

Community and Private Sponsorship – summary of the global state of knowledge

Introduction

There are more than 70 million people forcibly displaced in the world as a result of conflict and persecution, with nearly 26 million of those people classified as refugees in need of protection. Safe and legal channels for refugees to access safe third countries are vital, without them many are forced to make dangerous and sometimes deadly journeys overland and by sea. Resettlement schemes for the most vulnerable are a key part of those channels with UNHCR estimating that nearly 1.5 million refugees worldwide are in need of resettlement in 2020.¹

Community-based or private sponsorship schemes (CPS) for refugees combine “legal entry and protection with settlement support, using private means”.² While their design may differ, the basic model underpinning CPS schemes is a “public-private partnership between governments who, [at minimum,] facilitate legal admission of refugees, and private actors who provide financial, social and/or emotional support to receive and settle [those] refugees into [their] community”.³ In some cases sponsors may identify (“name”) the refugees that they sponsor. Such refugees are often relatives of previously sponsored refugees or other persons known to the community. CPS programmes are said to “empower groups of ordinary individuals – as opposed to governments or professionalised agencies – to lead in welcoming, supporting, and integrating refugees”.⁴

Canada’s Private Sponsorship of Refugees Programme is considered to be the longest running CPS scheme and, more recently, in Europe, several CPS-type initiatives have been piloted and in some cases implemented. These have varied in terms of the eligibility and selection of sponsored persons, legal status granted, as well as rights of sponsored persons and responsibilities of sponsors.

There is now a clear global effort to advance private and community-based sponsorship models in order to facilitate a pathway to safety for refugees spearheaded by the Global Refugee

¹ UNHCR, [Resettlement At A Glance, January to March 2020](#)

² European Resettlement Network (2017), [Private Sponsorship in Europe: Expanding complementary pathways for refugee resettlement](#)

³ Ibid. Quoted in Bond, J., and Kwadrans, A. (2019). [Resettling Refugees through Community Sponsorship: A Revolutionary Operational Approach Built on Traditional Legal Infrastructure](#). *Refuge: Canada’s Journal on Refugees*, 35(2), 86-108.

⁴ *ibid*

Sponsorship Initiative (GRSI). At the same time, there is a growing body of research examining the impact and development of CPS type schemes at a national level. As yet few attempts have been made to bring this knowledge together in order that policymakers developing CPS schemes might benefit from the learning available in different countries.

In March 2020, the Institute for Research into Superdiversity (IRiS) arranged an academic workshop in Birmingham intended to promote discussion about CPS between scholars from across the globe. The outcomes of this workshop were to be a policy briefing setting out the state of knowledge globally and the foundations of an academic network. With the advent of the COVID-19 crisis the event was cancelled. However, IRiS subsequently reached out to scholars asking them to complete a questionnaire with some key questions raised by policymakers and to forward key pieces of work. This briefing draws on information provided via the questionnaire, and aims to provide an initial overview of ongoing and planned research and to draw out some thematic findings. It is not exhaustive, and a list of further publications and articles are available in the Appendix.

Recent and ongoing research⁵

Australia

Australia ran a Community Refugee Settlement Scheme (CRSS), which might be considered to be a form of CPS, between 1979 and 1997. It used a combination of government and private funding and involved community groups (including faith communities) volunteering their time and resources to help new refugees settle. Current research in Australia focuses on a subsequent pilot, the Community Proposal Pilot (CPP – 2013-17), and the Community Support Program (CSP – 2017). A unique feature of these two recent Australian sponsorship programmes is the requirement that sponsors participate through organisations selected and approved by the Department of Home Affairs, known as Approved Proposing Organisations (APOs). Research has been undertaken on the sponsorship process and its relationship to wider resettlement/settlement policy, as well as an in-depth study of the CRSS.

Australian academics have recently submitted a

joint application to a key national funding body to conduct comparative research on Australia, Canada, the UK and Ireland.

Canada

Private sponsorship began in Canada in response to the arrival of Vietnamese refugees in 1979⁶ and since then around 300,000 refugees have been privately sponsored. The Canadian Government facilitates three kinds of refugee resettlement: government-assisted refugees (GARs); privately-sponsored refugees (PSRs); and a relatively new category of blended visa office-referred refugees (BVORs), supported equally by government and private sponsors. Through the PSR programme, Canadian citizens and permanent residents can, as members of organisations, associations and groups, sponsor refugees overseas as a Group of Five, a Community Sponsor or a Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAHs). Before 2015, 75% of refugees for sponsorships came from faith-based SAHs. The World University Service of Canada (WUSC) participates in private sponsorship as a SAH and its unique model of student-to-student sponsorship facilitates students in Canada participating in

⁵ This list reflects the information provided by respondents – it does not aim to summarise all existing CPS schemes and research. More than a dozen countries are exploring the potential of introducing community sponsorship programmes as a way of contributing to the global refugee protection regime, including New Zealand, Ireland and Argentina. See Bond, J. & Kwadrans, A. (2019). Resettling Refugees through Community Sponsorship: A Revolutionary Operational Approach Built on Traditional Legal Infrastructure. *Refuge*, 35 (2), 86–108.

⁶ See *Refuge*, Vol 32 No 2 (2016): The Indochinese Refugee Movement and the Launch of Canada's Private Sponsorship Program

sponsorship groups and welcoming newcomer young people.⁷

The BVOR refugee category was introduced in 2013 to incentivise the selection of UNCHR referrals. Under the BVOR Program, the Canadian Government provides up to six months of income support and private sponsors provide another six months of financial support. Private sponsors also provide up to a year of social and emotional support. The BVOR program is intended to reduce the financial burden on private sponsors and connect sponsors with refugees that the government has already screened and interviewed so that refugees can be resettled sooner.⁸ In 2018, the BVOR Fund was established with the aim of encouraging BVOR sponsorships; philanthropic leaders committed a combined total of nearly \$3.5 million to this fund.⁹

Canada has a well-developed scholarly field in refugee sponsorship - for an overview of recent Canadian research in this area see the 2019 sponsorship special edition of *Refuge* and the Appendix to this briefing. Recent research has focused on motivations and experiences of sponsors, peer networks, regional variations and new administrative processes and categories of sponsorship. GARs are the most studied category of refugee and less is known about PSRs, in part because of their smaller-scale support by faith-based organizations and civil society groups that are geographically dispersed across the country. Current projects include research looking at refugee integration and long-term outcomes (SyRIA.lth project) and a study of the experiences of private sponsors and the newcomers who have been sponsored to come to Canada (Exploring Private Refugee Sponsorship).

The Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (GRSI), a partnership between the Government

of Canada, UNHCR, Open Society Foundations, the Radcliffe Foundation and the University of Ottawa, was launched in December 2016 and seeks to promote and support the development of new community-based sponsorship programmes, building on the success of the Canadian model with the ultimate objective of scaling up refugee protection opportunities on a global level, including in Europe.

The University of Ottawa Refugee Hub's current research priorities regarding community sponsorship include conceptualising sponsorship, sponsorship in comparative perspective, and public attitudes and public support. The research also draws on and adapts the work of the GRSI. Several papers are planned or in development, including on conceptualising sponsorship within the broader resettlement system; exploring the links between sponsorship and social capital (integration impacts); and investigating the community impacts of refugee sponsorship. The Refugee Hub recently convened a remote Expert Discussion of the international research community working on community sponsorship which focused on the existing evidence base for sponsorship and identifying knowledge gaps. The Refugee Hub is planning an international research symposium on 'sponsorship in comparative perspective' which, subject to COVID-19 restrictions, will most likely be held in early 2021.

France

France has adopted the 'Humanitarian Corridors' programme to provide safe and legal means of transferring and integrating vulnerable refugees, with a Memorandum of Understanding signed between the French public authorities and Episcopal Conference of France, Caritas France, Protestant Federation of France and Federation of Protestant Mutual

⁷ McKee, C., Lavell, L.-A., Manks, M. & Korn, A. (2019). *Fostering Better Integration Through Youth-Led Refugee Sponsorship*. *Refuge*, 35 (2), 74–85.

⁸ See <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/help-outside-canada/private-sponsorship-program.html>

⁹ See <https://refugeehub.ca/program/bvor/>

assistance to provide support to 500 Syrians brought from Lebanon to France.¹⁰

The Centre for Migration and Citizenship at the French Institute of International Relations (IFRI) has been working with actors involved in sponsorship programmes and offers a forum for exchange, cooperation and evaluation. It is working on:

- Designing an advocacy and awareness raising strategy;
- Ensuring that private sponsorship programmes do not form a substitute for government duties to receive and support asylum seekers and refugees;
- Enhancing complementarity and mutual benefits with resettlement programmes and reception centres for asylum seekers;
- Harmonising information materials for citizens and groups of volunteers; and
- Developing an exchange of information and cooperation with European and international actors.

To date, most reports on private sponsorship have been produced by NGOs, and the Centre for Migration and Citizenship is launching a working group with NGOs involved in private sponsorship and other initiatives to inform IFRI of the latest developments and to provide support with joint working, awareness raising and fundraising strategies. There is also interest from the University of Nantes¹¹ in carrying out further research on the role of volunteers in welcoming refugees and community sponsorship initiatives.

Germany

In Germany, the “New start with a team” (NesT) programme allows a group of at least five individuals (‘mentors’) to support especially vulnerable refugees (individuals or families) to resettle in Germany. The group of mentors pays for refugees’ accommodation for two years and provides practical support for a year, including help with finding language courses, dealing with paperwork or enrolling in the social

security system. Civil society contact points enrol and support mentor groups. International organisations preselect (UNHCR) and prepare (IOM) suitable refugees.

NesT started in May 2019 with the aim of supporting up to 500 refugees. The research centre of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (FOMR) is conducting a formative evaluation of the pilot phase of the NesT programme, focusing on how civil society and refugees received the programme; how well prepared both groups were; the support refugees receive; and how well the various actors and institutions involved collaborated.

The programme officially started a year ago, so research on the topic remains limited. One part of the civil society contact point (ZKS) plans to conduct an evaluation in one federal state, while the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) is about to start a research project looking at social cohesion in refugee-receiving small and rural and communities within the EU-Frank-Resettlement project (using Germany and Italy as case studies), but it is not clear yet whether NesT will be involved in this research. The FOMR is considering a comparative study on integration process of returnees who came to Germany with the regular resettlement programme and with the NesT programme, if the pilot is extended.

Italy

The ‘Humanitarian Corridors’ initiative provides a safe and legal means of transferring and integrating vulnerable refugees in Italy. It is the result of an agreement signed between the Italian Bishops’ Conference and three NGOs (Caritas Italy, Migrantes, and Sant’ Egidio Community) with the Italian Government in January 2017. Under this system refugees still need to apply for asylum after arrival but are placed with a host family for a minimum of one year and their support and integration is financed by the sponsoring faith-based organisations.

Since 2018, the University of Notre Dame began

¹⁰ <https://www.humanitariancorridor.org/en/homepage/>

¹¹ <https://www.univ-nantes.fr/version-francaise/estelle-d-halluin-532811.kjsp>

tracking and evaluating refugees' experiences of integration in Italian society over a period of five years. Its study examines the immediate reception of 500 refugees who resettled via the Humanitarian Corridors project in 45 dioceses in Italy and the process of their transition and integration. Interviews are undertaken with both refugees and the volunteers and organisations who support them. The HUMANLINES web documentary is the creative part of this project. Microstories provide insight into some fragments of the complexity of the integration process, and the portal also hosts reports, academic articles, and other useful information.

United Kingdom (UK)

The Community Sponsorship scheme (CSS) was introduced in the UK in July 2016. The CSS enabled, for the first time in the UK, local community groups to become directly responsible for supporting the resettlement of refugees.¹² The initiative was inspired by the Canadian Private Sponsorship scheme and since the introduction of CSS nearly 400 refugees have resettled to locations across the UK supported by around 70 CSS groups. In 2019, the UK Government committed to supporting the CSS for a further five years hoping to increase the numbers of refugees arriving under the scheme. Focus has been extended beyond refugees affected by the Syrian conflict to enable refuge to be offered to vulnerable refugees escaping conflicts globally.¹³ Further, with the introduction of the UK's new Global Resettlement Scheme planned for 2020, refugees resettled under the CSS will be additional to national targets.

In late 2017 the Institute for Research into Superdiversity (IRiS) at the University of Birmingham began a formative evaluation of the CSS, publishing the interim findings in July

2019.¹⁴ A second phase of data collection between March 2019 and 2020 enabled further exploration of processes of developing sponsorship opportunities and co-ordination of support for sponsored families, understanding the motivations, aspirations and experiences of volunteers and assessing the impact of the CSS on the wider communities in which groups are located.¹⁵ IRiS's work has included a study looking at the impacts of CSS on the wider community in less diverse areas. In total some 250 interviews have been undertaken with refugees, volunteers, and wider community members. The formative evaluation has now completed and reported. A number of papers are currently under review or in development including a comparison between the experiences of resettled refugees in the UK and Japan and a paper focusing on the role of emotions in motivating and sustaining volunteer activity. Smaller studies are also underway looking at the longer-term civil action trajectories of CSS volunteers and comparing the experiences of CSS refugees to those arriving on other schemes. The IRiS team are developing a proposal for a five-year academic study looking at the relationship between CSS and civil society activation. This may involve a comparative dimension.

EU-FRANK

Launched in January 2016, the EU-FRANK project is the European Union Action Facilitating Resettlement and Refugee Admission through New Knowledge. It is led by the Swedish Migration Agency in partnership with other European countries (Belgium, Italy, The Netherlands, and Switzerland), international organisations and NGOs, and is co-funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF).

¹² Home Office, Community Sponsorship, Guidance for prospective sponsors.

¹³ Home Office. New global resettlement scheme for the most vulnerable refugees announced.

¹⁴ Phillimore, J. and Reyes, M., (2019) Community Sponsorship from application to integration. Formative Evaluation. Institute for Research into Superdiversity, University of Birmingham

¹⁵ Phillimore, J. and Reyes, M., (2019) Community Sponsorship in the UK: formative evaluation 2017-2020. Institute for Research into Superdiversity, University of Birmingham; Reyes, M, & Phillimore, J. (2020) Like Pebbles in a Pool: the effect of community sponsorship on knowledge about, and attitudes to, refugees in less diverse communities, Institute for Research into Superdiversity, University of Birmingham; Hassan, S. and Phillimore, J.,(2020) Community Sponsorship in the UK: Refugees to citizens. Institute for Research into Superdiversity, University of Birmingham.

The EU-FRANK project aims to provide operational support to EU Member States to build their resettlement capacity and help implement their resettlement programmes. It builds on the experiences and expertise shared through the European Resettlement Network, the SHARE project and others and involves a range of activities. It includes targeted research, the development of operational resources and tools, and the provision of resettlement training for practitioners. The project has encouraged multilateral exchanges through peer-to-peer reviews of existing systems, study visits and expert meetings, bringing together more and less experienced resettlement stakeholders from different countries.

The next section sets out some of the common findings to emerge from research undertaken to date.

Volunteers and repeat sponsorship

Studies have identified similar sources of motivation for community and private sponsorship volunteers. These include:

- The desire to contribute to the global refugee protection system (a ‘social justice’ motivation), perhaps generated by a sense of moral outrage and concern about events unfolding in and around conflict zones;
- A desire to act and pull together as a community;
- Religious motivation, with a significant number of sponsorships carried out or supported by faith groups;
- Affinity with certain ethnocultural groups or refugees facing particular persecution; and
- A desire to build new connections, to develop skills and/or to find purpose having gone through difficult personal experiences.

In 2019, the Refugee Hub conducted sponsor motivation research in Canada with 128 sponsorship groups that accessed the BVOR Fund to sponsor refugees through the Blended Visa Office Referred (BVOR) Program. The research found the main motivations were ‘contributing to resolving the world refugee crisis (43%), a sense of it being ‘the right thing to do’ (24%) and being inspired by a faith group (14%).¹⁶

Many sponsors have voluntarily or professionally worked with refugees for years and their decision to become a sponsor relates to this experience, although in the UK the CSS includes many volunteers who had no previous contact with refugees.

Sponsors connected to a larger sponsorship programme associated with a religious organisation or sponsorship charity may be encouraged by that organisation to sponsor subsequent families. Whether groups go on to sponsor additional families also depends on, among other factors, first experiences of welcoming refugees, the availability of financial support and availability of housing.

The ‘named refugee’ programme gives refugees who have arrived via sponsorship, or their sponsors, the option of sponsoring other members of their extended family. In Canada, Government-assisted refugees (GARs), who arrived through Canada’s resettlement programme, and those who arrive as PSRs and BVORs are all able (and have proved historically eager) then to sponsor their loved ones to come to Canada through the PSR programme. The draw of ‘naming’ is illustrated by the substantial processing backlog of named refugee cases. There is little global evidence on whether sponsored refugees themselves go on to become sponsors but research looking at the motivations of 530 private sponsors across Canada who sponsored Syrian refugees after November 2015 found that the majority were asked by the refugees they had sponsored if they would sponsor subsequent family

¹⁶ Given the small sample size of this survey and the specific category of sponsors, it is not representative of sponsors in Canada as a whole. However, while this research cannot be generalised to all BVOR sponsorships, or to named sponsorships, it does provide insights into the population that accessed the fund. See <https://refugeehub.ca/> for more information on the Refugee Hub.

members.¹⁷ While in Canada the majority of privately sponsored refugees are joining family members, some data suggests sponsors find sponsoring family members very stressful, given financial constraints, human resources and time commitments required.¹⁸

Support for volunteers

When volunteers come forward it is important that they are fully supported throughout the whole CPS process. Schemes need to manage expectations from the start; ensure volunteers are sufficiently prepared; ensure that safeguards are in place; and provide ongoing monitoring, feedback and practical support.

While national governments oversee the granting of visas / immigration status to resettled refugees, the extent to which they monitor CPS schemes varies. In many contexts, support is provided at a more local level with training and some limited monitoring provided by a national or centralised body. Where sponsors already have experience in supporting refugees and/or are familiar with existing local support structures, they are well placed to address any issues that might arise. Alongside local resources, such as settlement agencies, in some countries sponsors can call on a centralised service for advice and support, such as the Refugee Sponsorship Training Program (RSTP) in Canada and Reset in the UK. Moves towards greater government oversight and monitoring need to be balanced against ensuring sponsors retain a level of independence and do not have too many onerous reporting requirements placed on them.

A significant factor in ensuring volunteers remained motivated was the development of networks with peer groups who had already welcomed a family or were close to receiving new arrivals and could share ideas, advice, and resources. These networks are extremely valuable. Data from the 2019 BVOR Fund survey found that most sponsors received settlement information and support from 'experienced sponsors in my community' (57%), 'Sponsorship Agreement Holders' (53%), 'Settlement professionals' (34%) and 'government websites' (32%).¹⁹ In the UK volunteers cited other CSS groups as one of their main sources of support and inspiration.²⁰

Access to housing

Housing is a major concern for most CPS schemes. Housing in most cities is expensive and often inadequate for resettled refugees in terms of location, size, quality and choice which presents a significant problem. This is made more challenging where a matching sponsorship model means that sponsor groups do not know who will be placed with them until some way along the process. The challenges of housing are exacerbated for the sponsorship of large families and for families where people are living with disabilities, and there can be restrictions on the types of accommodation accessible as costs generally need to be covered by social assistance after the sponsorship period has come to an end.

One of the benefits of smaller and rural communities is that large families can more easily secure affordable housing. Positive

¹⁷ 58.2% of sponsors (BVOR and PSR) reported that they had been approached for subsequent sponsorships. For just BVOR sponsors the figure was 66.3%. Macklin, A., Barber, K., Goldring, L., Hyndman, J., Korteweg, A., Labman, S. and Zyfi, J., (2019) BVOR briefing note. See '[Probing private refugee resettlement in Canada: long-term sponsors and their communities – a research project](#)'

¹⁸ Roundtable on Refugee Sponsorship: A discussion on private refugee sponsorship to celebrate the launch of the special issue of *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees* 35(2) Thursday, November 21, 2019, University of Ottawa. See also Lenard, P. T., (2016) [Resettling refugees: is private sponsorship a just way forward?](#) *Journal of Global Ethics*, 12:3, 300-310.

¹⁹ <https://refugeehub.ca/>

²⁰ Phillimore, J. and Reyes, M., (2020) [Community Sponsorship in the UK: formative evaluation 2017-2020](#). Institute for Research into Superdiversity, University of Birmingham

engagement with private landlords is another way of addressing housing scarcity: in the UK, for example, CSS groups often relied on personal networks to identify a 'friendly' landlord prepared to make affordable housing available for a sponsorship family. Work can also be undertaken with local government to identify and access social housing. In Italy, the housing could be owned by Caritas itself, or by the diocese or by religious bodies and made available to the diocesan Caritas as a free loan.

Impact on communities

Although the research is in its early stages, there is a small but growing body of evidence suggesting that sponsorship strengthens community bonds and improves social cohesion. For example, a 2016 study on Syrian refugee sponsorship in regional communities in Canada profiled sponsorship-related collaborations between local businesses, settlement service providers, and community volunteers who worked together to welcome resettled refugees. Community sponsors commented that the welcoming nature of their small communities, and their 'pulling together' to welcome refugees, helped build strong local partnerships and overcome some of the challenges they faced more broadly.²¹

In France, research on volunteers in rural areas for resettled refugees has found that volunteering has increased social cohesion in the small towns. In the UK, analysis of qualitative data with a wide range of community members who were not involved in CSS groups suggests that the introduction of community sponsorship in less diverse areas offers the potential to transform understanding of refugee issues, to reduce fears about others, to change working practices to make them more inclusive of diverse populations and to bring

new perspectives into relatively homogeneous communities. Volunteers also noted that participation in a CSS group made them feel more embedded in their local community.²²

More research is needed on the potential political impacts of sponsorship as a catalyst for building more compassionate and politically engaged communities.

Relationships between sponsorship and other resettlement/refugee programmes

CPS initiatives can benefit from the frameworks and processes developed under national resettlement programmes, particularly with respect to planning for arrival, coordination and resources for ongoing support.

In some countries, there is little or no connection between CPS and wider resettlement programmes. In others, examples of cooperation and resources sharing do exist but these are often informal. Where there are different legal channels in place operating side-by-side, there is considerable need for multi-stakeholder coordination, including between actors involved in the different programmes, to avoid overlaps, explore synergies and exchange best practice. In Canada, for example, an innovative partnership project is working to increase and strengthen collaboration between settlement service providers and refugee sponsorship groups by developing and testing new tools and approaches for collaboration and teamwork.²³ In the UK some local authorities connected their work on wider resettlement programmes to the CSS, enabling CSS groups to access training and materials including

²¹ Cronkite M, Galatsanou, E and Ashton, W. (2016) Community Report: Immigration in 5 Rural Manitoba Communities with a Focus on Refugees: Winkler-Altona-Morden-Carman Case Study. Winnipeg, Brandon University.

²² Phillimore, J. and Reyes, M., (2019) Community Sponsorship in the UK: formative evaluation 2017-2020. Institute for Research into Superdiversity, University of Birmingham

²³ See <https://ocasi.org/allies-refugee-integration>

interpreting and support for refugee children.²⁴ Alongside practical considerations, there is a question of whether CPS needs to be brought into broader resettlement discussions and be better aligned with global needs.

Integration

CPS is thought to bring considerable benefits in terms of integration outcomes.²⁵ However, in some countries, while sponsors can be seen to facilitate refugees' access to health, financial and social support in the short term, it is too early to assess the impact on long-term integration.

Canadian research has highlighted the positive impact of sponsorship on the economic integration of refugees both in the short and long term, including recent reports comparing the initial advantage of privately sponsored refugees in achieving employment over government assisted refugees (GARs).²⁶ However, others have noted that, after Year 1, the difference between GARs and PSRs can be quite small. It should also be noted that some PSRs can feel under pressure to take work as soon as possible to reduce the financial burden on their sponsors and this can result in unsuitable employment which they subsequently need to leave. The demographics of most sponsors means they are not always an effective source for employment unless they have the right connections – many refugees secure jobs through peers in their community.

Some projects in Canada (such as the SyRIA. Ith Project) are assessing 'refugee integration' more holistically, preferring a 'social model' of integration that incorporates both economic

and social integration indicators, such as social connections, language proficiency, participation in the host community's social and cultural practices, and a sense of community belonging. While some early findings show mixed results (in terms of whether sponsored refugees fare better than other cohorts in relation to social integration markers), researchers have noted that outcomes might be affected by pre-arrival factors (like language proficiency and existing social networks) and whether refugees are settling in large cities (with existing ethno-cultural groups they identify with), smaller regional centres, or remote communities. Research has highlighted a need for a more nuanced examination of what 'success' looks like and an understanding that independence and integration is gradual and cannot be expected within a year.

Existing barriers to economic integration include difficulties in accessing employment, with sponsors not able to provide sufficient support because they do not have the right connections and refugees feeling pressured to take on work that is inappropriate or unbeneficial in terms of language learning and long-term advancement. Refugees can find themselves employed in fields/roles that are below their level of education and previous employment in their country of origin – for example, those employed as doctors or nurses in their country of origin who are unable to get accredited in medical fields. Such problems could be addressed through faster and less costly means of accrediting migrant certifications and degrees and free/low-cost retraining services. In the UK the main aspiration for male refugees was accessing employment, with respondents unaware that this would be dependent on their ability to speak English. Inability to work and

²⁴ Phillimore, J. and Reyes, M., (2019) Community Sponsorship in the UK: formative evaluation 2017-2020. Institute for Research into Superdiversity, University of Birmingham

²⁵ Hyndman, J., Payne, W. and Jimenez, S., (2017). Private refugee sponsorship in Canada, *Forced Migration Review*, 54, 56-59.

²⁶ Kaida, L, F. Hou and M. Stick. (2020). The Long-term Economic Outcomes of Refugee Private Sponsorship. Ottawa: Statistics Canada; Kaida, Lisa & Hou, Feng. (2019). The long-term economic integration of resettled refugees in Canada: a comparison of Privately Sponsored Refugees and Government-Assisted Refugees. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*.

dependence on social welfare left some men feeling hopeless.²⁷

Alongside employment, the main challenges with refugee integration include poverty, housing, disabilities and health issues, social isolation, accessing education for teenagers, inadequate or unavailable language lessons, mental health problems among those who struggle to find meaningful employment or find themselves socially isolated and lack of access to family reunification. Many of these are structural issues. There is consensus that it can be harder to meet the support needs of arriving refugees in smaller, more remote locations, and many rely on sponsors fully understanding and supporting refugees to access the support to which they are entitled.

The ability to speak the language of the host country is a vital facilitator of integration. Research in Italy found language to be one of the most problematic barriers for refugees' initial integration and a central cause of misunderstanding between refugees and volunteers, particularly in regards to cultural matters. Many refugees thought they would learn Italian more easily. The majority did not realise that Italian language skills were a prerequisite for job opportunities.²⁸ Similarly, in the UK the majority of refugees interviewed were trying hard to learn English but for many it was a significant challenge. A lack of communication skills made accessing training and work and developing a relationship with sponsors and the wider community difficult.²⁹

To address social isolation, it is important to create opportunities for regular interaction that are determined by the refugees themselves. In some countries it is important to enable access to a car that allows those in less urban areas to travel to places where they can get together with other people from their community as well

as purchase familiar foods etc.

Some sponsors and refugees report that sponsor groups can be overly involved and intrusive in their support of refugees. This 'helicopter sponsoring' can leave refugee families at risk of falling off a financial and emotional 'cliff' when sponsorship support ends. However the importance of showing care and concern was also noted, with empathy being seen as important to demonstrate that sponsors are more than just service providers to isolated refugees. In some countries, sponsors can learn from other, more experienced sponsor groups and, through training programmes, to try to achieve the right balance of support.

Impact of COVID-19

Sponsored refugees are inevitably facing significant challenges in light of COVID-19. These include accessing information in languages other than English; lack of access to health services more generally; the impact of delivering health services by telephone/video when newcomers do not have the required digital skills/ there is a lack of interpretation services; living, especially with children, in crowded accommodation; losing employment or being employed in high-risk situations when they cannot then socially distance at home; and an increase in food insecurity. Some find the restrictions alarming and see the collapse of civil liberties as reminiscent of the early days of the Syrian conflict. By comparison, some families feel that lockdown has brought them closer together.

Discussions convened by the University of Ottawa Refugee Hub,³⁰ through the GRSI team, as part of its COVID Response Workshop Series have emphasised the need to ensure there is a

²⁷ Hassan, S. and Phillimore, J., (2020) Community Sponsorship in the UK: Refugees to citizens. Institute for Research into Superdiversity, University of Birmingham

²⁸ Schnyder von Wartensee, I. An Exercise in Accompaniment: Exploring a Humanitarian Corridor Project in Italy, Briefing for workshop in Birmingham (UK), March 22-23 2020

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Bond, J., Di Blasi, G., and Kwadrans, A., (2020) The future of community sponsorship of refugees: Meeting COVID-19's challenges, Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law, University of New South Wales,

consistent, positive narrative about sponsorship and refugees, which should include an emphasis on stories showing that migrant workers make up a large percentage of frontline essential workers in countries like Canada, the USA and the UK. Participants highlighted the value of moving training for sponsor groups online, and the need to educate sponsors about online learning, and to develop workable options to increase interactivity in training sessions.

Many researchers are struggling with lack of funding to expand their work and the logistical challenges posed by COVID-19 restrictions.

Key gaps and challenges for research into community/private sponsorship

Research and policy making could benefit from better representation and feedback from those who have been directly involved with sponsorship. However, private sponsors and those they sponsor can be reluctant to participate in research: the former because they resist being judged and the latter because they are reluctant to say negative things about their sponsors. It can be a challenge generally to build trusting relationships with sponsors and refugees.³¹ In the UK's recent research, refugees stressed the importance of speaking with the team's Arabic-speaking researcher about their experiences stating it was the first time they had felt able to raise their concerns without the worrying about being viewed as "a burden".³²

Research can also be a challenge when the future of community sponsorship is by no means settled and under review by the government.

There is a need to build partnerships and collaborations across different knowledge groups working on sponsorship, including practitioners and sponsor organisations, policy experts, policy makers and academic researchers and to encourage stakeholders to understand the benefits of engagement in research. This will help both improve research outcomes and influence the development of public policy relating to sponsorship, although the fast-paced nature of some innovative work can make interdisciplinary and cross-cutting research more difficult to achieve. In some countries, CPS is more grass roots-led so there is more room for innovation, but this needs to be resourced. In all environments it is important to ensure that the findings of research are fed back to respondents in accessible formats. For example, in Canada, recently released research from Wilfrid Laurier University on PSR has been published alongside recommendations areas where the PSR program could be improved and the Refugee Sponsorship Training Program has published a Best Practice Series that documents and shares best and promising practices within the refugee sponsorship. In the UK, IRiS have produced a series of policy and good practice briefings aimed at volunteers and policymakers.³³

Respondents suggested the following as areas for further research:

- More nuanced, longitudinal analysis of sponsored refugee integration outcomes, including comparison with other refugee groups and with an emphasis on social integration outcomes.
- Evaluation of the significance of pre-arrival characteristics of refugee newcomers such as trauma, displacement circumstances and experiences of violence and discrimination in further investigations of integration outcomes for sponsored refugees (versus other refugee cohorts).

³¹ For discussion of ethics of refugee research, see Clark-Kazak, C., (2017) Ethical Considerations: Research with People in Situations of Forced Migration, Refuge 33, no.2

³² Hassan, S. and Phillimore, J.,(2020) Community Sponsorship in the UK: Refugees to citizens. Institute for Research into Superdiversity, University of Birmingham

³³ <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/superdiversity-institute/community-sponsorship-evaluation/index.aspx>

- The impact of sponsorship on future sponsoring (the 'echo effect') and other connected volunteer activities.
- Research into the optimal geographies for sponsorship (big cities, small cities, towns or rural villages) and what services are needed, at a minimum, to make a place suitable for refugees.
- Research (especially from an historical perspective) on the motivations and experiences of sponsors.
- Research that addresses the normative role of community sponsorship programmes vis-à-vis other complementary pathways and broader refugee resettlement systems.
- Public attitudes towards refugee sponsorship and refugee protection more generally.
- Need for longitudinal data and data about sponsorship's impact on local communities, including upon rural and/or remote communities.
- The impact of sponsorship as a catalyst for building more compassionate and politically engaged communities.
- How international sponsorship programmes influence and inform one another.
- Gender analysis, applying a gender lens to the experiences of women and girls who are sponsored as refugees.

In December 2018, the United Nations General Assembly affirmed the Global Compact on Refugees, which outlines measures to support states "to establish private or community sponsorship programmes that are additional to regular resettlement, including community-based programmes promoted through the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (GRSI)".³⁴ While there is great depth in the Canadian academic community researching on sponsorship, and over forty years of programmatic experience, there is now an exciting opportunity to learn with and from other emerging sponsorship contexts, including the UK, France, Italy, Germany, and

Australia. A comparative perspective can also help to bridge knowledge gaps/development areas for Canadian research, notably on integration outcomes and the conceptualisation of sponsorship within the resettlement system.

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³⁴ United National High Commissioner for Refugees (2018), Global Compact on Refugees, <https://www.unhcr.org/5c658aed4>

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