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Engaging communities in refugee protection

The potential of private sponsorship in Europe

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the onset of the migration crisis in 2015, the settlement of refugees through community-based or private-sponsorship schemes has attracted increasing attention from governments and civil-society groups across Europe. In addition to helping meet the rising need for resettlement places, such programmes may also mitigate the scepticism about immigration and refugee flows that has emerged in many societies. By involving community members directly in the process of welcoming refugees, sponsorship has the potential to build stronger relationships between refugees and receiving communities and to improve refugee integration outcomes. Sponsorship may also grant communities a sense of ownership over the immigration and humanitarian channels that are shaping their societies. Finally, where sponsored refugees are admitted over and above government resettlement quotas, such schemes can provide an additional pathway to safety for refugees who would otherwise have been excluded from traditional resettlement.

Sponsorship has the potential to build stronger relationships between refugees and receiving communities and to improve refugee integration outcomes.

Sponsorship arrangements take many forms, depending on the context and capabilities of the receiving country. At the most basic level, community-based refugee settlement involves community or private groups providing mentorship, assistance, and some level of financial or in-kind support to refugees, whether they have entered through resettlement or applied for and received asylum after arrival. While the Canadian private sponsorship programme is widely held up as a shining example, it is far from the only model; several ad hoc and small-scale initiatives have emerged in Europe since 2013 that demonstrate elements of sponsorship and hint at the diversity of ways policymakers can partner with communities to supplement traditional settlement systems. Broadly, sponsorship models can be divided into three categories:

- ***Community support during the government-run reception process.*** Private individuals and community groups may take on certain reception responsibilities during and after the asylum process. Many of these programmes specialise in providing housing or individual mentorship, areas where government programmes have struggled to meet refugee needs. In Germany, the Refugees Welcome initiative provides asylum seekers housing in private homes, and a recently launched government programme aims to match refugees with mentors in their communities.

- ***Sponsorship as part of a government-managed resettlement effort.*** Schemes such as the Canadian Blended Visa Office-Referred programme or the UK Community Sponsorship initiative match refugees who arrive through existing government resettlement channels with community sponsors who are responsible for their settlement and integration, including by providing financial support. Sponsorship within the context of government-led resettlement may or may not be additional to existing resettlement quotas.

- ***Sponsorship as an additional resettlement channel.*** Full sponsorship programmes, such as the Canadian Sponsorship Agreement Holders and Group of 5 programmes, allow private groups to identify refugees for resettlement and then seek government approval for their admission. Sponsors take full financial responsibility for refugees after arrival, and sponsored refugees are admitted in addition to government resettlement commitments.

Regardless of the model chosen, governments and their civil-society partners face three core questions when embarking on a new refugee sponsorship effort:

- ***How much time should be spent on planning, given the pressure to implement programmes quickly to capitalise on public interest?*** Because the current political climate in many countries leaves little room for trial and error, governments are more eager than ever to get new programmes right the first time. Yet public interest may fade if an initiative takes too long to develop, test, and get off the ground. Policymakers and community organisations thus face a tradeoff between moving quickly to capitalise on public support and spending sufficient time to create a well-designed programme.

- ***How much oversight should governments provide?*** Successful sponsorship efforts rely on individuals and community groups taking ownership of the settlement process. But governments still have an oversight role to ensure sponsorship occurs in a manner that is safe for both refugees and receiving communities. Finding the right balance between letting go and stepping in can be tricky. Authorities that are overly active risk displacing willing civil-society leaders, while those that are too hands off may deprive the programme of the support and guidance needed to be successful.

- ***How can relationships between key actors be managed most effectively?*** Close, trusting relationships between governments and civil society are the backbone of sponsorship programmes. New programmes must identify the right tools to ensure that communication is regular and clear, and that the responsibilities of each actor are clearly delineated. The Canadian approach offers one potentially effective model: sponsors have formed a Sponsorship Agreement Holders council to act as a liaison between the government and sponsors.

Looking ahead, there are several key considerations governments and civil-society actors in Europe may wish to take into account when designing community-based refugee sponsorship initiatives that are appropriate for their contexts. First, policymakers, civil society, and other stakeholders will need to clearly define and agree on the goals of the sponsorship effort. While each actor may have a different range of aims, finding common areas of interest, such as improving integration support, will be important to building a successful partnership. Moreover, clearly identifying the chief goals of a programme will help to determine which sponsorship models are most appropriate. Second, civil society and community groups that are enthusiastic about embarking on refugee sponsorship should be open to taking an incremental approach to new initiatives. Where asylum reception and resettlement have historically been highly centralised, small-scale proofs of concept may be necessary, such as matching sponsors with refugees already in the asylum system before implementing a full-scale sponsored resettlement programme. Finally, both governments and civil-society actors will need to honestly assess their capacity and take constraints into account when designing programmes. For example, where the capacity to build out new processing or administrative mechanisms is lacking, having sponsorship occur within existing resettlement referral and processing systems may reduce the additional demands placed on overstretched resettlement authorities.

If designed and implemented with care, sponsorship has the potential to augment the effectiveness of Europe's protection and migration management efforts. For policymakers and civil-society partners alike, flexibility, clear communication, and honest evaluation will be the keys to success.

I. INTRODUCTION

Refugee reception and resettlement have historically been highly centralised government functions in most European Union (EU) Member States. Since the summer of 2015, however, a profound transformation has taken place in how care is provided to newly arrived asylum seekers and resettled refugees. Community groups, some formed in a matter of days or even hours, have sprung into action to give newcomers shelter, food, clothing, and a sense of welcome. New voluntary initiatives have emerged in nearly every corner of Europe; in Germany, one survey estimated that one in ten Germans provided voluntary, financial, or in-kind support to refugees in 2015.[1] These initiatives have played a critical role in supplementing government reception and integration services that, in many countries, were overstretched by the unprecedented level of demand.

While largely born out of crisis, community-driven refugee settlement programmes may also prove valuable to European asylum and protection systems in the longer term. Such initiatives can give members of the public a greater sense of ownership and control over the humanitarian flows affecting their communities, while also offering civil society a chance to provide direct support to the displaced. Community engagement also plays an important role in facilitating refugee integration and social inclusion. Where such efforts supplement existing government-led humanitarian migration channels, the addition of new resettlement places could also offer a managed route to safety for some refugees in first-asylum countries who might otherwise undertake onward journeys through other means.

While largely born out of crisis, community-driven refugee settlement programmes may also prove valuable to European asylum and protection systems in the longer term.

This policy brief explores the potential community-driven resettlement and reception may hold for European countries. It begins by examining three models for applying these tools, and then considers the practical obstacles and roadblocks stakeholders may face when seeking to implement such solutions. The brief concludes by proposing several steps policymakers interested in pursuing sponsorship arrangements could consider.

II. THE DIVERSITY AND BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACHES TO REFUGEE SETTLEMENT

Both in Europe and elsewhere, community-driven sponsorship of refugees has been lauded as a way to expand the legal channels available to refugees in search of safety and as a tool to engage host-community members more directly in their protection. At times, however, the term 'refugee sponsorship' can seem like a policy version of the Rorschach inkblot test. Interpretations of what exactly sponsorship is—including why it is of value and what specific cluster of policies it encompasses—vary widely among experts, governments, and civil-society actors, often depending on their interests and experiences.

A. What is refugee sponsorship?

Most often, sponsorship is associated with refugee resettlement. The Canadian Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) programme, which allows private individuals, community organisations, and nonprofits to select refugees for resettlement in addition to the government resettlement programme, is the largest and most well-known model of privately sponsored resettlement. Other examples do, however, exist. In Europe, a number of ad hoc and pilot initiatives that incorporate elements of private sponsorship, such as the many Refugees Welcome[2] programmes, have emerged since 2013.

Sponsorship is typically understood to involve all—or some combination of—three core elements. First, and perhaps most important, sponsors are responsible for refugee reception and integration. Once refugees arrive in the resettlement country, their sponsors have the primary responsibility for ensuring they find housing, have sufficient financial support, and integrate into their new communities and the local labour market. Second, sponsored refugees are admitted in addition to government resettled refugees and do not count toward any existing quotas, allowing private actors to complement rather than replace government efforts. Finally, sponsored refugees are identified and nominated for resettlement by the organisations

and individuals who will sponsor them, called 'naming' in the Canadian system. Governments then approve candidates for admission.

These three elements are applied in a variety of ways across the sponsorship projects that have been started to date; many programmes may only incorporate one or two of the elements. The UK Community Sponsorship[3] initiative that was launched in 2016, for example, matches refugees with community groups that become responsible for their integration and support, but refugees are not identified by private individuals nor are they admitted in addition to the government's existing resettlement commitments. Similarly, refugees resettled under the Canadian Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR)[4] programme are supported by community groups and are additional to government-supported refugees, but they are not nominated by their sponsors.

Considered broadly, community and private sponsorship programmes fall into three categories:

- ***Sponsors provide refugees with specific kinds of support during the government-run reception process.*** Community-based reception and integration programmes can be valuable tools to help refugees find homes, navigate social services, learn the local language, and find work.[5] Housing and mentorship services lend themselves particularly well to joint public-private programming, as they benefit from civil society's ability to provide more individualised support than might be possible with centralised, government-led programmes.[6] While many of the initiatives currently operating in Europe run parallel to official reception and integration services, community programming could be built into these systems in a more structural way. Canada, for example, ran the Host Program from 1990 to 2008, through which its migration agency matched asylum seekers and other newly arrived immigrants with community sponsors who served as guides and mentors.[7] More recently the German government has funded numerous voluntary agencies, including several that provide mainstream integration services, to implement mentoring programmes for refugees.[8] Building civil-society support into official reception initiatives helps to create personal connections between refugees and local community members, and draws on the strengths of community groups to supplement government programming.

- ***Sponsors take on reception responsibilities as part of existing government-coordinated resettlement efforts.*** Sponsorship can also occur within the context of existing resettlement or relocation programmes. Refugees are identified through government referral channels, usually by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and matched with a willing sponsor organisation or group that is responsible for their reception and integration. Sponsored refugees may or may not be additional to government quotas. While the Canadian BVOR sponsorship programme is additional to government resettlement, the UK Community Sponsorship scheme and the Portuguese Refugee Support Platform[9] are not.

- ***Sponsorship as an additional resettlement channel.*** Full refugee sponsorship, along the lines of the Canadian Sponsorship Agreement Holders and Group of 5 programmes, relies on community groups and individuals to identify refugees for resettlement who will then be reviewed and approved by the government. Often, sponsorship overlaps with family reunification as candidates are either identified through family links to refugees already in the destination country or because programmes limit who may be eligible for sponsorship to the family members of existing residents.[10] Any resettled refugees fully supported by sponsors are admitted over and above existing government commitments.

Ultimately, the exact model policymakers and sponsors choose will depend on the goals, constraints, and opportunities within each context. At a minimum, however, sponsorship programmes delegate some amount of responsibility for refugee reception and integration from the national government to individual or community sponsors. Most often the support provided by sponsors is financial, although sponsors frequently also find housing or facilitate refugees' access to language training or employment support. In all models, national governments retain oversight of sponsorship arrangements, including by approving refugees for resettlement.

B. *What is the added value of a community-driven approach?*

Proponents of sponsorship cite several benefits it may offer refugees, policymakers, and sponsoring communities:

- ***The creation of additional legal pathways to protection.*** Most important for many would-be sponsors, refugee sponsorship can provide legal protection channels to those who might not otherwise qualify for resettlement. Where sponsorship is additional to government-facilitated resettlement, it increases the number of resettlement places available to refugees in need. This can extend a route to safety for people

who, though in need of protection, might not qualify for resettlement under UNHCR and national criteria that prioritise the most vulnerable cases (e.g., those with health needs or women and girls at risk). Humanitarian admission programmes run in Germany, Ireland, and Switzerland, for example, have prioritised the family members of existing residents, regardless of their status with UNHCR.[11] And in the case of Germany, Syrian individuals can apply for admission from within Syria, rather than after crossing into another country—something traditional resettlement programmes do not typically permit.[12]

- ***Improved refugee labour market integration and self-sufficiency.*** Advocates for sponsorship often point to better integration outcomes among sponsored refugees as a major argument in favour of community-based resettlement. In Canada, data on refugee economic outcomes have consistently shown that privately sponsored refugees find employment more quickly, receive more income from work, and are less likely to use public benefits than government-supported refugees, even after ten years of residence in Canada.[13] These advantages have been attributed to the fact that privately sponsored refugees may receive a level of personalised attention that government-supported refugees do not, with the latter group instead relying on oversubscribed public integration services that may not be adequately tailored to their needs.[14] Yet disentangling the factors that contribute to the better integration outcomes of privately sponsored refugees—whether their settlement route or other factors, such as prior education levels or language proficiency—can be difficult.[15] More research is needed to determine the extent to which sponsorship models themselves contribute to integration.

- ***A sense of ownership of refugee protection efforts among community members.*** By placing decisions about who to resettle and when in the hands of community and civic groups, sponsorship gives individuals and communities a stake in refugee protection. It may thus help to address concerns, particularly at the local level, that migration policy decisions are being made without sufficient community input or control. Sponsorship is of course not a panacea for scepticism about resettlement, however, and sponsors cannot claim to speak for an entire community. The UK Community Sponsorship programme has tried to address this limitation by requiring local authorities to sign off on any sponsorship agreement.[16]

- ***Opportunities to build meaningful relationships between refugees and receiving communities.*** Sponsorship can also serve as a way to build social connections between refugees and their new neighbours. Arrangements similar to those that exist in Canada and the United Kingdom, where sponsors themselves are primarily responsible for providing certain integration services, require close contact between refugees and local residents, creating opportunities for relationships to form that might not otherwise exist.[17] These types of interactions and relationships, sometimes referred to as 'bridging' social capital,[18] help to build trust and understanding between groups and are a key ingredient in cohesive communities.

III. GAUGING THE INTERESTS AND CONCERNS OF KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Private refugee settlement relies on the buy-in and ongoing practical support of a range of stakeholders within civil society and government. Understanding the interests, capacity, and concerns of each actor is critical when deciding whether sponsorship is feasible and which approach will be most suited to a particular context.

A. Civil society: Faith communities, refugee advocates, and the new grassroots

For advocates and community groups, additionality is often the main selling point of refugee sponsorship because it enables them to assist more people in need of protection than would otherwise be resettled. Some sponsorship proponents also see the ability to name specific candidates for resettlement as key to sponsorship efforts; particularly for organisations rooted in diaspora communities, the possibility of reuniting refugees who would otherwise be stranded in dangerous situations with family is a compelling reason to serve as a sponsor. Still others may be driven by a desire to create a 'culture of welcome' towards refugees in their communities and to build public support for refugees and resettlement.[19]

In Europe, faith communities—specifically those connected to Catholic or Protestant churches—have driven much of the interest in and action on refugee sponsorship. In Italy and France, the Catholic community of Sant'Egidio and several Protestant churches were instrumental in es-

tablishing sponsorship programmes, referred to as Humanitarian Corridors, that allow churches to identify and resettle refugees on top of existing government commitments.[20] Sant'Egidio and other Catholic groups, such as Caritas, have also been active in advocating for sponsorship in Germany and Spain. And in the United Kingdom, the Church of England and Caritas were among the first organisations to become sponsors under the Community Sponsorship programme.[21] For many of these faith groups, supporting and welcoming refugees is seen as a central part of their religious identity.[22] Extensive domestic and international networks, a wide volunteer base, and existing infrastructure to manage service projects can make such groups valuable partners in designing and implementing community-based resettlement schemes. Moreover, some faith-based groups, such as Caritas and Diakonie in Austria and Germany, have a long history of supporting refugees who arrive via asylum channels and are thus well-equipped to meet the specific needs of this population.

Extensive domestic and international networks, a wide volunteer base, and existing infrastructure to manage service projects can make such groups valuable partners.

Community interest in refugee resettlement has also come from some newer voices. Numerous grassroots initiatives, such as Refugees Welcome in Germany and Gastvrij Oost in Amsterdam,[23] have emerged since 2015 to provide the types of support sponsorship programmes often include, such as assistance finding housing and mentorship services. In many cases, these grassroots efforts have tapped into a new base of public support for refugees. For example, a 2015 survey of volunteers in Germany found that two-thirds of respondents had been volunteering for less than a year and that more than one-quarter of these volunteers served through new grassroots refugee-support groups rather than in existing organisations.[24] The factors that motivate people to participate in these movements may also differ from traditional refugee advocacy groups; new volunteers were more likely to report that their work was driven by a desire to provide practical assistance to refugees, rather than to make a statement about refugee policy.[25] At the organisational level, new actors have diversified the refugee support field, with the tech community playing a particularly large role in helping to facilitate certain efforts, such as house-sharing services.[26]

Finding shared interests among this diverse set of actors could pose challenges. While additionality and naming may be key goals for established advocacy groups, these issues may be less important to newer groups that are motivated primarily by a desire to address visible needs in their communities. It should also not be assumed that support for refugees and sponsorship is universal across particular constituencies. Faith communities in Italy and France, for example, have driven sponsorship efforts there, but in Eastern Europe, churches remain highly sceptical of refugees and resistant to calls from church leaders to support to them.[27] The types of engagement civil-society groups are willing and able to provide will thus differ both between groups and across national and local contexts.

B. *Local and regional governments*

Significantly different views of refugees and levels of willingness to participate in sponsorship initiatives may also exist between localities in the same country, particularly between rural and urban communities. In several countries, such as Spain and Poland, local and regional governments have been vocal in their support for taking in more refugees through resettlement or relocation, despite reluctance on the part of their national governments. In 2016, the mayors of 11 European cities launched the Solidarity Cities initiative to support the work of municipalities in receiving and integrating refugees. An express goal of the Solidarity Cities network is to generate pledges from city governments to receive more refugees through the EU relocation framework.[28] Among those participating, Barcelona has been particularly active, drawing up a city-level plan to receive relocated refugees in collaboration with local volunteers and advocating for the Spanish government and the European Union to provide more channels for relocation and resettlement.[29] Some of the cities that have pledged to take in relocated refugees, such as Gdansk,[30] have done so despite opposition from their national governments.

In Germany, several regional governments have gone a step further and are actively working with civil-society groups to facilitate the private sponsorship of Syrian refugees. A 2013 decision by the national government allowed *Land* authorities to operate their own humanitarian admissions programmes through which Syrians residents in Germany can sponsor family members. Several *Land* governments chose to allow third parties to take on the financial sponsorship requirements on behalf of the refugees' families, and in Berlin and Thuringia, private organisations have emerged to coordinate between would-be sponsors and refugees in need.[31] While many *Land* governments have since halted their admissions programmes, Berlin, Brandenburg, Hamburg, Schleswig-Holstein, and Thuringia have extended theirs to late 2017 at least.[32]

C. National governments

National governments have varied reasons for supporting the private sponsorship of refugees. To the extent that sponsorship opens additional legal pathways for refugees, some may see it as a tool to reduce spontaneous asylum flows.[33] Because sponsorship schemes often offer an opportunity for refugees to reunite with extended family, they may provide an alternative for family member who would otherwise try their luck with smugglers. For other governments, sponsorship may fit broader goals of engaging civil society and communities more directly in providing services and social support to refugees and other newcomers.[34] Improved integration outcomes and social cohesion can be other aims, particularly in areas where governments are concerned about secondary movement after resettlement; finding livelihood opportunities and building social bonds, these governments hope, will encourage refugees to remain in their resettlement communities. Finally, sponsorship could serve as a tool to help governments meet their existing commitments to resettle or relocate refugees, particularly where these targets have proved difficult to achieve. In the United Kingdom and Portugal, for example, the national governments have partnered with civil society to assist enough refugees to meet their resettlement and relocation targets via the Community Sponsorship programme and Refugee Support Platform, respectively.

Sponsorship may fit broader goals of engaging civil society and communities more directly in providing services and social support to refugees and other newcomers.

In some cases, policymakers may see sponsor provision of financial support to refugees as a way to reduce the costs of resettlement to the government—a concern sometimes raised by civil-society organisations worried that sponsorship may be used as an excuse for retrenchment.[35] Whether privately sponsored resettlement does result in significant cost savings is, however, far from clear. Where refugees are named by their sponsors, national resettlement authorities will still need to review admissions applications, which can be resource intensive.[36] Moreover, some costs cannot reasonably be borne by private sponsors alone. Germany, for example, found it necessary to limit sponsors' liability for medical expenses, which had proved excessively burdensome for some.[37] Most sponsorship programmes also restrict the duration of sponsors' responsibility for refugee expenses to one to five years after arrival,[38] after which national and local governments resume responsibility for any services or support refugees may need. Furthermore, if sponsored refugees are granted status through the asylum system, EU law may obligate governments to take on certain responsibilities rather than delegate them to private actors.

Nonetheless, enthusiasm for sponsorship initiatives has generally been more muted among national governments in Europe than among subnational governments. Few have, as of yet, wholeheartedly endorsed sponsorship. National governments may have reservations about the administrative costs of setting up a sponsorship scheme or about whether sufficient civil-society interest and commitment exist to sustain a programme. Tough political environments and large numbers of asylum claims may also make governments reluctant to take on additional protection commitments.

IV. AVOIDING PITFALLS IN PROGRAMME DESIGN

Once policymakers, civil society, and other stakeholders decide to pursue refugee sponsorship, they face a number of choices and tradeoffs. The numerous small scale and ad hoc sponsorship efforts that have emerged in Europe and elsewhere in recent years offer crucial lessons on the constraints and challenges European policymakers and sponsors may encounter when attempting to introduce or scale up such programmes.

A. Balancing thorough preparation with timely action

One of the primary questions policymakers and civil-society groups face when introducing any new public-private initiative is how to balance the pressure to act quickly to capitalise on public enthusiasm with the need for sufficient planning and preparation to ensure programme success. Refugee sponsorship efforts in particular rely on commitments made by individuals, communities, and civic groups to be sustainable. But because public support can be highly variable, moving quickly to engage those who wish to participate before their interest fades is essential if sponsorship initiatives are to achieve their full potential.

An example from Ireland illustrates this point. In September 2015, the advocacy group Uplift launched a campaign encouraging Irish residents to 'pledge a bed' in their homes for a refugee.[39] Driven by media reports of the crisis in the Mediterranean, more than one thousand Irish residents signed up online to host refugees.[40] In response to

this outpouring of support, the government committed to using some of the spots pledged to house refugees relocated from Italy and Greece under the EU relocation programme, tasking the Irish Red Cross with evaluating the housing offers and determining which should be taken up. More than six months after the campaign was launched, however, the evaluation process was still ongoing due to staffing constraints, and no refugees had been moved into Irish homes. Many of those who had pledged support were left frustrated that their assistance had gone unused.[41] Irish civil-society groups have since become wary of drumming up too much public support for similar sponsored or community-based settlement efforts without a hard commitment from the government to act on their offer of assistance.[42]

At the same time, speed can carry real risks. Between 2013 and 2015, several EU countries implemented ad hoc humanitarian admissions programmes, many of which had elements of sponsorship, with the intention of providing pathways to protection for Syrian refugees.[43] Most were designed to be highly responsive to demands from particular civil-society constituencies and were put in place quickly—often before many of the details of implementation had been worked out. The 2016 sponsorship initiative in the Czech Republic, for example, was agreed by the government directly with the sponsoring organisation, the Generation 21 Foundation,[44] with very little involvement by or consultation with the Ministry of the Interior on the practicalities of the arrangement. As a result, the ministry had little input into how it was designed or implemented.

Two particular practical issues—the legal status of refugees and the exact responsibilities of sponsors—have proven particularly tricky to negotiate when programme design is on an expedited timeline. In Germany and Ireland, the uncertain legal status of humanitarian-admission beneficiaries, who were given a special type of temporary residency that lacked some benefits of refugee status, led a number to apply for asylum after they arrived in the country.[45] Similarly, few ad hoc programmes have launched with guidelines or limits for the responsibilities sponsors take on already in place. Germany, for example, responded to concerns that sponsors were being placed under too much financial strain by introducing national guidelines in 2016 that limit sponsors' period of responsibility to five years.[46] While negotiating these details in the initial development phase may delay the launch of the programme, it can prevent situations down the road where sponsors find themselves overburdened or refugees are left without sufficient assistance.

The desire to move quickly while giving due diligence to thorough planning can create a chicken-and-egg problem. Would-be sponsors feel the need to demonstrate a high level of interest in sponsorship to policymakers, but may fear promising too much and disappointing volunteers. Conversely, governments may wish to wait for significant civil-society support before committing scarce administrative resources to sponsorship efforts, but end up preventing such support from building with their reluctance to make firm commitments.

Early and sustained engagement between policymakers, community groups, and potential sponsors on planning and preparation issues is one way to maintain interest and mitigate concerns if there are hold ups. Sponsors are likely to be more patient if they have realistic expectations about the timeline at the outset and if they are confident that delays are due to authorities' efforts to ensure refugees receive high-quality support, rather than a lack of government commitment.

B. *Providing the right amount of coordination and oversight*

Sponsorship programmes thrive on the creativity and generosity of civil society. But government still has an important role in providing oversight and ensuring certain basic standards of care and safety are met. Without coordination and monitoring, there is a risk that sponsorship efforts, no matter how well-intended, may not target the most appropriate beneficiaries or may not provide refugees with effective assistance. In the worst-case scenario, poorly designed programmes could even harm refugees or undermine public support for sponsorship and resettlement.

Government still has an important role in providing oversight and ensuring certain basic standards of care and safety are met.

Three particular programme areas require oversight. First, governments must determine which organisations or groups should be eligible to become sponsors. Without setting basic standards to be used when reviewing applications, sponsors may join the programme but later not be able to fulfil their commitments or, worse, actually harm refugees. In the United Kingdom, only organisations that can demonstrate experience working with vulnerable groups, such as nonprofits that already provide social services, are allowed to become sponsors.[47] In other countries, such as Germany, sponsors are required to prove they have sufficient financial resources to support the individual or family to be sponsored.[48] And in Canada, sponsors are required to submit a detailed settlement plan that demonstrates how they will receive the refugees and what integration support they will provide.[49]

Second, while civic group and individual naming of refugees for admission can be an important part of sponsorship programmes, asylum and immigration agencies still need to screen and approve refugees to ensure eligibility for protection and check for security concerns. Coordination between government and sponsors can also help ensure that sponsorship targets those truly in need and furthers broader national resettlement priorities. Poland's brief experiment with sponsorship and humanitarian admission for Syrian Christians in 2015 provides a useful lesson in this regard. Refugees were primarily identified and reviewed for eligibility by the sponsoring organisation, the Estera Foundation, and church leaders within Syria. While the Polish government provided some oversight during the visa application process, other civil-society groups later called into question whether the procedures used by the Estera Foundation resulted in the admission of individuals truly at risk of harm or persecution, and several of those resettled have since returned to Syria.[50] The result has been a public backlash against refugee sponsorship and resettlement, though it is difficult to disentangle what part of this reaction is due to broader public scepticism of immigration and refugees.

Third, where sponsors are responsible for providing orientation or integration support, training and guidance can help to ensure they understand and have the tools to effectively support the refugees in their care. Cultural barriers and misunderstandings, trauma and mental health issues, and the unequal power relationship between refugees and sponsors can all undermine the effectiveness of sponsoring arrangements and, in extreme cases, cause lasting harm if, for example, sponsors assume too much authority over refugees' personal decisions or are unprepared to deal with serious mental health issues. The Canadian Private Sponsorship of Refugees programme includes an in-depth orientation for refugee sponsors as well as a handbook and ongoing trainings and webinars,[51] and the UK Community Sponsorship programme includes an induction event for new sponsors.[52]

Requirements that are too stringent risk excessively limiting the pool of potential sponsors or delaying the processing of sponsorship applications.

It is important, however, for policymakers to find balance between too much and too little oversight. Requirements that are too stringent risk excessively limiting the pool of potential sponsors or delaying the processing of sponsorship applications. The UK Community Sponsorship programme has, for example, come under criticism for its intensive and time-consuming review process for new sponsors, although this may be due in part to the fact that the programme's administrative systems and procedures are still relatively new and evolving.[53] Similarly, the Australian sponsorship programme has been criticised for setting too high a financial threshold and thus excluding some quality would-be sponsors.[54]

Oversight requirements—especially vetting and approval of sponsored refugees—can also place a significant burden on governments themselves. The examination of applications and supporting documentation is often time consuming and resource intensive, but because sponsored refugees are frequently identified outside normal resettlement procedures, national resettlement authorities cannot rely on information provided by UNHCR to verify a candidate's identity or need for resettlement.[55] Evaluations of the Canadian Private Sponsorship of Refugees programme found that the resettlement applications of privately sponsored refugees were more complex to process than those of government-identified refugees and that approval times for sponsored refugees were at least twice as long.[56] Ireland's 2014 Syrian Humanitarian Admission Programme (SHAP) encountered similar challenges. The SHAP application required refugees and sponsors to submit extensive documentation, including a medical and vaccination history,[57] and as a result, national resettlement authorities quickly encountered difficulties reviewing and processing applications as swiftly as they had planned. Limiting sponsorship eligibility to refugees who have already been recognised by UNHCR or another government could mitigate this challenge, as Canada does for refugees sponsored by individuals and community groups that do not hold sponsorship agreements.[58]

Finally, while oversight aims to guarantee a minimum level of support and services, there are limitations to the amount of monitoring that can realistically be provided. The levels of support sponsored refugees receive are bound to vary. Sponsors in Canada, for example, differ widely in the types and levels of support they provide to refugees,[59] above the minimum requirements. These differences are a normal and inevitable part of any programme that relies on private individuals and community groups to provide services.

C. Building strong working relationships among key actors

As a public-private partnership, the success of refugee sponsorship relies heavily on a close and trusting relationship between government, civil society, and other key partners.

Strong working relationships depend on open lines of communication. When programmes are small in scale, personal relationships can play this role. In Germany, sponsorship programme leaders have close, individual relationships with *Land* authorities, enabling them to easily check on requirements for applicants or even the details of specific cases.[60] Such direct communication becomes impossible to maintain, however, in larger-scale initiatives. In Canada, a coordinating council for Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAH) facilitates communication between sponsors and the government. A similar arrangement has emerged in Portugal, where the Refugee Support Platform serves as the official coordinating body for sponsor organisations and the Portuguese government.[61] These more established channels of communication allow programmes to evolve organically in response to community concerns and for sponsors to feel invested in decisions taken by the government.

Policymakers also need to balance enthusiasm with experience in deciding whom to include in conversations and decision-making about sponsorship programmes. In Poland, for example, the push for a sponsored humanitarian admissions programme was led by an organisation with little background in refugee support, and more experienced organisations were reportedly not consulted, leading to criticism that sponsors were inadequately prepared to receive and integrate refugees.[62] Equally important to consider is local government consultation on and consent to sponsorship arrangements. Greater involvement of local communities in refugee resettlement can add significant value of sponsorship, but devolving too much authority to local governments may create new challenges. In the United Kingdom, would-be sponsors have complained that one of the biggest obstacles they face is securing the necessary approval from local governments to sponsor refugees.[63]

Providing high-quality training and monitoring for sponsors is likely to require a certain amount of capacity-building within civil society.

The issue of funding can also complicate the relationship between government, civil-society groups, and sponsors. Providing high-quality training and monitoring for sponsors is likely to require a certain amount of capacity-building within civil society, particularly where groups have little prior experience working with refugee populations. In many cases, government may be in the best position to provide the financial support necessary to ensure sponsors get the training and resources they need. Yet, there is a risk that government support can disrupt the community-driven nature of sponsorship arrangements and displace private commitments. The United States, for example, has struggled with the balance of public and private support in its resettlement programme, which has always been run as a public-private partnership. Government promotion of sponsorship to the public can raise similar concerns about blurring spheres of influence between government and civil society.

V. NEXT STEPS FOR INTEGRATING COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACHES INTO REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT AND RECEPTION

As policymakers, civil society, and other stakeholders look for ways to integrate community-based and private support into resettlement and reception systems, the following considerations may help them determine the appropriate next step.

1. ***Define the goals of sponsorship initiatives and look for common ground between stakeholders.*** Refugee sponsorship can serve a wide range of aims, and defining the goals of such efforts will be a prerequisite for identifying the most fitting approach. If, for example, the primary objective is to improve refugee integration or build community with other residents, additionality may not be essential. Similarly, if creating additional legal pathways is most important, it may be possible to dispense with the naming element. Of course, various stakeholders often do not share the same fundamental reasons for engaging in refugee sponsorship efforts. Where interests diverge, it will be important for the key actors to identify common goals to work towards, even if just in the short term.

2. ***Consider taking an incremental approach.*** Delegating authority and responsibility to community groups and private individuals can be a big step for resettlement and asylum systems that have historically been highly centralised. While the ultimate goal—particularly for refugee and sponsorship advocates—may be a programme that is additional to government commitments, it may be necessary to deliver a 'proof of concept' before committing to a full-fledged private sponsorship programme.

Incorporating community engagement and elements of sponsorship into existing reception and resettlement systems may be one way to test the potential of refugee sponsorship in a particular context. The UK government, for example, has left open the possibility that the Community Sponsorship pilot may eventually become an additional resettlement channel. And in France, church groups first provided support to refugees as part of the asylum reception system before reaching an agreement to serve as sponsors for additional refugees admitted through Humanitarian Corridors. In addition to demonstrating the capacity of civil society, community-led and private reception projects may also foster productive relationships between potential sponsors and governments. In Poland, for example, one civil-society group is working with the Warsaw city government to renovate vacant public housing for use by refugees. Organisers hope that this will allow them to develop a relationship with the city government that may, with time, pave the way towards sponsorship.[64]

Local or regional sponsorship initiatives, as in Germany, may be another way to test the waters before launching a national programme. By allowing decisions about sponsorship to be taken at the local level, devolved sponsorship programmes offer a 'two-speed approach' where communities that wish to do more can while those that are more hesitant can move at a slower speed. Of course, such approaches still require national-level cooperation to facilitate refugee screening and admission, which may be difficult in some political contexts.

3. ***Assess possible capacity constraints and beware of overcommitting.*** Governments and interested civil-society groups will need to honestly appraise their own capabilities before embarking on a joint sponsorship project. Making commitments that cannot be fulfilled will undermine the success of—and public support for—refugee sponsorship and resettlement. Capacity may be a particular issue for countries that have recently welcomed a large number of arrivals via the asylum channel. Moreover, sponsored refugees who are admitted in addition to a country's resettlement quota may fall under a different legal framework or receive a different legal status, creating more administrative demands.

   Sponsorship programme designers have several options at their disposal to address potential capacity issues. First, the scope of the sponsorship effort could be limited to refugees of certain nationalities or with family connections already in the country (e.g., the humanitarian admission programmes in Ireland and Germany). This may reduce to a manageable level the processing and oversight demands on government agencies that might otherwise be asked to screen a large pool of applicants from a wider range of backgrounds. Similarly, allowing only a small number of experienced organisations to serve as sponsors, as in Italy and France, could minimise the demands of vetting and training sponsors.

   Another tactic that can prevent new initiatives from exceeding capacity is to integrate sponsorship into established resettlement programmes. By doing so, governments could, to some extent, draw on existing administrative capacity instead of creating entirely new systems. Relying on existing referral mechanisms could also prove beneficial for civil-society groups in the resettlement country that do not have the networks needed in first-asylum countries to identify refugees for sponsorship. Finally, for countries that are already struggling to meet their EU resettlement or relocation commitments, drawing on the enthusiasm and capacity of civil society may offer a way to fulfil their pledges.

Ultimately, policymakers must consider sponsorship part of a larger refugee protection and migration management toolkit, alongside traditional resettlement, humanitarian admission, and territorial asylum. Equally, sponsorship advocates will need to acknowledge that sponsorship is not the only way to assist refugees or engage community members. Not all individuals or community groups will have the time or financial resources to devote to full sponsorship, and efforts that seek to truly engage a broad swathe of the population in refugee protection will need to provide alternative forms of community service. Flexibility, for both governments and community stakeholders, will thus be the key to success.

Policymakers must consider sponsorship part of a larger refugee protection and migration management toolkit.

ENDNOTES

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4 Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), 'Blended Visa Office-Referred Program – Sponsoring Refugees', accessed 16 June 2017, www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/sponsor/vor.asp.

5 Private reception and integration initiatives have emerged on an ad hoc basis in many European countries over the last several years. See, for example, the Amsterdam-based Gastvrij Oost, 'Gastvrij Oost', accessed 16 June 2017, http://gastvrijoost.amsterdam/en/; and the Austrian initiative Vielmehr für Alle, 'Vielmehr für Alle', accessed 16 June 2017, http://vielmehr.at/.

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10 Most *Land*-level programmes in Germany were restricted to family members of Syrians already living in Germany, as were the Irish and Swiss humanitarian admissions programmes.

11 Samantha Arnold and Emma Quinn, *Resettlement of Refugees and Private Sponsorship in Ireland* (Dublin: European Migration Network Ireland and the Economic and Social Research Institute, 2016), www.esri.ie/publications/resettlement-of-refugees-and-private-sponsorship-in-ireland/

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16 Chris Clements, Russel Rook, Mario Barosevcic, and Becky Evans, 'Supporting the Development of Community Sponsorship of Resettled Refugees in the UK' (unpublished report, Social Finance Limited and Good Faith Partnership LLP, London, 2017).

17 Sponsors in Canada, for example, spend an estimated 20 hours per week with the refugees they sponsor. This intense time investment represents a significant opportunity to build meaningful relationships. See CIC, *Summative Evaluation of the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program* (Ottawa: CIC, 2007), www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/evaluation/psrp/psrp-summary.asp#s3.2..

18 'Bridging social capital' has been defined as social ties to people 'different to you' and is believed to help create social and economic opportunities. By contrast, 'bonding social capital' is ties to people 'similar to you' and is thought to help increase resiliency. See, for example, Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

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22 Pope Francis, for example, has been a vocal proponent of welcoming refugees, as evidenced in his remarks to Jesuit school alumni in Rome in the fall of 2016: 'I encourage you to welcome refugees into your homes and communities... Remember that authentic hospitality is a profound Gospel value that nurtures love'. See Voice of America (VOA) News, 'Pope Encourages Europeans to Offer Refugees Warm Welcome', VOA News, 17 September 2016, www.voanews.com/a/pope-encourages-europeans-offer-refugees-warm-welcome/3513622.html. The Archbishop of Canterbury has also spoken on the refugee crisis, saying 'Now, perhaps more than ever in post-war Europe, we need to commit to joint action across Europe, acknowledging our common responsibility and our common humanity. As Christians we believe we are called to break down barriers, to welcome the stranger and love them as ourselves (Leviticus 19:34)'. See Archbishop of Canterbury, 'Archbishop of Canterbury on the Refugee Crisis' (news release 3 September 2015), www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/5606/archbishop-of-canterbury-on-the-refugee-crisis.

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