

I. Summary

A number of countries globally have adopted community sponsorship (CS) in part due to the unique and beneficial role that community members can play in the reception and support to sponsored refugees. One of the most important responsibilities undertaken by community members, sometimes known as ‘sponsors’, is ensuring that sponsored refugees have access to the services they need to settle in their community. Sponsors provide a number of these services directly, and also support sponsored refugees to connect into and navigate existing government services and publicly funded organizations. This knowledge brief is a high-level overview of access to services within CS programs globally, using a comprehensive review of relevant literature to respond to the questions: how are sponsors and sponsored refugees accessing services and working with service delivery partners on the ground, and what are some promising practices to ensure quality service access?

Two categories of services are examined: settlement services and government services. While there is overlap between the two categories, generally, settlement services are amenities such as housing, language support, employment, and community services that sponsors support help sponsored refugees to access in the first weeks of settlement. The second category includes services provided by the government to all residents, such as documentation, healthcare, education, and welfare. Evidence for this brief will be drawn from a broad array of CS programs including those in New Zealand, Canada, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, France, the Basque Country, and Italy. This brief starts with an overview of access to services and sponsorship, then explores what access to services looks like in practice, closing with a brief review of some promising practices, and knowledge gaps on this topic.

II. An overview of access to services and sponsorship

CS programs usually involve sponsors taking on a number of responsibilities of settlement support and connecting sponsored refugees into available government services. The involvement of sponsors in this aspect of refugee welcome is motivated in large part because integration support—such as accessing social services, education, and language classes—has been identified as a key area where they can bring strong added value (European Commission 2018: 8). However, the specifics of how sponsored refugees access services depends on the national context and the goals of the program ([European Commission 2018: 37](#)).

II.1 Formal agreements on sponsor support

In most cases, sponsors sign a formalized agreement such as a memorandum of understanding or a settlement plan. These documents detail the sponsors’ role in providing financial and other support to the sponsored refugees during their sponsorship period. For example, in France’s Humanitarian Corridors, sponsors are required to produce a plan that outlines how they will reach out to and work with service providers ([Tardis 2018: 28](#)); in New Zealand’s Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship (CORS) pilot, the settlement plan must detail sponsors’ ability to provide services to vulnerable groups ([New Zealand Government 2019: 6](#)), and in the Auzolana II pilot in the Basque Country, sponsors must show how they will assist sponsored refugees to access services ([The Basque Government 2021: 20](#)). Canada also has a long tradition of using [settlement plans](#) that include a financial assessment of sponsors, a settlement checklist assigning sponsor roles, and details that help sponsors to understand and agree to their legal obligations.

One of the benefits of creating this formal agreement is that it helps sponsor groups to plan in advance and in some cases to identify which sponsor will be the lead on supporting the sponsored refugee with a particular service, such as with job search or tutoring. The Basque Government pilot tried this approach, and reported that it led to a quicker response to refugee needs (The Basque Government 2021: 39). The state still holds ultimate responsibility for the integration of refugees, and will generally step in as the service provider of last resort if a sponsorship fails (European Commission 2018: 5).

II.2 Some strengths and challenges of sponsor support

One of the strengths of sponsor-led support is their ability to link connections to institutions and to provide individualized attention. Sponsors may provide services themselves, connect sponsored refugees to existing services, or may accompany them as they navigate unfamiliar bureaucracies. Sponsors draw on their local knowledge, relationships, and social capital to help sponsored refugees navigate day-to-day challenges, ‘short-circuiting’ what might be near intractable barriers, such as accessing medical care with long patient wait lists (Finn 2020: 18). For example, in the Basque Country, it was noted that sponsors were able to deal with access gaps such as when refugees didn’t have the required documentation to access certain benefits, or finding alternative options for education when sponsored refugees were unable to enroll in the middle of the school year (The Basque Government 2021: 40).

In smaller or less diverse communities, sponsors have been shown to be particularly helpful in liaising with community services in preparation for the arrival of refugees. For instance, they can liaise with schools to improve English as a Second Language support, or to work with job centres to raise awareness of refugee needs (Reyes and Phillimore 2020: 4). Sponsor groups active in Community Sponsorship Ireland (CSI) found that a promising practice is to identify and work with ‘champions’ in local government and community service provision, sensitizing them in advance of the refugee’s arrival.¹

It is worth noting that sponsor groups and sponsored refugees will have different levels of pre-existing knowledge or personal experience in navigating services. Not all sponsors may have understanding of the unique vulnerabilities of sponsored refugees, and they may lack training to provide certain services themselves (Fratzke and Dorst 2019:10). Service gaps can happen if sponsors are not properly trained and supported, and it can take a great deal of work, risk, and imagination to effectively harness sponsor contributions (Fratzke and Dorst 2019: 9/10). Sponsored refugees report very different experiences of accessing services through CS programs, making it difficult to draw conclusions about the impact of sponsor support. For example, while 34.3% of sponsored refugee respondents of the Humanitarian Corridors survey reported that their needs —such as accessing hospitals, school, and job placements —as they settled into new lives in Italy had been ‘very well’, another 19.4% responded negatively (European Union 2020: 31).

II.3 Comparing sponsorship to government resettlement: A Canadian example

Most CS programs don’t have the long-term evidence needed to meaningfully compare access to services and other integration impacts of sponsorship to that of government resettlement. Even in the Canadian context from where the majority of existing evidence is available, caution is needed when making comparisons due to differences in the pre-arrival conditions of refugees, types of sponsor groups, and selection criteria all of which makes it difficult to measure direct sponsor impact. Regardless, by considering Canada as an example, it is possible to start to understand how sponsor support may impact the settlement and integration experience of refugees.

A number of studies show that those arriving through the private sponsorship of refugees program in Canada acquire employment and achieve higher earnings at a faster rate than government assisted refugees in the short-term (Hynie et al 2019: 37). It is difficult to attribute these indicators to the care of sponsors, to the different socio-demographic profiles of each group, or to some other variables in sponsor group support. For example, sponsored refugees in Canada are shown to arrive with higher levels of education and knowledge of English or French than government resettled refugees, (Hynie et al 2019: 37).

A few more recent studies have tried to take these differences into account and have concluded that sponsored refugees may indeed demonstrate slightly higher earnings and employment levels (Kaida, Hou and Stick 2020: 6). However, these differences diminish over the long-term (5-15 years after

¹ Key informant interview participant from Ireland

arrival) and the effects are not distributed evenly across all individuals; for example, among sponsored refugees, women with less education appear to benefit the most from sponsorship (Kaida, Hou and Stick 2020: 19).

Another recent study from the UK also attempted to compare the two streams, suggesting that sponsorship allows refugees to “better access all dimensions of integration because of the additional support refugees have in navigating the health, housing and education systems” (Alraei, Collins, and Rigon 2018: 4). More evidence from Canada and other CS programs would be beneficial to better understand the impact of sponsor support on the overall integration of refugees—however, such comparisons should be taken with caution.

II.4 The intersection between sponsors and service providers on the ground

CS programs ensure that services are being accessed by sponsored refugees by working closely with service providers through hiring dedicated staff, or working with refugee support organizations who offer professionalized settlement services. For example, the Basque Country hired a social worker to work with sponsors to ensure the sponsored refugees’ access to help with securing documentation, access to healthcare, education, and more (The Basque Government 2021: 24). Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) describes this relationship as a “partnership of support” between settlement workers and sponsors, with sponsors as the primary providers and service providers offering access to “language assessment and training, employment-related supports, and other specialized settlement services” (IRCC 2017). There are some indications that this teamwork is happening, albeit somewhat sporadically; a survey conducted in Ontario, Canada with 238 sponsors and settlement workers saw 67% of respondents involved in or aware of successful collaborations between private sponsors and settlement organizations (Allies for Refugee Integration 2019: 11).

In a few of the newer CS programs, such as Community Sponsorship Ireland, sponsors reported the need for increased sensitization of some services providers to the existence of the sponsorship program (Finn 2020: 40). New Zealand’s CORS pilot reported the same issue, with sponsors struggling to deal with the lack of knowledge about the program among government agencies, both on an organizational level and among frontline workers (New Zealand Government 2019: 25).

While sponsors often interface with services providers in government-funded services, there is little overlap between sponsorship and service providers administering government resettlement programs (Phillimore and Dorling 2020: 8). In France, there are few opportunities for interaction between the Humanitarian Corridors with state-funded resettlement providers, due in part to budget cuts leading service providers to be overwhelmed, as well as geographic restrictions with whom they can work (Tardis 2018: 27). In Ireland as well, a key informant shared that there is little formal collaboration, but there have been questions among resettlement workers as to the fairness of attention and funds allotted to the new CS program.² One interesting exception to this is in New Zealand where sponsored refugees attend part of the general orientation offered by service providers to all resettled refugees (New Zealand Government 2019: X).

² Key informant interview participant from Ireland

III. Access to Services in Practice

Sponsors are primarily responsible for ensuring sponsored refugees have timely access to the settlement services they need upon arrival, and their support can be instrumental in helping sponsored refugees to successfully navigate an unfamiliar service environment. While

sponsored refugees are not a monolithic group, in general refugees have been shown to face unique structural and systemic barriers such as higher rates of unemployment, lack of access to adequate housing, and challenges in accessing language training in their resettlement process. (Agrawal 2019: 944). It is therefore key that sponsors have the knowledge they need to ensure that sponsored refugees are accessing the services to which they are entitled.

During the first few weeks and months of the sponsored refugee's arrival, there are a number of important services that they will likely access with the assistance of sponsors.

III.1 Housing

Provision of housing, or support in accessing housing services, is a key responsibility for sponsors across all CS programs scanned (GRSI 2021: 27). For example, in Germany's NesT- New Start in a Team program, sponsors "are expected to provide refugees with housing for two years after arrival" (UNHCR 2020: 10). Sponsors are also responsible for funding accommodation for a certain length of time, except in some programs where government housing subsidies are available, such as in the Basque Country and the United Kingdom (GRSI 2021: 27).

Sponsors also help to secure housing for sponsored refugees in a number of informal ways; they may choose to "top up" social assistance benefits to cover rent, act as a reference, or use their networks to tap into new sources of accommodation in a tight housing market (Fratzke and Dorst 2019: 8). However, the available housing may not always be satisfactory. Of the participants in France's Humanitarian Corridors surveys, 40% expressed dissatisfaction with their housing, due to feeling dependent on their sponsors, and having to live in shared accommodations (European Union 2020: 112/113).

Securing affordable housing for sponsored refugees has been identified as a major hurdle, but sponsor group support has been shown to be beneficial in overcoming these challenges. An evaluation of Ireland's CSI determined that the most beneficial aspect of the program was the way in which sponsors enabled new pathways for refugees to access housing (Finn 2020: 18). However, sponsors still experienced barriers such as stereotyping of refugees and a lack of awareness by landlords about the CSI program (Finn 2020: 29).

III.2 Language learning and interpretation

Gaining proficiency in the local language is an important step for sponsored refugees to achieve their goals in their new community. In the CS programs of Germany, Canada and New Zealand, sponsored refugees are able to access government-funded language classes and sponsors support with enrollment (GRSI 2021: 27). In Ireland, sponsors fund and organize language learning, while in the United Kingdom, Italy, and Spain, sponsors have some responsibilities to plan for language learning support, such as arranging training which may be partially funded (GRSI 2021: 27).

Even when language courses are provided by the government, sponsors often act as a language tutor, assisting sponsored refugees when the curriculum is too difficult, or providing extra opportunities for conversational practice (Fratzke and Dorst 2019: 5). Alternatively, sponsors may need to fill in services gaps themselves, for example, in rural Canada, sponsors had to step up to provide English language training themselves as it was not locally available (McNally 2018: 35).

Securing assistance with interpretation and translation support is also often a sponsor responsibility. This may be achieved through identifying and/or funding a professional interpreter, gaining the support of other newcomers who can help with interpretation more informally, or providing advanced notice to

service providers, such as healthcare, that interpretation services may be needed (GRSI 2020: 14). For example, in the evaluation of the UK's CS program, it recommends that sponsor groups budget for interpretation and work in advance with interpreters if possible ([Phillimore, Reyes and Hassan 2020](#): 36).

III.3 Employment Support

In a number of CS programs, sponsors are expected to assist sponsored refugees to find employment opportunities through leveraging formal or informal employment networks. In rural areas in particular, sponsors have been shown to play a key role in assisting with labour market integration through directly recommending sponsored refugees to employers, and avoiding the usual recruitment processes that can be discriminatory to refugees (Tardis 2018: 10). In some cases, more formal employment support may be provided through services providers. In New Zealand, sponsoring groups must “ensure there are adequate staff to support a variety of case-related settlement services and support” including for housing and employment support (New Zealand Government 2019: 43).

While accessing employment is a high priority for sponsored refugees, the quality of employment support and type of job should also be considered. In a recent survey of the Humanitarian Corridors in Italy, participants reported that while finding a job was very important to them, only 25.6% had access to job orientation courses or training, and only 20.7% had found work (European Union 2020, 39). Of those that did have work, however, 69.2% said it was due to the help of the support of the Humanitarian Corridors Program (European Union 2020, 39). Sponsored refugees may feel pressured by sponsors to take on work that is “inappropriate or unbeneficial in terms of language learning and long-term advancement” (Phillimore and Dorling 2020: 8). In another Canadian study, the majority of sponsored refugees reported getting their jobs through their ethnocultural connections, with only 12% of sponsored refugees actually utilizing sponsor networks to secure employment (Hynie et al 2019: 43). More research from a sponsored refugee perspective would be helpful in understanding the quality of employment support from sponsors in meeting their needs over the long-term.

III.4 Orientation to community services

Sponsors also orient sponsored refugees to the community upon arrival, which includes informal introduction to community services. Sponsors can draw on their time, knowledge, and skills to provide sponsored refugees with individualized and day-to-day support which can include familiarizing them with local transportation, answering questions, and connecting them to wider social networks ([Fratzke and Dorst 2019](#): 4-8). For example, in Germany's NesT program, sponsors “provide support in areas such as completing paperwork, interacting with government departments, opening bank accounts, enrolling children in schools, and forming contacts with sports associations for one year after arrival” (UNHCR 2020: 10).

This informal connection to the community can also have two-way impacts on both sponsored refugees and the local community. The social connection brokered between sponsored refugees and the community through sponsors was shown to have a positive impact in the UK, where sponsored refugees expressed feelings of increased security and welcome through their sponsor relationships ([Alraei, Collins, and Rigon 2018](#): 16). Sponsored refugees coming through Community Sponsorship Ireland (CSI), reported benefits to cross-cultural adaptation and orientation to the community through the help of their sponsors (Keppel 2020: 51). Sponsors also have reported developing a more outward looking perspective through sponsorship, and sometimes were able to reframe negative views held by some community members about refugees through sharing their experience with friends and family (Reyes and Phillimore 2020: 11).

IV. Access to Government Services in Practice

Sponsors also play a role in ensuring sponsored refugees are able to access and navigate government services that are essential to their health, wellbeing, and long-term integration. In most CS programs the state retains responsibility over a number of services usually offered to residents and citizens, which are extended to include sponsored refugees. In the EU context in particular, “there is a clear consensus that responsibility for basic welfare services should not rest on individuals as it would expose refugees to potential harm and would place an unreasonable burden on private persons” (Tan 2020: 18). Other programs such as in New Zealand also ensure that sponsored refugees are eligible to access the same government-funded welfare, housing support, education and health services as other residents and citizens (New Zealand Government 2019: 4). Even if they are not financing or directly providing these services themselves, sponsors have an important responsibility to connect sponsored refugees into these services and assist with barriers to access that may arise.

IV.1 Documentation

Supporting sponsored refugees to secure documentation related both to their immigration status as well as other identity documents is a necessary first step in ensuring their right to access a number of services. Sponsored refugees in Ireland reported that the support of sponsors in getting documentation to access unfamiliar services was “crucial” in their first few weeks of sponsorship (Keppel 2020: 36).

Securing documentation such as a driver’s license, immigration documents, or healthcare documentation can often involve sponsors supporting sponsored refugees to navigate bureaucracy and providing help to fill in forms that may be complex and, in a language, that might be unfamiliar to the refugees. For example, in the UK program, it was reported that, “completing the paperwork associated with tenancy agreements and claiming benefits was a huge task for (sponsors) and refugees... groups also faced bureaucratic hurdles such as difficulties fulfilling the evidence requirements to open bank accounts or barriers to registering with a local GP” (IRIS 2020: 2).

IV.2 Healthcare

Research shows that “access to adequate healthcare is critical to successful refugee integration in resettlement contexts” (UNHCR 2020: 34). In all of the CS programs scanned, states retain responsibility over basic health service provision for sponsored refugees, and sponsors ensure sponsored refugees are able to navigate healthcare services, including mental health services where available (GRSI 2021: 27). Access to publicly funded healthcare for sponsored refugees was often cited as essential for the success of CS programs, particularly in the EU context where “stakeholder consultations showed that access to health care should always be borne by the State” (European Commission 2018: 8). Exceptional healthcare costs such as dental care, however, may not be covered, and sponsors may need to consider securing special health insurance, or planning to pay out of pocket (GRSI 2021: 27).

While on paper sponsored refugees have access to healthcare, navigating the system in a foreign language and culture can be challenging. Refugees may face similar barriers to healthcare access as local community members, such as long wait times (The Refugee Hub 2021). Easily accessible access to mental health services for refugees in particular has been reported as a major barrier in Ireland (Finn 2020: 34) and in France (SHARE 2021:15).

Sponsor support can therefore be beneficial in assisting sponsored refugees to register with a local doctor, explaining the health system, or booking interpreters for appointments (Phillimore, Reyes, and Hassan 2020: 21). In the UK’s CS program, there were numerous examples of sponsors drawing on their social connections and knowledge of the healthcare system to assist those with high healthcare needs (Alraei, Collins, and Rigon 2018: 4). Other solutions to the issue of access could include specialized services for refugees. For example, a study in Canada demonstrated that having a dedicated health clinic for government assisted refugees improved referrals and decreased wait times (Hynie et al 2019: 48).

IV.3 Education

Access to primary and secondary education is particularly important for resettled refugee children and young people where schools are an important space of support (UNCHR 2020: 37/38). Access to education for children and youth in CS programs is almost always provided by publicly funded schools, and sponsors are responsible for enrollment and support (GRSI 2021: 27). Sponsors may assist in ensuring access to education through activities such as “attending parents’ evening meetings, and providing one to one tuition to help support children’s learning” (Phillimore, Reyes, and Hassan 2020: 21). In a UK study, sponsors provided individualized attention to assist refugee children to get up to speed with their peers or to find solutions to problems such as a lack of the certification that is needed for school enrollment (Alraei, Collins, and Rigon 2018: 14).

Sponsored refugees may access higher education through programs such as the [Student Refugee Program run by World University Service Canada](#), that provides access to tertiary education in Canada through refugee sponsorship. It is difficult to summarize the state of access to higher education for sponsored refugees given differences in their status on arrival, differences among institutions in regards to credential recognition, access to scholarships or other funding, and various ad-hoc interventions targeting the higher education of resettled refugees (Streitwieser et al 2018: 16). Nevertheless, it is clear that “for refugees following displacement... beginning or resuming (higher) education is often an immediate next step for successful integration” (Streitwieser et al 2018: 1). The international community has recognised the urgent need to strengthen refugee access to education with the creation of the [Global Task Force on Third Country Education Pathways](#) working on expanding educational complementary pathways, and the [UNCHR’s “Refugee Education 2030”](#) strategy document which sets out a vision for refugees’ inclusion in all levels of education.

IV.4 Welfare

One of the major points of difference between CS programs is access of sponsored refugees to welfare. A number of CS programs argue that, due to their national context, it is important that refugees can access the welfare state, for example the German NesT or UK’s CSS programs which provide full access to the national welfare system (Tan 2020: 18). In France, refugees coming through Humanitarian Corridors have access to the asylum seeker’s allowance prior to protection being granted, and afterwards they can access mainstream subsistence allowance (Tardis 2018: 25). In New Zealand, sponsored refugees have access to welfare similar to government resettled refugees (New Zealand Government 2019: 4); however, sponsors were reported to have a steep learning curve in navigating welfare services due to lack of personal experience.³ In Ireland also, sponsors were reported to lack awareness of social protection services, leading to a need for increased sponsor training in this area (Finn 2020: 35).

In the [Canadian CS program](#), sponsors are responsible for providing financial support equal to that of government assisted refugees for 12 months and sponsored refugees are not able to access welfare support during the sponsorship period. As the end of the sponsorship period (known in Canada as ‘month 13’) approaches, there is often nervousness on the part of sponsors and sponsored refugees about the transition to financial independence ([Lenard 2019](#): 66). Although sponsored refugees in need of financial support are able to access welfare at this point, it has been shown that many sponsored refugees are unaware of the financial and settlement services that are still accessible to them ([Lenard 2019](#): 66).

³ Key informant interview participant from New Zealand

V. Identifying promising practices for access to services in sponsorship

With growing interest in community sponsorship globally, there has been an emphasis on identifying and sharing promising practices. Below are a few promising practices to consider when it comes to securing and ensuring access to services for sponsored refugees.

V.1 Equitable access to services upon arrival for sponsored refugees

The first step in a sponsored refugee's access to services is grounded in the state's commitment to ensuring their legal right to access services, and to provide the necessary documentation in a timely way. In the EU context, many Member States provide international protection status to sponsored refugees which gives them the same rights and benefits as resettled refugees (European Commission 2018: 7). There are exceptions, such as Germany and Ireland, where sponsored refugees do not receive harmonized status. This sometimes leads to challenges in access. For example, in Ireland there are reports of sponsored refugees having difficulty accessing employment as their national residence permit status was not well understood by public authorities (European Commission 2018: 69).

Ensuring equitable access to services for sponsored refugees may also help to alleviate some of the tensions between government resettlement and CS programs. In Canada, both sponsored refugees and government assisted refugees arrive as Permanent Residents, meaning that "[they get most social benefits that Canadian citizens receive](#)" although ongoing debate about the level of support offered by settlement agencies versus sponsors continue among refugee populations (Agrawal 2019). In France, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) argued that in order for them to support the sponsorship program, equality of rights and equal access for sponsored refugees was essential (Tardis 2018: 25). In New Zealand's CORS pilot, there was a lack of clarity around the eligibility of sponsored refugees for housing benefits that government resettled refugees are able to access, which led to some tension with sponsors (New Zealand Government 2019: 8).

V.2 Engaging service providers and other partners in sponsorship

There are a number of mutual benefits to the proactive engagement of service providers and other partners in the development and implementation of CS programs. The Basque Country's program evaluation indicated that involving local administration enriched the program, as "the expert role of social work professionals is key...for their role in the work of the local support groups, which they naturally end up engaging with" (The Basque Government 2021: 47). In the UK as well, local authorities have an important role as they determine whether local services can meet the needs of sponsored refugees (IRIS 2020: 3).

By soliciting input from and pursuing partnerships with service providers, sponsors may benefit from harnessing existing knowledge of services. This is especially in "respect to planning for arrival, coordination and resources for ongoing support" so that duplication or competition can be avoided (Phillimore and Dorling 2020: 8). In Ontario, Canada, Allies for Refugee Integration (ARI) tested how to streamline pre and post arrival connections between settlement workers and sponsors for a more collaborative approach to welcoming sponsored refugees ([Allies for Refugee Integration 2021](#)). However, this proactive sharing of resources and mutual support is not always possible—as evidenced in the UK's CCS program evaluation where a lack of joined-up working and information sharing links was identified as preventing this from taking place (IRIS 2020: 4).

V.3 Sponsors can enable service access with the right support

Sponsors can be an asset to sponsored refugees in accessing and navigating services, but this is not a free resource—sponsors do require support and training. In Canada, support for sponsors is provided by the federally funded [Refugee Sponsorship Training Program](#), and the Canadian [Refugee Sponsorship Agreement Holders Association](#) represents the majority of Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs), providing common perspective and voice for the sponsorship community. In a

number of EU member CS programs, there is an emphasis on the need for a kind of ‘civil society focal point’ that can lead sponsor training, screening, and support (Tan 2020: 25). In New Zealand, a federally funded umbrella organization is being created to “[support refugees and community groups through the settlement journey](#)”. An evaluation of the NesT program in Germany recommended the development of the role of contact agencies ([SHARE 2021](#): 10) and in Ireland, [The Open Community](#) exists to support sponsor training, including information on how to access services. It is recommended that all CS programs fund and engage service providing organizations to properly leverage the human resources of sponsors in order to help guard against potential backlash (Fratzke and Dorst 2019: 10/14).

While each CS program has a unique framework, there a number of commonalities in service access for sponsored refugees globally. This includes a majority of programs finding it beneficial for sponsors to assist sponsored refugees to connect into and navigate government services, as well as providing a number of services themselves such as housing support. Ultimately, sponsorship is a mechanism to increase community involvement in providing and accessing services for refugees, one that provides a more individualized immediate support that prioritizes connections with the local community. If sponsors are given the right support, sponsored refugees are in turn likely to have a wide pool of support to access the services they need to start their lives in their new community.

VI. Knowledge gaps and preliminary research

VI.1 Smaller programs and scalability

A number of CS programs globally have welcomed only small numbers of sponsored refugees, leading to questions around scalability and sustainability when it comes to access to services. In addition, because sponsors may be less familiar with services and their work is not as visible, better understanding and oversight over the process can ensure responsibilities are being met ([Beirens and Ahad 2020](#): 5). Research gaps in CS programs identified by Phillimore and Dorling includes better understanding about what services need to be provided at minimum in smaller resettlement locations, and data on comparing streams of resettlement (Phillimore and Dorling 2020: 12).

Another knowledge gap related to scalability is understanding how sponsorship either helps to alleviate or adds additional pressure on local community services. Refugee resettlement has been shown to strengthen local service provision especially in rural areas by providing a boost to funding and additional infrastructure ([Patuzzi, Andriescu, and Pietropolli 2020](#): 23). Nonetheless, there can also be additional pressure on local services without preparation and ongoing mediation between services providers and new refugees in the community (Patuzzi, Andriescu, and Pietropolli 2020: 23). For these reasons, it will be important to ensure rigorous monitoring and evaluation for CS programs moving forward.

VI.2 Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on access to services

Preliminary research is emerging on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and adoption of virtual service delivery on sponsored refugee’s access to services. Challenges have been reported in recent global discussions on refugee sponsorship such as accessing health services, especially with a lack of digital skills and interpretation support for refugees in languages other than English (Phillimore and Dorling 2020: 10). Sponsors are reportedly taking on more responsibilities for services in the UK context, in particular for language learning ([SHARE 2021](#): 13). In Italy, a report found that COVID-19 had a negative impact on the refugees coming through Humanitarian Corridors, including job loss and a lack of access to training programs (Panchetti and von Wartensee 2020: 11).

It appears that the support of sponsors may be even more essential during the COVID-19 pandemic and into the future. In the UK, sponsor groups have shown creativity and adaptability in moving their support of sponsored refugees online by providing hardware and access to internet, as well as supporting with digital literacy (Reyes 2021). In Italy, sponsors worked with service providers through the pandemic to fill gaps by offering online Italian courses, explaining public health measures and leveraging informal employment networks (Panchetti and von Wartensee 2020: 10-12). It would be useful to know more about the long-term impacts of COVID-19 on service access as well as the ways that sponsored refugees might be better able to leverage new tools and technology in an increasingly virtual service delivery environment.

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