (Protected – Refugee in my home, and Between Us), ongoing since 2014.[76] The project allows communities, parishes and families to host adult refugees for a limited period of time until they regain their autonomy. The projects aim to facilitate integration, which is genuinely two-way - between communities and refugees – and to foster the social inclusion of refugees. A social worker deployed by the local Caritas and dioceses accompanies, guides, and supports the families. Alternatively, the project also allows for volunteers in a local community to collectively support the rental costs to host a family or an individual in a private apartment nearby. The *Protetto* project was launched in 2014 by the national organisation, Caritas Italiana, with only about 200 beneficiaries, and has since successfully scaled up: local Caritas branches are now implementing the project all over Italy and thousands of refugees have been hosted. "*The best part*," explained Roberta Messina, who hosted a young man in her home in Biella, Italy, "*was when he really became part of our family*".[77]

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WHOM TO SPONSOR? THE ISSUE OF 'NAMING'

The fifth key issue in the debate around community sponsorship is the question of whom to sponsor, and 'naming'. Different models have been described in this publication. The family reunification schemes allow sponsors to 'name' their extended family members; the Humanitarian Corridors rely on referrals from partner organisations working in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Ethiopia; and finally, the structured schemes rely on referrals from UNHCR.

As discussed above, we have seen in Canada, Germany and France that family reunion-based sponsorship schemes have succeeded in quickly and efficiently bringing in high numbers of refugees. In Canada, previously resettled refugees applying to sponsor further relatives has been a recognised factor in the programme's enormous success.[78] At the same time, community sponsorship schemes that are only open to family members of certain communities or nationalities (e.g. in the Irish, German and French family reunion-based schemes) fail to truly target vulnerable refugees in need of protection. And, if the criteria for selecting sponsored refugees are not clear and transparent, or if there is a perception of discrimination in the identification and selection, this can have negative consequences on the protective environment in the countries of first asylum and in the country of destination.

Recommendation

Sponsorship programmes should **benefit family-linked and vulnerable refugees**, including those in specific groups, such as students or religious, racial, ethnic, and other minorities; and, in all cases, sponsorship schemes **must have transparent selection criteria**. Experience shows that such an approach will encourage a wide range of actors to sponsor refugees – including families, faith communities, specialised NGOs and other groups of citizens – which would push sponsorship schemes to grow and flourish. At the same time, enabling sponsorship schemes to target vulnerable refugees would still ensure that sponsorship contributes to global protection needs and demonstrates solidarity.

We have discussed in this chapter how policy makers and practitioners can best design sponsorship programmes to ensure their sustainability and success. Indeed, future programmes must seek to take into account lessons learned from past approaches and replicate the most effective elements. The chart below summarises the key issues we have examined, (additionality, the partnership framework, coordination structures for civil society, quality control, identification and naming, and finally, fostering social cohesion) in each of the three approaches to community sponsorship, as well as our recommendations for how to address these issues in future programmes.

ADDRESSING THE KEY ISSUES IN COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP: THREE APPROACHES → OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Issue	Family Reunification-based Sponsorship	Humanitarian Corridors	Resettlement-based Community Sponsorship	Our Recommendations
Additionality	Yes	Yes	No, except for the German pilot project, and the UK programme starting in 2020	Community sponsorship scheme should increase the number of places of protection
Partnership Framework	Closed framework (usually only open to family), regulated, with heavy burden on sponsoring family members	Closed framework (one-time quotas with only MoU signatories as lead sponsors), less regulated and less transparent	Open framework, regulated, with accountability structures built in (but often complex to navigate)	Open framework, regulated, with accountability structures built in
Coordination Structures for Civil Society	Coordination not built in, but informal NGO networks developed	Coordination not built in, but networking and training delivered under lead sponsors	Coordination and training built in, with further training and civil society networking in development	Coordination and training built in, with flexibility for growth/ development over time
Quality Control	Standards often not defined or consistently monitored	Standards often not defined or consistently monitored	Standards are defined and monitored consistently by the government	Standards defined and monitored consistently by government and civil society
Identification and Naming	Family members name refugees to sponsor	Specific NGOs identify refugees to sponsor	UNHCR referrals	UNHCR referrals as well as opportunities for family, NGOs, and other stakeholders to identify sponsored refugees, based on transparent criteria
Fostering Social Cohesion	Extended family sponsors contribute to integration, but sponsorship often creates heavy burden for the family and may not include the local community	Sponsorship can contribute to integration and social cohesion in the local community, but this occurs to varying degrees, depending on the local conditions and efforts of sponsors	Sponsorship can contribute to integration and social cohesion in the local community, but this occurs to varying degrees, depending on the local conditions and efforts of sponsors	Sponsorship programmes can foster increased social cohesion by facilitating training and support for sponsoring groups, and solid preparation for refugees and host communities

:: Conclusion and recommendations

As discussed in this publication, community sponsorship has become a reality in Europe, with an increasing number of programmes piloted in recent years. In the coming period, the good practices and lessons learned from experiences thus far can lead to the further engagement of NGOs, churches and citizens in community sponsorship programmes, and, more broadly, to the further growth of complementary pathways. This, in turn, will result in increased refugee admissions as well as widening their welcome and integration – transforming local cities and towns across Europe into more inclusive communities. Furthermore, the Global Compact on Refugees and the Three Year Strategy can simultaneously guide actors to become part of a global commitment to protecting refugees.

While ad-hoc arrangements have been developed to govern sponsorships in recent years, the EU, governments and civil society should now invest in creating transparent and inclusive frameworks for the medium and long term, allowing programmes to scale up and flourish. The SHARE Network's Community Sponsorship Working Group fully supports the continued growth of community sponsorship and invites EU and national, regional, and local stakeholders to take into account the following recommendations.

DEFINING CLEAR OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS FOR SPONSORSHIP PROGRAMMES

Several complementary pathways are developing in Europe at the same time; in some cases, sponsorship programmes also overlap with other complementary pathway schemes. There is thus a need to further define the objectives and scope of such programmes in order to measure success and increase the admission of refugees. We define sponsorship as a legal pathway combined with integration support.

:: Sponsorship can be set up as its own programme or as a strand within broader resettlement programmes. Either way, in order to enhance transparency in the way countries set quotas and implement resettlement and complementary pathway programmes, **sponsorship programmes should set clear targets** (e.g. target numbers, groups, nationalities) that allow for accountability and traceability - particularly in cases where programmes are supported with EU funding.

:: Sponsorship programmes should **not replace already existing pathways for refugees**, such as family reunification, and should also **not be a substitute for access to asylum**.

:: Future sponsorship programmes should **complement and be additional to resettlement**. Sponsorship programmes should also seek to target groups, nationalities and profiles that are additional to those targeted by traditional resettlement programmes. Defining clear objectives and targets for sponsorship programmes.

WHO CAN BE SPONSORED? IDENTIFICATION AND 'NAMING'

Whether the programme sponsors refugees identified and referred by the UNHCR or by NGOs, churches, family members, or others, the identification and selection criteria of those who will be sponsored must be clear and transparent.

:: To ensure longer term sustainability, sponsorship programmes should **primarily benefit vulnerable refugees who are referred according to the UNHCR submission criteria** for traditional resettlement programmes. Sponsorship should also offer opportunities for **family-linked cases**, and programmes should foresee that sponsored refugees will later have the opportunity to sponsor their own family members or wider community members.

:: **Government operated and funded resettlement programmes must focus on the most vulnerable refugees**, as per UNHCR vulnerability criteria. Highly vulnerable cases can also be welcomed and supported through special programmes or streams that blend resettlement with community sponsorships, ensuring additional support from private resources. As supporting newly arrived refugees with severe medical needs requires professional service providers, sponsorship programmes must establish strong links and the clear division of roles with professional services.

:: **Selection criteria should be clearly communicated to all stakeholders**. Sponsored persons should be well informed about the programme before travelling to the destination country, especially regarding their legal status, and their options for family reunification, as applicable.

:: **Sound pre-departure cultural orientation** sessions should be provided to refugees and host communities in the pre-departure and post-arrival phases.

DEFINING PARTNERSHIP FRAMEWORKS BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Partnership frameworks between government, civil society (e.g. CSOs and churches), and the private sector should be explicit, transparent and open, and should set up flexible coordination mechanisms. At its heart, community sponsorship is a grassroots, community-led initiative, which therefore requires a true partnership on an equal footing.

:: The partnership framework should **clearly determine the roles and responsibilities** of the state, local actors, lead sponsors and grassroots sponsoring groups; this includes responsibilities with respect to the settlement support offered, the duration of the partnership, monitoring, and safeguarding mechanisms.

LONG-TERM SELF-GOVERNANCE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS

In order to foster high quality and sustainable sponsorship programmes, civil society actors should develop self-governance and coordination mechanisms. Such structures can contribute to widening the integration and social inclusion offered through sponsorship programmes. Groups such as students, human rights organisations, employers, trade organisations, local diaspora communities, and families of already settled refugees should be encouraged to take part in community sponsorship. These new partnerships and wider engagement will help sponsorship programmes to expand and grow across territories.

:: Sponsorship programmes should consider **accreditation of 'lead sponsor' mechanisms**, which allow experienced welcoming groups to underwrite other grassroots and emerging groups of citizens and volunteers, and to apply on their behalf. Such mechanisms widen the sponsorship base and cut down on bureaucracy and form-filling for local sponsoring groups.

:: On a national level, **sponsoring organisations and civil society actors should additionally develop self-governance mechanisms** inspired by the Canadian sponsorship model, i.e. the Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH) Association. This would allow welcoming groups to learn from one another and become advocates of community sponsorship. Governments should allocate sufficient funding and resources to these national sponsorship associations, through AMIF funding or private foundations, for example.

:: **High quality and ongoing training** should be provided to sponsoring groups, including the **management of expectations and inter-cultural dialogue**, the training of volunteers, and developing multi-stakeholder platforms to strengthen cooperation and synergies among actors, including local governments and the private sector.

REGIONAL APPROACHES TO INTEGRATION

Many smaller-size municipalities and rural areas are newly engaging in receiving refugees who arrive through community sponsorship and other pathways. This engagement is a positive development and should be encouraged. However, areas that are receiving refugees for the first time have unique opportunities and challenges, and they need support. In many cases, it is beneficial if such support, as well as funding and planning, is implemented at regional levels.

:: **Longer term engagement** in community sponsorship and receiving refugees (including longer term planning and funding) should be considered in **areas with newly receiving refugees**, in order to allow for sufficient time and investment in developing needed support systems. This will require developing **stronger partnerships with local authorities and regional bodies** in order to ensure longer term engagement and to avoid single, one-time efforts.

:: **Integration frameworks** that incorporate systems for welcoming sponsored refugees should be developed at local and regional levels.

:: **Municipalities that are new to receiving refugees should be supported** in order to strengthen their capacity so that **mainstream service providers are equipped to support sponsored refugees**. In order to ensure economies of scale when investing in such capacity building, regional actors can be mobilised to support multiple municipalities in a given territory.

:: Community sponsorship engagement should ensure **linkages with the ESF+ and other regional funds** that promote labour market inclusion, social and territorial cohesion and those that promote grassroots citizens' engagement.

:: **EU funds (AMF, ESF+) aimed at supporting reception and early integration should be made more easily accessible to local authorities and CSOs** involved in community sponsorship programmes. For smaller amounts of funding, lighter procedures and requirements should be in place. Particular attention should be paid to further strengthening partnerships for service provision and integration support in small-size municipalities and rural areas.

ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES AND SETTLEMENT SUPPORT OFFERED BY PRIVATE ACTORS

Community sponsorship programmes should enhance cooperation between state social services, and NGOs and volunteers so that sponsorship programmes complement rather than replace public service provision.

:: Sponsored refugees should enjoy **equal rights and entitlements** (e.g. access to public welfare and services) as other refugees, and should be offered **secure and durable legal status**.

:: While sponsoring groups have an important role to play in ensuring access to housing and integration support for a determined period of time, **sustained government investment in social housing and in refugee reception and integration programmes** is essential for long-term refugee inclusion and social cohesion.

:: When **matching refugees to welcoming groups, sponsorship programmes should be sensitive to the needs and potential of both the refugees and host communities** in order to ensure access to adequate services and to foster social inclusion within hosting communities. Welcoming groups must, for instance, ensure that language learning and employment or training opportunities are readily accessible. Programmes to support refugees must take account of the particular challenges in more remote areas, including services for women and youth, programmes to ensure higher mobility and access to driving licence courses, and so on.

EUROPEAN UNION SUPPORT FOR SPONSORSHIP PROGRAMMES

In order to enable the growth of sponsorship programmes, the EU has an important role to play in supporting structured programmes according to clear objectives and targets.

:: **The European Commission should support further multi-stakeholder engagement** and the exchange of promising practices, including a wide range of actors (e.g. national, regional and local governments, CSOs, diaspora and other refugee associations, UNHCR, and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM)).

:: **Adequate financial and practical support to CSOs and local communities** is needed to capitalise on the desire to engage in community sponsorship. Likewise, EU funding should support national sponsorship associations and the civil society self-governing mechanisms, as described above.

:: The EU should **clarify, in the resettlement regulation** currently under discussion, **to what extent funding can be allocated to sponsorship and other complementary pathways**.

:: The EU should ensure **support for integration frameworks for sponsorship** (and for receiving refugees, more generally) in newly engaged and/or remote regions.

:: **Exchange of promising practices** at European level must be ensured by means of structured peer-to-peer exchange, piloting of innovative actions, as well as research and evaluation.

End notes

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