



Share Network
WELCOME & INTEGRATION OF MIGRANTS & REFUGEES



Credit: Isabel Corthier for Caritas International

Monitoring and Evaluation of Community Sponsorship Programmes in Europe: First Lessons Learned

SHARE Quality Sponsorship Network (QSN) Policy Brief

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WHAT IS THE SHARE NETWORK

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

WHAT IS THE SHARE QUALITY SPONSORSHIP NETWORK (QSN)?

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

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

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



Table of contents

Introduction	4
I. An overview of community sponsorship programmes and evaluations in Europe	5
A. EVALUATION OF HUMANITARIAN CORRIDORS IN ITALY	6
B. EVALUATION OF HUMANITARIAN CORRIDORS IN FRANCE	8
C. EVALUATION OF THE COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP PROGRAMME IN THE UNITED KINGDOM.....	11
D. EVALUATION OF GERMANY’S COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP PILOT PROGRAMME (NEST)	13
E. EVALUATION OF THE COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP PILOT PROGRAMME IN IRELAND	15
F. EVALUATION OF THE BASQUE COUNTRY’S COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP PILOT PROGRAMME (AUZOLANA II)	17
G. MONITORING OF THE COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP PROGRAMME IN BELGIUM	20
II. Conclusions and main recommendations from the first evaluations of community sponsorship programmes in Europe.....	21

Introduction

Community sponsorship has become a reality in Europe with an increasing number of programmes piloted in recent years. Since the development of the various sponsorship schemes, a number of formative evaluations have been conducted in different European countries looking at programme design and best practices and challenges, whilst also providing stakeholders recommendations for future adaptations of their programmes. Some of the community sponsorship models have also begun to develop monitoring tools to assess how well the programmes are performing, facilitate quick interventions, and adapt to new needs.

This summary and policy brief takes into account the findings and recommendations from these formative evaluations and monitoring practices¹, which were presented at the Share QSN Transnational Roundtable on Refugee Sponsorship Evaluations and the follow up workshop on Monitoring of Community Sponsorship Programmes in 2021.² Both events were organised in the context of the SHARE Quality Sponsorship Network (QSN), a programme co-funded by the European Union's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) which supports pilot and ad-hoc sponsorship initiatives to develop into sustainable, community-driven programmes.

Looking at the monitoring and evaluation of these programmes in a comparative perspective has been useful to document common challenges across the different schemes and begin to establish the good practices which can help make the various models more resilient over the long-term. The evaluations have also allowed an initial assessment of how well these practices and design frameworks work in different contexts and operational settings as well as with different profiles of refugees, sponsors, and hosting communities.

This brief is divided into two parts, the first provides an overview of evaluations of community sponsorship schemes in Italy, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Ireland, and Spain, as well as the challenges, main findings and lessons learned. The second part provides the main takeaways from these initial evaluations in the form of recommendations and concluding remarks. While the implication of COVID 19 was not taken into account in most evaluations carried out, it is clear that this has affected the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the programmes in a context of extremely reduced arrivals during the pandemic.

¹ Monitoring is a continuous process of collecting and analysing information to assess how well a project, programme, or policy is performing and to facilitate quick interventions to solve problems. Evaluation, by contrast, is the assessment of an ongoing or completed programme or policy in terms of whether its objectives were met and how or why it was (or not) successful. It examines the relevance of the intervention, along with its efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability. See Hanne Beirens and Aliyyah Ahad, "Measuring up? Using Monitoring and Evaluation to Make Good on the Promise of Refugee Sponsorship", Migration Policy Institute, June 2020, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/MPIE-Sponsorship-Monitoring-Evaluation-FINAL.pdf>.

² Share Quality Sponsorship Network (Share QSN), "Transnational Roundtable on Community Sponsorship Evaluations Report", Share Network, March 2021 <https://www.share-network.eu/articles-and-resources/report1-t8zhs>.

I. An overview of community sponsorship programmes and evaluations in Europe

Resettlement and complementary pathways have developed significantly from 2014 onwards - as European countries developed varied responses to the Syrian refugee crisis, tapping into a widespread grassroots citizen and community interest in welcoming refugees fleeing conflict. The European model of community sponsorship, inspired by the 1978 established Canadian model, began to gain traction in this context and seven community sponsorship pilot projects were launched in the ensuing years across Europe. However, community sponsorship (also called refugee or private sponsorship, or humanitarian corridors in some contexts) programmes are still under development - operating under a flexible concept. They can be broadly defined as “*a public-private partnership between governments, who facilitate legal admission for refugees, and private or community actors, who provide financial, social and/or emotional support to admit, settle and integrate refugees into the community*”³

Two main types of community sponsorship are currently operating in Europe.⁴ The first type of community sponsorships are the **Humanitarian corridors programmes** which offer complementary pathways in addition to resettlement. They emerged in Italy, France and Belgium, between 2015 and 2017, where faith-based actors established agreements with their respective governments to receive refugees who are initially admitted on humanitarian visas. The humanitarian corridor model is based on a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the government and civil society groups who are responsible for identifying refugees for resettlement in cooperation with local organisations, the UNHCR and IOM.⁵ Humanitarian corridor programs offer a safe and legal entry to vulnerable people in evident need of protection who have been identified in a first stage of assessment as *prima facie* refugees.

Characteristically, they follow three-stages: First, NGO staff carry out exploratory visits to refugee camps and urban centres in a first country of asylum and select refugees according to vulnerability criteria. Second, NGOs conduct orientation and information sessions for selected candidates and secure a flight to the European country concerned. Third, NGOs match refugees with local volunteer groups that welcome newcomers who support beneficiaries through the phases of reception and socio-economic integration.⁶

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

⁴ A third type was established in Germany under the Lander Programme and HAP to ensure Syrians could reunite with their family members. For more information about this third type see ICMC Europe and Caritas Europa, “Fostering Community Sponsorship Across Europe”, Share Network, July 2019 <https://www.share-network.eu/articles-and-resources/study1-w9pjc?rq=fostering>.

⁵ Michael Collyer, Maria Mancinelli, and Fabio Petito, “Humanitarian Corridors: Safe and Legal Pathways to Europe”, University of Sussex, Autumn 2017, <http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/72424/1/Policy%20briefing%20-%20Humanitarian%20corridors.pdf>.

⁶ Alberto Mallardo, “Humanitarian Corridors: A Tool to Respond to the Refugees’ Crisis”, University of Oxford Law Blog, May 2017, <https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/research-subject-groups/centre-criminology/centreborder-criminologies/blog/2017/05/humanitarian>.

Together, the programmes to date have provided more than 3000+ protection places⁷- additional to resettlement commitments - across the three countries, with faith-based organisations coordinating and financing most of the sponsorship. A new type of humanitarian corridor for refugee students (UNICORE) emerged in Italy in 2019 in which refugees are selected based on academic merits.

The second approach is the **resettlement-based sponsorship schemes** launched first in the United Kingdom (UK) in 2016. This was followed by the development of the Irish and German community sponsorship pilots in 2019, the Belgian community sponsorship programme in 2020, and the regional programmes that developed in Spain in recent years, beginning with the Basque country in 2018 followed by Valencia and Navarra in 2020.

Resettlement-based community sponsorship programmes enable groups of citizens to support refugees who are identified and referred by UNHCR and selected by governments within⁸ or additional⁹ to the respective resettlement quotas of each country. Once refugees are selected, they're matched via NGO lead sponsors with local sponsoring groups, who are then responsible for fundraising, securing housing, and providing post-arrival support. In the regional model piloted in Spain by Basque country, it is the regional government that coordinates placement of refugees selected by the national government with civil society groups that provide for integration support while providing for partial financing of sponsoring organisations.

To date, resettlement-based community sponsorship numbers are much smaller in terms of arrivals than humanitarian corridor programmes, but in contrast, the resettlement-based programmes offer an open framework that enable a wider range of actors to become involved in sponsorship in the future. The number of refugees who have been welcomed through resettlement-based community sponsorship range from approximately 700 refugees in the UK to 35 refugees welcomed through Belgium's Community sponsorship programme.¹⁰

A. EVALUATION OF HUMANITARIAN CORRIDORS IN ITALY

Overview of Humanitarian Corridors in Italy

The Italian Humanitarian Corridor (HC) programme was launched in December 2015 as a response to the large numbers of migrants dying in the Mediterranean Sea and the lack of legal migration channels to reach Europe. It offers vulnerable refugees a complementary pathway to protection (humanitarian visas) in addition to resettlement, while also providing legal access, reception and integration support.

Since 2015 four protocols have been implemented under multiple agreements between the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Interior, and four religious organisations: the community of Sant'Egidio, the Waldesian Board, the Federation of Protestant Churches, and the Italian Bishops Conference/Caritas Italiana.¹¹ In response to the Afghan crisis, a fifth MoU providing for the legal and

⁷ For the Humanitarian Corridor programmes, the total number of arrivals per country from the beginning of the programme (with the signing of the first protocol) until March 2022 was the following: France: approx. 530+ arrivals, Italy: approx. 2500+ arrivals, Belgium: 150 arrivals.

⁸ In Belgium, Ireland, Spain they are selected within their government's resettlement quotas.

⁹ In Germany (and the UK as of 2020) they are selected in addition to the resettlement quota.

¹⁰ The number of arrivals for resettlement-based community sponsorship programmes as of March 2022 are approximately the following: Spain: 31 arrivals to Basque Country, 23 arrivals to Valencia and 11 arrivals to Navarra; Germany: 139 arrivals; Ireland: 80 arrivals; Belgium: 35 arrivals, UK: 700 arrivals. For a more detailed comparison of the different programmes and number of arrivals see <https://www.share-network.eu/qsn-project>.

¹¹ The first MoU was signed in December 2015 between the Italian Ministries of Interior and Foreign Affairs and the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy, the Community of Sant'Egidio and the Waldesian Church for a quota of 1000

safe entry of 1,200 Afghan citizens was signed in November 2021. For the first time, a secular civil society organisation ARCI (Associazione Ricreativa Culturale Italiana)¹², has become a partner to the protocol.

Under the scheme, religious organisations in collaboration with UNHCR and partners on the ground, are involved in the selection of beneficiaries, pre-departure orientation, travel arrangements, and upon arrival are responsible for providing accommodation, support in accessing language courses and general upskilling. All costs of the programme are covered by the sponsoring religious organisations.

Each of the respective partners in the programme operate with their volunteers their own designed social and cultural integration programmes, while they are also responsible for assisting with asylum applications of beneficiaries post arrival.

The Italian Humanitarian corridor programme is flexible with regards the way partners deliver integration support as well as with respect to the duration of sponsors' responsibilities (around one year to eighteen months but can be longer or shorter as required¹³). Another central feature of humanitarian corridors is that they are additional to resettlement, noting that resettlement numbers in Italy have traditionally been very low.¹⁴ Since the start of the programme in 2015, humanitarian corridors have welcomed approximately 2500+ refugees to Italy. Caritas Italiana, a leading actor in the programme, has supported and hosted approximately 620 of these refugees from camps in Ethiopia, Niger, Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey in 70 dioceses across Italy.¹⁵

Evaluation of Humanitarian Corridors: objectives and methodology

The longitudinal study conducted by Ilaria Schnyder von Wartensee and her team at Notre Dame University (United States) focused on the first cohort of refugees from Eritrea, South Sudan and Somalia residing in camps in Ethiopia, which arrived in Italy beginning in 2017 under the Humanitarian Corridor protocol signed by Caritas Italiana. The methodology used in the research involved the collection of qualitative data through conducting 400 interviews with refugees, social workers, and volunteers across 45 Italian dioceses. Additionally, participant observation and field studies were conducted for a holistic understanding of the programme.

Key Research Findings

The longitudinal study found that humanitarian corridors provided communities with an opportunity to be actively and positively engaged in the social issue of the refugee crisis. However, the emotional

people. An extension for an additional 1000 Syrian refugees from Lebanon was granted in 2017. In January 2017 a third MoU was signed by the Italian Episcopal Conference (through Italian Caritas and Migrants Foundation) and the Community of Sant'Egidio to open a Humanitarian Corridors from Ethiopia and welcome 500 persons. In the spring of 2019, a fourth MoU was signed by the Italian Bishops Conference/Caritas Italiana and the community of Sant Egidio to welcome 600 additional refugees from Ethiopia, Niger, and Jordan.

¹² See Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Relations, "Signing of Protocol for Humanitarian Corridors from Afghanistan", Press release, November 11 2021, https://www.esteri.it/en/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/comunicati/2021/11/firma-del-protocollo-per-i-corridoi-umanitari-dallafghanistan/.

¹³ Gabriela Agatiello, Fiona Kendall, Giulia Gori, Guilhem Mante and Paolo Pezzati, "Private Sponsorship for Integration: Building a European Model", PPI Project, December 2020, https://ppiproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/pub_Building_European_Model_WEB.pdf.

¹⁴ In 2020 resettlement numbers in Italy were 21 and in 2021 there have been no refugees admitted through government resettlement programmes.

¹⁵ See Share QSN Partnership in Share Projects: Quality Sponsorship Network, <https://www.share-network.eu/qsn-project>

and financial support to refugees that was required by the sponsors, usually faith-based, was often considered to be very intense and at times difficult.¹⁶

The research found that refugees felt a sense of “rebirth” stemming from the safe environment in Italy and the immediate community that provided support and welcome. This, combined with the inter-faith pairings of refugees and sponsors was perceived as positive by the researcher in the way it tackled prejudices in hosting communities by helping to reduce communities’ negative perceptions of other cultures. However, more intercultural training was found to be needed to further improve social relationships between groups.¹⁷

The evaluation also highlighted several key challenges including the difficulty for refugees to confidently feel integrated within the one-year placement period. This resulted in increased pressure on volunteers and communities who used their own financial and social capital to continue to support the refugees. This financial pressure was exacerbated by refugees reporting difficulties in gaining job opportunities due to a strained labour market, discrimination, and language barriers.

The study provided some interesting findings with regards to the transition to autonomous living and secondary movement of refugees. Overall, the longitudinal study showed that only 6% of beneficiaries were fully autonomous and living in Italy after the programme completion. Around 50% of participants who had been interviewed for the study had either left the programme before the end of the sponsorship duration or moved to a new country. A further 31% continue to be partially or completely supported by Caritas and 13% of participants were transferred to the Federal SPRAR reception system after the sponsorship ended. Although many did not finalise their sponsorship period, the programme was stated to have helped build their confidence and language skills enabling them to rebuild their lives. This finding however raises the question of how the success of humanitarian corridor programmes should be measured as beneficiaries may not always choose to integrate and stay in the arrival country despite local volunteer support offered.¹⁸

Since the research has focused only on the corridor from Ethiopia, it would be worthwhile to carry out comparative research on the integration experience of other humanitarian corridor cohorts (i.e., Niger, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey).

B. EVALUATION OF HUMANITARIAN CORRIDORS IN FRANCE

Overview of Humanitarian Corridors in France

France established its humanitarian corridor programme in 2017 when five faith-based organisations and the French State signed its first protocol to issue 500 temporary visas for asylum seekers fleeing from Syria and Iraq. Beneficiaries of the programme are identified and selected in Lebanon by NGOs and their partners according to certain criteria aimed at helping the most vulnerable, including families with young children, persons with medical issues, and LGBTQ+ individuals who are at risk.¹⁹

¹⁶ Ilarya Schnyder Von Wartensee, “Humanitarian Corridors from Ethiopia to Italy: A 3 Years Evaluation” in Share Quality Sponsorship Network “Transnational Roundtable on Refugee Sponsorship Monitoring and Evaluation”, Share Network, March 2021, <https://www.share-network.eu/articles-and-resources/report1-t8zhs>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Private sponsorship for integration project, “Impact Assessment of Humanitarian Corridors Program: Primary Achievements in Italy and France”, Eurodiaconia, August 2020, <https://www.eurodiaconia.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/AMIF-PPI-Impact-Assessment-Report-FINAL-27072020.pdf>.

Monitoring and Evaluation of Community Sponsorship

In November 2021, the FEP signed a second protocol with the government to welcome an additional 300 beneficiaries through humanitarian corridors, with 23 beneficiaries (5 families) arriving on November 11, 2021. By March 2022 around 530+ refugees were hosted in France, 324 of whom were hosted by the FEP local volunteer groups called Citizen Committees (CC).

In parallel, Sant Egidio which also participated in the first protocol, signed a second protocol with the Minister of Interior in April 2021, along with *Semaines Sociales de France* (a faith-based platform which brings various Christian actors together) to welcome 300 additional beneficiaries through the humanitarian corridors, with 40 beneficiaries having arrived by March 2022.²⁰

As is the case with the Italian Humanitarian Corridor, the programme run by FEP is organised differently than the one by Sant Egidio. Overall coordination and oversight of the programme is done by the FEP national platform, but the local Citizen Committees (made up of 20+ volunteers per CC) are directly supported by the five regional platforms that assist in the reception and integration of the beneficiaries. A social worker paid by FEP oversees and monitors the programme in each regional division with the support of the FEP national platform. For some refugees, additional support is needed if they are placed in an area not covered by one of the regional platforms.²¹

Evaluation of Humanitarian Corridors: objectives and methodology

While there is no formal evaluation of the Humanitarian Corridors programme supported by Sant Egidio, FEP has been monitoring its own programme and undertaken several evaluations since its start. The most recent being an assessment of the primary achievements of the humanitarian corridors programme conducted in 2020, which was presented at SHARE's QSN Transnational Roundtable on Community Sponsorship Evaluations in March 2021.²²

Commissioned by the FEP, the evaluation was conducted by Paolo Stuppia, a researcher affiliated with CESSP (Centre Européen de Sociologie et de Science Politique). The evaluation used both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The quantitative research consisted of a statistical analysis of a tracking table (tableau de suivi)²³ where the FEP central platform keeps up-to-date information about each individual arrival and family unit which is hosted by a citizen committee across France. Researchers collected 35 questionnaires administered to beneficiaries living in four different regional divisions. Moreover, researchers conducted 10 qualitative semi-structured interviews with different actors involved in the programme, including social workers, citizen committee members, local officials, and FEP coordinators.²⁴

The evaluation examined the successes and challenges faced by the citizen committees and refugees with the aim of improving the programme and assessing whether the expectations of both groups were met through the programme.

²⁰ Sant'Egidio, "Couloirs humanitaires en France: des familles de réfugiés venant du Liban accueillies dans le cadre d'un parcours d'intégration", Sant'Egidio news, 26 March 2022.

<https://www.santegidio.org/pageID/30284/langID/fr/itemID/47353/Couloirs-humanitaires-en-France-des-familles-de-r%C3%A9fugi%C3%A9s-venant-du-Liban-accueillies-dans-le-cadre-d-un-parcours-d-int%C3%A9gration.html>

²¹ Paolo Stuppia, "Assessment of the French Humanitarian Corridors Programme, 3 years later", in Share QSN, "Transnational Roundtable on Community Sponsorship Evaluations Report", Share Network, March 2021, <https://www.share-network.eu/articles-and-resources/report1-t8zhs>.

²² Share QSN, "Transnational Roundtable on Community Sponsorship Evaluations Report."

²³ Private sponsorship for integration project, "Impact Assessment of Humanitarian Corridors Program: Primary Achievements in Italy and France".

²⁴ Ibid.

Key Research Findings

The key research finding highlighted that overall refugee and sponsor group expectations were successfully met as two thirds of refugee participants stated that the programme was overall a positive experience and significantly aided their integration into their local communities.²⁵ The results also point to the emergence of a new local dynamic in support of refugees, particularly in rural areas, where the initial reluctance to welcome refugees by some locals was replaced by more positive attitudes and the creation of stronger community bonds.²⁶

The citizen committee members reacted positively to the support they received from the national and regional platforms in helping them to establish a good relationship with the refugee families throughout the duration of the sponsorship.

Another finding was that the programme facilitated the creation of links with other refugee serving organisations and communities, contributing to the development of a network of actors interested and engaged in supporting refugees. In rural areas, the engagement of citizen committees in hosting refugee families led to more cohesive communities.²⁷

A minority of refugees expressed negative programme experiences; most notably related to language, housing, access to employment and experiences with the asylum-seeking process. Other challenges signalled by the social workers and CC members interviewed include a “culture gap” during the first few months of hosting, sometimes leading to tensions within the groups.

The evaluation pointed to a few areas for improvement, including better expectation management for refugees and sponsors prior to the arrival of families and the provision of intercultural training courses for groups to reduce cultural tensions.²⁸ The evaluation also identified a gap between rural and urban areas in terms of volunteer engagement, as the majority of CCs are located in rural areas or smaller towns, which can sometimes represent a disadvantage to vulnerable refugees. The evaluation found that the latter would benefit from having the wrap around support provided by CC groups, but in larger urban areas where they could also access more tailored services (i.e., LGBTQI+ refugees, refugees with special medical needs).²⁹

²⁵ Stuppia, “Assessment of the French Humanitarian Corridors Programme, 3 years later” in Share QSN ‘Transnational Roundtable on Community Sponsorship Evaluations Report’.

²⁶ Paolo Stuppia, “French Humanitarian Corridors Program Experience: An Assessment of a Private Sponsored Program, 3 Years Later”, Fédération de l’Entraide Protestante (FEP), 2020, <https://fep.asso.fr/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/AMIF-research-Pre-report.pdf>.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Agatiello, Kendall, Gori, Mante and Pezzati, “Private Sponsorship for Integration”. Since the evaluation took place the FEP has taken corrective measures to improve their pre-departure orientation and preparation for refugee families before arrival. With the support of funds received by AMIF, “the French and Italian HC programmes set up some specific “corrective actions” to rebalance expectations responsibility among different actors involved. Besides classic pre-departure orientation, two-day psychological counselling sessions run by mental health professionals (mainly clinical psychologists, psychotherapists and stress counsellors) were started with the aim of helping participants to develop realistic expectations of their migration project and equipping them with the skills needed to have a smooth transition into their host countries and to adapt to their new culture without giving up their own. Such counselling has proved to be extremely useful, having a significant impact on participants’ real understanding of their migration project and on their levels of post-arrival proactivity.”

²⁹ Stuppia, “Assessment of the French Humanitarian Corridors Programme, 3 years later” in Share QSN Transnational Roundtable on Community Sponsorship Evaluations Report.

C. EVALUATION OF THE COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP PROGRAMME IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Overview of Community Sponsorship Programme in the UK

In July 2016 the first European resettlement-based sponsorship scheme was launched in the United Kingdom by the Home Office. It allowed local community groups to be responsible for supporting refugees and aiding the facilitation of refugee resettlement. Since the introduction of the Community Sponsorship Scheme (CSS) approximately 700+ refugee individuals have been resettled across the UK, supported by approximately 130 Community Sponsor groups.³⁰

The positive results and perceived programme success documented in formative evaluations of the scheme led the UK Government in 2019 to commit to supporting the CSS programme for five more years, in which the CSS focus will shift from primarily Syrian refugees to include other groups of vulnerable refugees. Furthermore, starting in 2020 refugees resettled through the CSS are additional to the national resettlement targets, although the UK has not specified what the government resettlement target would be.

Evaluation of CSS programme: objectives and methodology

Growth in cultural analysis and academic interest in refugee resettlement since 2016 has resulted in increased funding from both public and private sources to understand and examine the outcomes of integration schemes, such as sponsorship-based resettlement. Subsequently, in 2017 Professor Jenny Phillimore along with her team at the University of Birmingham's Institute for Research into Superdiversity (IRiS) was able to undergo a three-year evaluation of the scheme³¹, looking at challenges and effects of sponsorship on refugees across 22 groups in rural and urban areas in all four countries of the UK (England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland). The methodology of the evaluation consisted of in-depth interviews with 250 individuals including 61 sponsored refugees and 145 CSS volunteers. The IRiS team also undertook exploratory research on five communities with low levels of diversity where CSS groups were operating. 32 members of the wider community were interviewed for this study, including doctors, teachers, employment centres and thought leaders to give insight into refugee sponsorship's impact on a community and shifting attitudes towards refugees.

Key Research Findings

The IRiS has published several reports on their evaluation of the CSS in the UK including a 'Formative Evaluation from 2017-2020 of Community Sponsorship in the UK'; a study titled 'From Refugees to Citizens', which focuses on the experiences of refugees in sponsorship³²; and a study on 'The effects of Community Sponsorship in less-diverse communities'.³³ The findings highlight important insights

³⁰ See Share QSN Partnership in Share QSN Project, <https://www.share-network.eu/qsn-project>.

³¹ Jenny Phillimore, Marisol Reyes and Sara Hassan, "Community Sponsorship in the UK: Formative Evaluation 2017-2020", University of Birmingham Institute for Research into Superdiversity, June 2020, <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/iris/2020/community-sponsorship-general-report.pdf>.

³² Sara Hassan and Jenny Phillimore, "Community Sponsorship in the UK: Refugees to Citizens", University of Birmingham Institute for Research into Superdiversity, June 2020, <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/iris/2020/community-sponsorship-refugee-report.pdf>.

³³ Marisol Reyes and Jenny Phillimore, "Like Pebbles in a Pool: the Effect of Community Sponsorship on Knowledge About, and Attitudes to, Refugees in Less-diverse Communities, University of Birmingham Institute for Research into

Monitoring and Evaluation of Community Sponsorship

into the experiences and challenges of the CSS volunteers, the support for refugee families, and the impact of CSS on the wider communities in which refugees are hosted. The overall finding from the evaluations is that community sponsorship has “transformative potential” for both refugees, who feel a sense of security and welcome, and the host communities who begin understanding refugees’ struggles. The evaluations further found that CSS programmes can serve as an important tool in combating negative stereotypes surrounding refugees.³⁴

The first phase of the evaluation examined refugee and community members’ expectations and experiences before and during arrival, as well as volunteer motives and demographics. Volunteer members stated that building trust and openness to the programme, the refugees, and their sponsor peers were important and key to a positive outcome of the process. The majority of volunteers also stated that CSS gave them an opportunity to be actively and positively engaged with the refugee crisis, in a way that allowed them to express their personal values.

However, tensions between group members and stakeholders with regards to input effort, tasks and responsibility sharing were also apparent, as well as the emotional vulnerability and difficulty experienced when working with refugees who may have suffered trauma. Volunteers also noted that finding suitable and affordable accommodation, particularly in urban areas was also quite challenging for many of the groups.

Expectation management of refugees themselves was also found to be very important, as many stated that the culture shock upon arrival was difficult, heightened by misinformation and unrealistic expectations prior to arrival. Furthermore, the language barrier was a considerable challenge that slowed down abilities to communicate and connect with their hosts and the wider community. Language barriers also made employment and education needs difficult for both refugees and the community whilst translation costs exceeded what sponsors had expected. Nevertheless, research highlighted that most sponsors and refugees felt they had developed strong social bonds with each other and that the positive outcomes had exceeded their expectations. A suggestion proposed by the research was to increase the number, consistency, and efficiency of English ESOL classes in future adaptations of the CSS.

Social and well-being challenges included refugees’ feelings of isolation and loneliness, as well as the pressure to make the most of their resettlement opportunity which could often lead to feelings of shame. These feelings were present in many older male refugees who found their lack of employment or ability to provide for their family very difficult, which was exacerbated by the lack of male volunteers in the CSS. One suggestion could be to include more Arabic speaking buddies or mentors for newly arrived men.³⁵

A positive finding was that many groups formed sponsor-refugee friendships that developed into kin-like ties, stating that they learnt from each other’s cultures. Whilst there are challenges that come from close bonds such as difficulty with boundaries and responsibilities, the CSS programme has demonstrated success in providing social and practical support which benefits both the refugee beneficiaries and their sponsors.

Superdiversity, June 2020, <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/iris/2020/community-sponsorship-case-study-report.pdf>.

³⁴ Share QSN, “Transnational Roundtable on community Sponsorship Evaluations Report”.

³⁵ Jenny Phillimore, “Community Sponsorship and Integration: Refugees’ Perspectives”, online presentation in Brussels 3 virtual event on Strengthening Europe’s Approach to Community Sponsorship: Strategies and Tools for Growth, April 27 2021.

Monitoring and Evaluation of Community Sponsorship

While initial findings from the first phases of the research have been generally positive, it has been noted by Phillimore and the IRiS team that integration is a long-term process with effects that are far-reaching and constantly evolving. Therefore, more in-depth, and long-term studies need to be carried out to assess the longer-term impacts for refugees and their host communities.

Another positive outcome noted by the research team has been that the evaluations have been reviewed and discussed with the Home Office on a regular basis and have contributed to improving and fine-tuning the programme design and implementation.

As part of ongoing research conducted by the University of Birmingham's Institute for Research into Superdiversity (IRiS) a study on the impact of the Covid-19 in the UK's Community Sponsorship Scheme (CSS) concluded that with the advent of the pandemic and the introduction of social distancing and lockdown in March 2020 Community Sponsorship groups were challenged to offer alternative support to refugees in new ways. As the pandemic evolved, volunteers, the majority of whom are retired or semi-retired realised that many refugees faced language barriers or were unable to access information digitally. With some volunteers and refugees needing to isolate themselves and many services moving to remote provision, these groups faced a situation very different to that for which they had planned.³⁶

The study also found that the mental health of many refugees deteriorated during the pandemic and the imposed isolation and lockdown was particularly difficult and overwhelming for refugees already struggling with trauma as a result of their experiences with war. Some local groups tried to offer support by introducing refugees to activities such as gardening and birdwatching to help with their wellbeing, but such resources were not available to all.

D. EVALUATION OF GERMANY'S COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP PILOT PROGRAMME (NesT)

Overview of NesT pilot programme

The New Start in a Team (NesT) programme is the German pilot community sponsorship programme launched in May 2019. The NesT pilot programme aims to facilitate the resettlement of 500 refugees in addition to the resettlement quota through the mobilisation of civil society sponsorship groups composed of five+ individuals. Financially the sponsors are responsible for providing accommodation for 2 years and supporting refugee families with practical, emotional, and integration support for at least one year. As of May 2022, a total of 139 refugees had arrived through the NesT programme and been welcomed by 31 sponsor groups in Germany. In 2022, the admission quota for NesT is 200 individuals resettled from Kenya, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, and Niger. BAMF recently announced that it plans to consolidate the programme in 2023 and reduce the financial requirements of sponsors for the provision of accommodation from 2 to 1 year.

BAMF Formative Evaluation of NesT: objectives and methodology

An initial evaluation of the NesT programme was initiated by BAMF (the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees) in 2020. While preliminary findings were not formally published, initial findings were

³⁶ Marisol Reyes and Jenny Phillimore, "Community Sponsorship Scheme: Supporting Refugees and Volunteers During the Covid-19 Pandemic", University of Birmingham Institute for Research into Superdiversity, September 2021, <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/iris/2021/supporting-refugees-and-volunteers-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-general-report.pdf>.

shared by BAMF researchers at the SHARE QSN Roundtable on sponsorship evaluations in March 2021.³⁷ A final report of the evaluation, which is still ongoing will become available in 2022.

The formative evaluation had the following key objectives:

1. to assess the efficiency of sponsorship recruitment and the refugee admission process;
2. To examine which groups participate in sponsorship, why they choose to do so, and what measures can encourage other actors to participate.
3. Refugees and sponsors were also asked about best practices and improvement suggestions after one year to help shape future programme design and implementation.

The methodology of the evaluation consisted of participatory observation and qualitative in-depth-interviews with 8 refugees, 32 sponsors and actors responsible for the programme, as well as quantitative analysis of administrative data on sponsors' recruitment process and the refugee admission process.³⁸

Key Research Findings

Key research findings showed that the institutional support of churches and municipalities is central to the success of groups in finding accommodation and financing it. Finding affordable housing is challenging particularly in larger urban areas³⁹. In Germany, until recently, sponsors were asked to finance two years of rent which must be secured before the arrival of the family. This costs for accommodation can range anywhere from 8 000 – 18 000 euros depending on the location.⁴⁰ The financial obligation on sponsors is higher than what is usually asked under other sponsorship programmes in Europe. There is consensus among most German stakeholders that the financial burdens on sponsors and the difficulties in finding suitable housing are two of the most significant challenges preventing scaling the programme.⁴¹

The evaluation also looked at the recruitment strategy of sponsors and highlighted the positive role played by the civil society contact points (ZKS)⁴² not only as a platform for actor coordination, training support and information sharing but also as a means to mobilise and recruit new sponsor groups and support the growth of the programme. According to the preliminary evaluation, this recruitment strategy has proven to be effective but selective at the same time.⁴³

Recruitment of groups has mostly relied on the contacts and networks of the faith-based organisations and churches of the ZKS contact point organisations. This has resulted in volunteers being closely linked to the established churches and welfare organisations, and clustered in the regions of North-Rhine Westphalia and Bavaria. Many of the volunteers have also been previously engaged in volunteer work with migrants and refugees, which has ensured quality support to refugee families. However, while being able to activate their local parish networks has proven useful in helping to grow the programme initially, it has also limited the outreach to other actors and the geographical scope. An overreliance on the ZKS contact points and their networks has also made it difficult to decentralise the work of recruitment and provision of support.

³⁷ Share QSN, "Transnational Roundtable on Community Sponsorship Evaluations Report".

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Share Network, "Community Sponsorship via the German NesT Programme: An Experience to Repeat", Share Network, June 2021, <https://www.share-network.eu/articles-and-resources/story1-9hb3g?rq=NesT%20programme>.

⁴⁰ Share Network online meeting with NesT stakeholder, October 2021.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² The civil society contact points (ZKS) include Caritas Germany, the German Red Cross and the Protestant Church of Westphalia. https://resettlement.de/wp-content/uploads/nest_broschuere_quadratisch_aufgabe_EN_v03.pdf.

⁴³ Evaluation of the NesT Programme, online presentation in Brussels 3 virtual event. "Strengthening Europe's Approach to Community Sponsorship: Strategies and Tools for Growth", April 27 2021.

E. EVALUATION OF THE COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP PILOT PROGRAMME IN IRELAND

Overview of community sponsorship pilot programme in Ireland

The Community Sponsorship in Ireland (CSI) pilot programme was developed between 2017 and 2018 under the guidance and the inputs of the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (GRSI) and the Canadian government department for Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada. The CSI pilot was implemented between March 2019 and October 2019 by the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP) in collaboration with the UNHCR, the Irish NGO sector, and a host of civic-minded and community-based actors. Following the initial pilot phase, a mainstream programme was launched nationally by the government in 2019.⁴⁴ The CSI is complementary but not additional to the mainstream resettlement programmes operating in Ireland and aims to offer an alternative pathway for Syrian refugees' integration with the help of the host communities and financial capital.

Refugees resettled under CSI have their status recognised by the UNHCR and are welcomed in Ireland as part of the IRPP (Irish Refugee Protection Programme) with a "programme refugee" status, allowing them to apply for citizenship after three years. The first CSI refugee family arrived in Ireland in December 2018. Since then, Community Sponsorship groups have resettled around 16 families (70 refugees) by November 2021.⁴⁵

Community Sponsorship groups are comprised of local volunteers supported by Regional Support Organisations (RSOs), which currently include the Irish Refugee Council, the Irish Red Cross, Nasc and Doras. A national sponsorship support organisation, the Open Community, coordinated by Amnesty Ireland, bring key partners together to promote, support and mobilise groups and communities to welcome refugees. Volunteer groups need to provide support and secure accommodation for a refugee family for up to two years, demonstrate that they have at least 10,000 euros and are able to support refugees in accessing services such as education and employment.

The policy objectives of CSI are 1. To enhance Ireland's humanitarian tradition with respect to forcibly displaced and persecuted persons by providing opportunities and mechanisms for communities to become involved in the direct support of the resettlement of refugees. 2. To provide new pathways for refugees' language acquisition, housing, education, employment, social protection, and social inclusion through direct involvement by Irish communities in resettlement. 3. To involve a wider set of Irish individuals, civil society organisations and community actors in refugee protection and integration. 4. To maintain a human-rights based approach to protection, resettlement, and the wellbeing and security of refugees and Irish communities.⁴⁶ Ultimately CSI is intended to establish deep linkages between the host community and refugees to create a sense of acceptance and to realise the benefits of integration and diversity.

Evaluation of CSI pilot programme: objectives and methodology

The evaluation of the CSI was commissioned by the IRPP and conducted by Montbretia Consultant Anthony Finn. The methodology of the research, which ended in September 2019, consisted of desk

⁴⁴ Irish Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Written Answers, June 2021 <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2021-07-27a.3307&s=amif#g3310.r>.

⁴⁵ See Share QSN Partnership in Share QSN project. <https://www.share-network.eu/qsn-project>.

⁴⁶ Anthony Finn, Community Sponsorship Ireland: Pilot Project Evaluation, Montbretia, September 2019.

research and key informant interviews (KII), and where relevant, focus group discussions. In total 58 people were consulted as part of the research, and KIIs included relevant government stakeholders, members of the National Support Organisation (NSO), members of the Regional Support organisations (RSOs), and representatives of the Community Support Groups (CSGs).⁴⁷

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) was built into the pilot programme's design and shaped the programme throughout its implementation, which was identified by the research as a positive outcome and will remain a design element of the programme.

The aim of the evaluation was to provide an overview of the programme's outcomes, best practices and challenges whilst also providing stakeholders recommendations for future adaptations of the programme.

Key Research Findings

A key finding of the pilot evaluation is that Ireland's communities' boundaries are flexible and accommodating to incoming refugees. This finding was evidenced by the enthusiastic engagement of different community actors in the programme.⁴⁸ Institutional coordination however remains a key challenge, as the communication and standard operating procedures between the multiple stakeholders are not always efficient nor effective. Responsibilities and functions of the different stakeholders must be clearly outlined, and institutions aligned to deal with future influx of refugees under the sponsorship programme.⁴⁹ This challenge is currently highlighted with the increasing numbers of Afghan refugees. While there is high motivation to welcome Afghans on the Irish volunteers' side, there is a lack of a coherent communication and coordination strategy that has presented an additional barrier to CSGs effectively performing their roles.

The evaluation also found that some CSGs encountered procedural challenges linked to managing financial aspects, often linked to ensuring accommodations under their settlement plans. Some groups encountered problems with accessing financial services (i.e., opening bank accounts) or faced bureaucratic barriers by the administration of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme, which required CSGs to pay the deposit for private rented accommodation and advance the initial months of rent while waiting for HAP to be approved, which could result in a financial strain for CSGs.⁵⁰

The evaluation also found that refugees in the selection process found it difficult to retain information during the pre-departure orientation. Many of them identified gaps in their understanding or insufficient information given prior to arrival. For example, they mentioned not knowing the locality where they would be resettled or whether they would have to spend time in a reception centre upon arrival. These findings point to the need to improve the effectiveness of the sensitisation and orientation process during pre-departure, and to ensure that the design and delivery of pre-departure information sessions take into account the capacity limitations that may arise by the impact of trauma and stress on some refugees.⁵¹

Furthermore, whilst sponsors and refugees have been supported and trained throughout the programme by the RSOs, feedback from stakeholders in the evaluation recommends the inclusion of

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Unlike other countries in the EU, faith-based actors do not constitute the majority in Ireland's community sponsorship programme.

⁴⁹ Anthony Finn, "Characteristics of Evaluating CSI as a Pilot", in Share QSN "Transnational Roundtable on Community Sponsorship Evaluations Report".

⁵⁰ Anthony Finn, "Community Sponsorship in Ireland: Pilot Project Evaluation.

⁵¹ Ibid.

additional training modules on trauma, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), sexual and gender-based violence, domestic violence and other mental health impacts of conflict and displacement.⁵²

Another key challenge is the programme's sustained governmental support. Ireland's recent change in government highlights the need for the programme to be formalised into institutional memory to avoid loss of knowledge of the pilot programme as governments or ministers' change.

COVID-19 has also exacerbated the already oversubscribed welfare services provided by both the government and NGOs, such as housing and mental health services. More thought, therefore, is needed into how to make sponsorship programmes more resilient to adverse conditions,⁵³ highlighted again by the influx of Afghan refugees.

Lastly, the pilot evaluation recommends that monitoring of the programme be led by the IRPP and that any future M&E work contribute to improving the efficacy and efficiency of the programme as well to evidence-based policy making.

F. EVALUATION OF THE BASQUE COUNTRY'S COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP PILOT PROGRAMME (AUZOLANA II)

Overview of pilot programme in Basque Country, Spain

The Basque Community sponsorship pilot programme (named Auzolana II) was launched in March 2019 as an initiative of the Basque regional government. In the aftermath of the Syrian crisis and rising refugee flows, the regional government was interested in establishing an alternative safe pathway for the admission of refugees and was inspired by the Canadian model of community sponsorship. Following negotiations between the Basque Government and the central Spanish government in 2018, a collaboration agreement was signed in 2019 between the Basque Government, the National Department of Integration and Humanitarian Support, the UNHCR and the social entities Cáritas Diocesana Bilbao, Cáritas Diocesana Vitoria, Cáritas Diocesana Sebastián and the Ignacio Ellacuría Social Foundation, marking the launch of the pilot experience.

The focus of the Basque community sponsorship pilot is on shared public, financial and social responsibility as well as political, public, and local solidarity. The Auzolana II programme emphasizes public and political engagement in refugee integration and involves a wide variety of actors. The pilot experience had two key objectives:

1. to develop a model in which the community takes a direct role in receiving and integrating refugees
2. To create synergies and added value which lead to a qualitative improvement in integration processes and leads to a positive impact on refugees' autonomy and social cohesion.⁵⁴

Under the initiative, two social entities, Cáritas Euskadi and the Ignacio Ellacuría Social Foundation were selected to coordinate and monitor the programme. The entities are required to provide housing for the two-year duration of the project and financial support of 10,000 euros (financed by the Basque government). Each entity and sponsor group must also submit a settlement plan to the Basque

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Anthony Finn, "Characteristics of Evaluating CSI as a Pilot", in Share QSN "Transnational Roundtable on Community Sponsorship Evaluations Report".

⁵⁴ In strategies, "Auzolana II Pilot Community Sponsorship Experience: Evaluation Report", Share Network, March 2021, <https://www.share-network.eu/articles-and-resources/story1?rq=evaluation>.

Monitoring and Evaluation of Community Sponsorship

government, detailing how they will support the sponsored families to integrate and become autonomous. The coordination of the Auzolana II initiative is led by the Basque Government who also finances a part-time trained social worker employed by the social entities to assist the local volunteer groups in welcoming and supporting the refugee arrivals in their resettlement and integration. A monitoring committee, which meets quarterly was also established as part of the pilot to coordinate the various actions set out in the agreement with the stakeholders concerned.

Thus far the programme has resettled 29 Syrian individuals from Jordan across 5 Basque municipalities hosted by 5 different local sponsorship groups. The Auzolana II experience has inspired the launch of two other regional community sponsorship pilots in Spain, including one in Valencia and the other in Navarra, which have welcomed 23 (5 families) and 11 (2 families) resettled refugees respectively since their launch in 2020.

Evaluation of pilot programme: objectives and methodology

Two research consultants from the independent consulting firm Instrategies were commissioned by the Basque Government in 2020 to conduct an initial evaluation of the Basque pilot initiative. The evaluation assessed the entirety of the programme, from design to implementation, identifying and assessing the role of the various stakeholders, the procedures and governance of the initiative. It sought to identify positive aspects and areas for improvement and the possible implementation of similar initiatives in other Spanish regions.

The methodology used in this evaluation consisted of data collected through interviews and meetings with stakeholders in the public administration, international bodies (UNHCR and IOM), sponsorship entities, local groups, and a few refugee beneficiaries. A Monitoring Committee was established to discuss issues and findings with local coordination panels. However, implementation of monitoring was unequal as some local coordination panels took on higher burdens in evaluation practices.

Key Research Findings

The evaluation found that conducting M&E throughout the implementation phase of the pilot meant that shortfalls in the programme could also be quickly identified and overcome. For example, entity holders and sponsorship groups are responsible for quarterly monitoring reports which present the progress of refugees' integration and needs to the Basque government. Actions needed in response to these reports are then discussed and coordinated by a government-led monitoring commission that meets quarterly.⁵⁵ The evaluation found that the commitment and the engagement of the stakeholders aided this process.

However, the evaluation of the implementation phase also highlighted the need for greater assurance and transparency between stakeholders locally, regionally, and nationally, as it was not always clear the different actors' roles and responsibilities.

Whilst overall coordination between different stakeholders was demonstrated as being generally effective in the evaluation, coordination and communication about the programme with local municipalities and other actors could be improved. For example, the evaluation found that municipalities could be better informed and be more engaged and active in providing resources to community stakeholders.

⁵⁵ Instrategies, "Evaluation of Community Sponsorship Pilot Project in the Basque Country" Instrategies presentation in Share QSN, "Transnational Roundtable on Community Sponsorship Evaluations Report".

Monitoring and Evaluation of Community Sponsorship

Furthermore, as the recruitment of local volunteer sponsor groups is limited to those affiliated with the selected faith-based entities participating in the programme, establishing an open selection process of entities who can become involved as supporting organisations for sponsorship groups could also be considered to expand the number of sponsorship actors involved.

With regards to sponsor groups, a significant programme strength highlighted in the M&E is the diversity of composition of the programme's local volunteer groups, which ensures that participating refugees had access to a strong network of different persons of varied ages, resources, and contacts. The inclusion of refugees in the community was also enabled by the project's timeframe of 2 years. However, the transition from extensive volunteer support to refugee self-sufficiency after the sponsorship period ended had not been considered as part of the initial evaluation, which the groups and entities have indicated to be a significant challenge in the implementation phase. The impact of Covid 19 was also reported to have a negative impact on the social and economic integration of the sponsored refugees.

With regards to pre-departure preparation and training, the evaluation found that there was no specific orientation or information sessions for the participants in the Auzolana II community sponsorship pilot. Selected refugees were already part of the general resettlement programme and therefore only received generic information intended for persons who would be resettled to Spain. This created much confusion and dismay in terms of expectations, as participating families did not always understand how community sponsorship works, the differences with the mainstream resettlement programme and its added value for the participants.⁵⁶

Adding to the challenge of expectation management and matching of refugees with local groups, was the fact that the Auzolana II participants were not identified until the last minute, hence the Basque government, sponsorship entities and volunteer groups only received information about the refugee families with little time in advance. The evaluation therefore recommended improving pre-departure orientation and training for refugee participants as well as more transparent and effective matching procedures that include all stakeholders concerned. Providing better and more detailed information to stakeholders about the refugee families well ahead of their arrival would help in planning for their needs, enable the composition of the sponsor group to be altered if necessary, and facilitate the integration process for refugees.⁵⁷

The researchers also identified improved training of volunteers, especially in intercultural skills, as necessary as the evaluation found that significant differences in cultural understanding led at times to tensions or conflict between groups.

A significant positive of the programme expressed by refugees was the possibility to withdraw from the Community sponsorship programme and re-join the government protection system. This is empowering for the beneficiaries and parallels Ireland's consent-based approach.⁵⁸

Overall, this pilot experience was seen as a positive example to other regions interested in running similar projects. It has influenced other autonomous communities, which now are implementing their own initiatives. Despite the success of the programme, there has been little coverage from the national press. International networking has however successfully opened dialogue between different national and regional bodies involved in refugee resettlement.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

During 2022, Basque Country will receive a new cohort of refugees that will be sponsored under the Spanish resettlement programme. The Basque Country will seek to ensure that recommendations of the first pilot will feed into the design and implementation of the second programme.

G. MONITORING OF THE COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP PROGRAMME IN BELGIUM

The Belgian Community Sponsorship programme was established in 2020 as a partnership between Fedasil (the government agency responsible for the reception of asylum seekers) and Caritas International Belgium. Under the programme, refugees are referred by UNHCR to the government through Belgium's mainstream resettlement programme, and following a medical screening and cultural orientation session, selected individuals are welcomed in Belgium and matched with a volunteer sponsor group upon arrival. The sponsor group is responsible for providing refugees with accommodation and integration assistance for one year, including support in accessing education, employment and health services.

In addition to recruiting volunteer sponsor groups, Caritas International Belgium is responsible for supporting the sponsorship groups and providing training and advice as needed.

Monitoring of Community Sponsorship Programme

While there hasn't yet been a formal evaluation of the sponsorship programme in Belgium, Caritas International has been monitoring the programme since the beginning and presented some of its initial observations at the Share Workshop on Monitoring of Community Sponsorship held in June 2021.

For Caritas International, the purpose of its monitoring activities is to facilitate programme improvement. Currently, monitoring is done by collecting feedback from the sponsor groups and the refugee families. The data is collected in training and peer learning sessions, as well as during regular monitoring sessions with refugee families and the sponsor groups. The latter occurs at three key moments for refugees and sponsors: at 1 month, 3 months, and 12 months after the arrival of refugees (or in accordance with needs as they arise).⁵⁹

Monitoring sessions involve the active participation of intercultural mediators. They are former refugees who are trained employees of Caritas and are responsible for building bridges between refugees, the sponsor groups and Caritas staff. They understand the culture, the language and have experienced the reception and integration process themselves. Having a cultural mediator not only helps with communication but it also helps sponsor groups to understand the different struggles the refugee families may experience and the refugee families to better understand life in Belgium.

Initial findings from monitoring activities

A significant challenge identified through monitoring has been the difficulty in managing the expectations of both the families and the sponsor groups. Caritas found that managing expectations from the beginning is important, including clarifying the expectations of volunteer groups in terms of the integration of the family. When discussed and assessed at an early stage, then possible

⁵⁹ Share Quality Sponsorship Network (Share QSN), "Workshop on Monitoring of Community Sponsorship Report", Share Network, June 2021, <https://www.share-network.eu/articles-and-resources/report1-t8zhs-najtd-sf8hl-g574a>

discrepancies in the expectations of sponsor group members can be addressed early on to avoid internal divisions and tensions arising later. Caritas also found it helpful to address expectations in the area of ‘phasing out support’ during peer-to-peer sessions, ensuring that all sponsor group members are in agreement.

Working on building trust is also key in relationship and expectation management. Caritas support staff found that even when supported by an intercultural mediator, refugee families were often reluctant to share their concerns. They are very grateful for the opportunity and support they receive and are worried they will offend the sponsor group by expressing their concerns. Intercultural mediators and Caritas programme staff also faced challenges to collect feedback from women and children, as in most of the monitoring sessions the husband spoke on behalf of the family. More emphasis should therefore be given to collecting views and needs of women and children separately.

Another observation was that training and monitoring practices work best on a needs-driven basis, remaining flexible and adaptable to the group’s needs. Additionally, whenever possible, Caritas recommends working with intercultural mediators, not only for translation but also for practical advice. They can guide the sponsor group and other intermediaries in dialogue, avoiding miscommunications caused by cultural, practical, procedural, or linguistic misunderstandings.

II. Conclusions and main recommendations from the first evaluations of community sponsorship programmes in Europe

As we have seen from initial evaluations, incorporating monitoring and evaluation systems in the different schemes has been important to assess the challenges, good practices and lessons learned that can be used to adapt and enhance future programmes – which can lead to more sustained engagement and expansion of sponsorship programmes across Europe. Evaluations of the pilots has led in a number of cases to the prolongment of the programmes – as in the case of the UK, Ireland and Spain – and have been key in garnering political support for sponsorship as well as continued funding.

Analysis of the findings from initial evaluations suggests common challenges and opportunities across the different programmes, which should be taken into account to support the development and growth of future programmes and the quality and sustainability of current ones. These common findings are highlighted in the following sections in the form of recommendations.

Defining partnership agreements with clear roles and responsibilities between actors

One resounding finding highlighted throughout the evaluations has been that the design of programmes have not adequately taken into account the need for more explicit and transparent partnership agreements that clearly lay out roles, responsibilities and their duration, between the government, intermediary civil society organisations (CSOs and churches), volunteer sponsor groups and other actors.

Monitoring and Evaluation of Community Sponsorship

While programmes differ in terms of actors roles and responsibilities – particularly as it relates to the duration of the sponsorship agreement and financial responsibility,⁶⁰ the evaluations showed that civil society organisations and sponsors groups often take on additional responsibilities that have not been foreseen under the sponsorship agreement and without receiving adequate financial and training support.

In general, transition to autonomy for the refugee families is a challenge that most volunteer sponsor groups faced in the programmes, with volunteers and intermediary civil society organisations often finding themselves supporting refugee families financially and/or with practical, emotional and integration support well beyond the envisaged sponsorship duration.

In the Basque programme for example, while the duration of housing support was agreed for 18-24 months, intermediary civil society organisations found themselves supporting the refugee families with housing far beyond the sponsorship period until the families were eligible for mainstream housing benefits. This created a lot of stress and uncertainty during the last few months of sponsorship as intermediary civil society organisations needed to figure out how to keep the families housed for the remaining months until they could become eligible for public housing benefits.

Other problems included the blurring of roles between different actors. In Ireland’s pilot programme, for instance, in certain cases both the government and intermediary civil society organisations (called regional support organisations in Ireland) were providing direct assistance to sponsoring groups, leading to confusion and inefficiencies. In other instances, the blurring of responsibilities occurred between volunteer sponsors and the intermediary civil society organisations, with volunteer sponsors taking on tasks and administrative responsibilities beyond their capacities, leading at times to burnout and frustration.

- Community sponsorship schemes therefore should be **more transparent** from the outset in terms of institutional arrangements and **clearly delineate the roles and responsibilities of each of the actors** involved in the scheme at the national, regional and local level.
- **Roles and responsibilities should be assigned based on respective mandates, expertise of stakeholders, and the availability of necessary financial and human resources** to carry out their functions. It is recommended that clear standard operational procedures be developed for all actors in the scheme.
- The **financial obligations of different actors should be clearly stated and agreed upon from the beginning**, and responsibilities of actors, particularly volunteer sponsors, should be balanced and realistic so that the programmes can breed success, attract diverse new sponsor groups and lead to further growth.
- Intermediary **civil society** actors (i.e., lead sponsors, regional support organisations, civil society contact points) **should be adequately resourced financially by national, regional and/or local government to provide the necessary support and training to volunteer sponsor groups.**

⁶⁰ In Belgium, the duration of sponsorship is for 1 year, whereas in the United Kingdom it is for 18 months. In Ireland it is 18 months for integration support and 2 years for housing, in Germany it is 1 year for integration support and 2 years for housing, and in the Basque programme it is 2 years housing and integration support. The sponsorship period for Humanitarian corridors is variable, ranging from 1-2 years.

Monitoring and Evaluation of Community Sponsorship

- Securing and financing housing remains a challenge in all schemes. **Models should explore new partnerships and innovative financing models** to make it easier for volunteer sponsor groups to secure housing, including partnering with local authorities, regions, landlord associations, philanthropy, and local churches. Sponsorship programmes with more strict minimum standards for housing could ease requirements to make it easier for sponsor groups to find housing.
- A supportive blended financial model, with **less rigorous financial requirements for volunteer sponsor groups** could also assist with the engagement of more diverse actors in sponsorship and support programme growth in the long-term.

Linking pre-departure to post-arrival: the need for thorough pre-departure orientation and transparent selection and matching processes

Integration is a two-way social and economic process of adaptation, experienced by both refugees, migrants, and receiving communities. Preparing both refugees and receiving communities beforehand facilitates a smoother transition and adaptation for both parties once refugees arrive in their new communities, laying the foundations for successful integration. The expectation management and pre-arrival cultural orientation for both volunteer sponsors and refugees are key in facilitating settlement in the new community. As is the need to transfer information to volunteers on the profiles, family composition and special needs of refugees to facilitate a successful matching process between refugee families, the sponsor groups and local community.

Throughout the evaluations this need was highlighted repeatedly, with both volunteer sponsor groups, intermediary civil society organisations and refugees indicating that more information about the profiles of the families and what to expect pre-arrival would have been helpful to make the settlement process smoother.

In the case of resettlement-based community sponsorship programmes, refugees can – as part of the selection and pre-departure cultural orientation process – choose between being received under the mainstream government resettlement programme or under the community sponsorship programme. A couple of the evaluations show that prior to arrival refugees were not properly informed about the differences between these programmes, and the implications in terms of integration support, housing, placement, autonomy, and social benefits.

Informed decision-making by refugees between the different programmes should be better addressed by pre-departure counselling and information provision to prevent mismatched expectations, misinformation, and confusion.

At the receiving end, volunteer sponsor groups reported that they were often given little or no information about the refugee family they would be supporting. Sponsors often felt inadequately prepared and overwhelmed - particularly when dealing with special needs of refugee families requiring tailored and/or specialised support.

The evaluation of the humanitarian corridors in France showed the benefits of well-prepared pre-departure information. Providing detailed information about the settlement programme, the locality (rural or urban) and community where they would be settled, as well as making psycho-social support and basic language lessons available prior to departure was reported to lead to a more realistic understanding of refugees' migration project and a more pro-active attitude during the post-arrival

Monitoring and Evaluation of Community Sponsorship

phase.⁶¹ The same was found for volunteer sponsor groups who could already communicate and exchange online with refugee families before their arrival. This was the case for the NesT programme in Germany. Having had the opportunity to exchange ‘online’ with refugees before their departure and receiving information about their profiles and needs, allowed sponsors to better prepare their welcome and support.

Civil society partners in the different programmes also reported that they would find it useful if they were more involved in the process of matching refugees to communities, as they are in a better position to assess the needs of the refugees and have a good knowledge of the groups and communities that will be receiving them. This allows them to ensure successful matching of refugees with the receiving community and volunteer sponsors.⁶²

- A thorough **pre-departure orientation and preparation is key to develop supported and realistic placement expectations of all participants**. Information sessions should match the capacity for refugees to absorb and understand the information given.
- Information such as how community sponsorship works, **the differences with the mainstream resettlement programme and its added value** should be explained to refugee participants.
- A good practice is to **impart information to refugees through different mediums** (written, verbal, video) and in their own language.
- When possible, during the pre-departure phase **refugees should be offered the possibility to have direct contact with their matched sponsor group** via video conference to provide information about the locality and community where they will be settled.
- The selection and matching process of refugees with sponsors groups should be transparent and completed prior to arrival. **Matching procedures that include the stakeholders concerned can facilitate the integration process** of refugees and better prepare the intermediary civil society organisations and sponsor groups to assist the refugee families.
- **When matching refugees to sponsor groups, programmes should be sensitive to the needs, capacities and potential of both the refugees and communities.**⁶³ When matching refugees with medical or other special needs, coordinating bodies should ensure that adapted housing is available and that the adequate services are in easy reach – particularly in rural settings.

Dedicated bodies and structures for training and support for volunteer sponsor groups

Evaluations show the need for improved training and support to volunteer sponsor groups – and the benefit of tasking dedicated bodies and/or structures with this role on an ongoing basis.

Training of volunteers, especially in intercultural skills, and expectation management, was identified as key in many of the evaluations, as significant differences in cultural understanding or expectations led at times to tensions within the sponsor groups and misunderstandings between volunteer sponsors and refugee participants.

The UK government created RESET in 2018 to coordinate the growth of the Community Sponsorship movement across the UK. The formative evaluation in the UK, found that training on issues such as

⁶¹ See Observations from FEP’s programme in Agatiello, Kendall, Gori, Mante and Pezzati, “Private Sponsorship for Integration”.

⁶² SAFE Project, Online workshop on Pre-departure activities and matching process, May 19 2021.

⁶³ ICMC Europe and Caritas Europa, “Fostering Community Sponsorship across Europe”.

Monitoring and Evaluation of Community Sponsorship

safeguarding and expectation management from organisations like RESET, as well as providing support with the application process and facilitating coordinated peer-to-peer learning was very helpful to prepare for welcoming the families.⁶⁴

Having a civil society intermediary organisation that acts as a clearing house and coordinator between the volunteer sponsors and the local, regional and/or national government were found to be extremely useful in many of the programmes evaluated. Intermediary civil society organisations not only recruit sponsor groups and support them in the application process, but they also organise training and peer-to-peer support sessions, and in some programmes have a dedicated staff member and an intercultural mediator to assist sponsor groups and refugees to troubleshoot problems as they arise. Having regular check-ins with an inter-cultural mediator that speaks both languages can also help sponsor groups to feel more supported, avoid burnout, and assist with any inter-cultural misunderstandings that may arise.

- To ensure growth of sponsorships across the country, it is recommended that **governments invest in the creation of dedicated bodies to raise awareness and mobilize** new groups, provide training and support and to carry out this role on an ongoing basis.
- **Refugee serving organisations which act as intermediary supports or civil society contact points in the sponsorship programmes** - such as Regional Support Organizations (RSOs) in Ireland, regional platforms in France, ZKS contact points in Germany, Caritas International in Belgium and the Jesuits and Caritas in Spain – **are a highly valued support by volunteer sponsor groups**. They're useful in helping groups deal with any challenges that may arise in the sponsoring process. Many of them support groups to develop a settlement plan before a family's arrival, conduct regular check-ins with volunteer groups and refugees, provide training and tailored support, assist with applications and navigating administrative hurdles, and provide emotional and practical support to groups.
- **Civil society contact points or national and/or regional support organisations also play an important coordination role and are key to support the growth of programmes**. In addition to training and support for groups, they can assist with communication and coordination between the different partners, and in some programmes conduct monitoring of the groups, raise awareness about the programme and assist with recruitment and mobilization of new sponsors.
- It is recommended to further **strengthen intermediary civil society supports in the sponsorship programmes** and that governments provide these with the means to transform such initiatives into durable structures with a clear mission and mandate.
- **Employing intercultural mediators or migrant/refugee volunteers who speak the language and are familiar with the culture of the sponsored refugees is very helpful**—particularly during the first few months after refugees' arrival—to ease the adaptation of refugees into the new community and assist with inter-cultural communication between the volunteer sponsors and the refugees. Peer-to-peer sessions with refugees who have arrived previously through sponsorship are also helpful to connect new arrivals to the wider diaspora community, assist them in navigating services and ease the transition to life in the host country.

⁶⁴ Sara Hassan and Jenny Phillimore, "Community Sponsorship in the UK: Refugees to Citizens".

Monitoring and Evaluation of Community Sponsorship

- In addition to basic training on community sponsorship and sponsors' roles and responsibilities, **training groups on expectation management, safeguarding and intercultural skills is important to prepare volunteer groups to welcome families.** Additional training for groups on fundraising, the impact of trauma on mental health, empowerment, establishing boundaries and avoiding burn-out could also enhance the quality of support refugees receive and boost motivation of groups.
- **Peer learning and capacity building** for lead sponsors and civil society contact points on **how to engage the wider community and recruit and build strong, diverse, and cohesive volunteer groups** can also support the expansion and sustainability of sponsorship in the long-term, enhance integration support for refugees, and help refugees expand their networks by having more diverse contacts within the receiving communities.
- **Regular and facilitated opportunities for peer-learning and best-practice exchange between sponsoring groups** can also be effective in **enhancing motivation of group members**, improving integration support, and helping groups to problem-solve any issues that may come up.

Quality assurance: monitoring and safeguarding

Many of the formative evaluations have highlighted the importance of building monitoring mechanisms into the programmes to ensure programme quality, sustainability and the safety and wellbeing of refugees. Having safeguarding and accountability mechanisms built into the different programmes also ensures that the protection needs of refugees are being met. The evaluations showed that while monitoring/quality assurance is done deliberately and documented through regular check-ins with both sponsors and refugees in some of the programmes – for example by RESET in the UK, FEP in France, and Caritas International in Belgium, in most cases it is done on a more ad-hoc, and unstructured manner. In programmes where it's done regularly, monitoring can be useful not only for the purposes of safeguarding and quality assurance but also to troubleshoot problems and respond to needs as they arise, adapting and making small changes as needed.

- To ensure that the financial and integration needs of refugees are being met in addition to their safety and wellbeing, it is recommended that **programme and quality assurance activities (monitoring) occur at regular intervals throughout the duration of the sponsorship.**
- Civil society and government actors need to work together to **ensure sponsorship programmes adhere to protection standards and basic levels of quality.** Safeguarding mechanisms (i.e., sponsorship breakdown, child protection, abuse, domestic violence) should be built into the design of sponsorship schemes and be clearly communicated to all actors involved.
- A good practice and safeguarding mechanism developed in the Irish and Basque sponsorship schemes is providing refugees with the **option to leave the community sponsorship programme and re-join the government protection system.**
- **Quality assurance activities/monitoring should also be intentional, clearly communicated to all stakeholders, documented, and inclusive** - involving refugee participants, lead sponsors/supporting organisations, and sponsor groups.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ RSTP, "Best Practices for Monitoring Toolkit", 2021 <https://www.rstp.ca/en/>

Monitoring and Evaluation of Community Sponsorship

- Quality assurance and information sharing activities should also **involve intercultural mediators or trained and trusted interpreters** (as needed) to avoid miscommunication and ensure that refugee participants feel at ease and are able to communicate their needs.

Refugee participation and community-based approaches to evaluation

While some of the sponsorship evaluations included a few interviews with refugees who had been sponsored, their feedback thus far, has not been consistently and systematically included in the monitoring and evaluation of sponsorship programmes across Europe.

Share's Workshop on Monitoring of Community Sponsorship in 2021 provided the opportunity to start a collective reflection on more participatory monitoring practices, building upon QSN partners experiences with monitoring and evaluation, and drawing from the examples presented by actors with experience in participatory approaches and community-based research. A key highlight from the workshop was the importance of supporting sponsor and refugees' active engagement in community sponsorship programmes design, implementation, and monitoring.

Involving the active participation of refugees and migrants, those whose lives are affected by the programme, in all phases of the programme supports refugee self-reliance and **contributes to a more forward-looking system**. Including refugee voices more consistently, however, will require a change of attitudes and practices in organisations and institutions. For instance, by systematically involving refugees in the evaluation of programmes and projects through feedback mechanisms, where refugees get to share their opinions on how programmes can be improved, and their involvement better integrated in their design. As highlighted in the Share workshop, in the future, giving refugees a say in the design of programmes addressed to them can contribute greatly to tailoring sponsorship to their real needs and will ultimately improve the programme and lead to more positive outcomes.

Gaps and areas for future research

While initial evaluations of pilot schemes have shed some light on the effectiveness of programme design, sponsor recruitment, and admission processes, not much research that has been done documenting the impact of sponsorship at the local level. In Europe, besides anecdotal evidence (with the exception of research carried out by the IRiS research team at the University of Birmingham) little research has been carried out showing the impact of community sponsorship on refugees and hosting communities.

Furthermore, the role that sponsorship plays in early integration outcomes or on public attitudes towards refugees has also not been analysed across the different programmes, with the exception of the UK where there is some initial evidence of its positive impact on hosting communities. More comparative research on sponsorship, looking at how sponsorship works in different contexts (for example rural versus urban) and with different profiles of refugees and hosting communities could also shed more light on the conditions that best support positive outcomes for both refugees and hosting communities and support the sustainability of the models over the long-term.

In an attempt to begin bridging this research gap, the Share Network - in collaboration with independent researchers affiliated with the University of Birmingham and external researchers in six European countries - will be assessing how sponsorship programmes work with volunteers, local authorities, refugees, support organisations and the wider community in six different European countries that are currently carrying out sponsorship programmes. The aim is to identify challenges and solutions and inform the actors involved so that they can improve the implementation of the programmes. The impact of sponsorship on communities will also be explored. The results of the

research aims to add to the evidence-base focusing on the impact of sponsorship at the grassroots and local level.

Conclusion

On-going evaluation and monitoring of current and future programmes will be essential to achieve sustainable and high-quality programmes that ensure durable solutions and overall inclusion of sponsored refugees. While still many programmes are in the pilot phase, it is essential to ensure monitoring and evaluation includes opportunities to feed these back into improvement of programme design and structures.

For this reason, it is important to create transparent frameworks, processes and mechanisms to ensure that stakeholders involved can discuss evaluation outcomes, lessons learned and recommendations to be implemented. The University of Birmingham's ongoing evaluation of programmes is a good example on how findings can feed-back into improved design and mechanisms.

Continuing to assess what does and does not work at the different stages of the programmes and documenting and sharing challenges and best practices will also help make the models more resilient over the long-term, particularly during times of uncertainty⁶⁶ – such as the current Covid-19 pandemic. A better understanding of challenges and good practices will also help to scale up programmes in the future and adapt them to new needs - as for example the Afghan and Ukrainian refugee crisis.

Monitoring systems that are inclusive of all programme stakeholders will also be important to shape, adapt, and improve the programmes throughout their implementation. For M&E systems to be implementable, however, it will be important that they remain realistic and affordable while maintaining a degree of flexibility so as to not stifle the organic creativity that is necessary for community sponsorship to thrive, by creating burdensome bureaucratic procedures.

In the future, supporting research into the impact of sponsorship at the local level as well as further comparative analysis of the different schemes will also be extremely valuable in determining the conditions by which sponsorship programmes can achieve the best outcomes in different contexts.

⁶⁶ MPI, "Measuring up?"

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MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP PROGRAMMES IN EUROPE: FIRST LESSONS LEARNED

Principal Authors: Gabriela Agatiello (ICMC Europe/Share Network), with the support of Petra Hueck (ICMC Europe/Share Network)

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The Share Network

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**Share
Network**

International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC Europe)

Rue Washington 40, 1050 Brussels, Belgium

+32 (0) 2 227 97 29

www.icmc.net

www.share-network.eu