

Recruiting, Developing, and Sustaining Sponsor Groups

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*The **Knowledge Brief Series** is produced by the University of Ottawa Refugee Hub. The Briefs are intended to briefly summarize the global state of knowledge on topics related to community-based refugee sponsorship.*

I. Summary

Community Sponsorship is a shared endeavour in which the government, sponsor groups, volunteers, settlement provider agencies, and international organizations participate in the implementation, management, and monitoring of community sponsorship and humanitarian corridor programs. They typically take on responsibility for ensuring that newcomers achieve certain integration outcomes, such as acquiring stable housing, learning the local language, or becoming self-sufficient ([Fratzke and Dorst, 2019](#)). Without willing and able sponsor groups and volunteers, sponsorship programs cannot succeed.

This brief provides a detailed overview of key elements identified in the literature outlining the process of recruiting sponsorship volunteers, forming sponsor groups, and developing capacities and aspects that contribute to the sustainability of sponsor groups. The knowledge base informing this brief includes academic articles, expert reports, and policy papers. It also incorporates streams of analysis identified in different countries and programs. The brief starts by explaining the initial recruitment and engagement of community networks participating in the sponsorship. It observes how pivotal events and media coverage create the conditions for the mobilization and engagement of sponsorship volunteers. It then explores factors that motivate sponsor groups and individual volunteers to become involved in the programs. Finally, it covers the different recruitment strategies used to meet the demands of the settlement plan, and how personal motivations are crucial to involving sponsors groups and volunteers.

I.1 Overview of sponsor groups

Community Sponsorship models vary significantly from country to country ([Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative \[GRSI\], 2021b](#)) and, consequently, there are some differences in how the terms ‘sponsor group’ and ‘volunteer’ are used. For example, in Canada, a sponsor group is formed by a group of people who collectively share contractual settlement and safeguarding responsibilities for sponsored newcomers for a set period of time. Conversely, in the UK and Germany, the term ‘sponsor groups’ describes umbrella organizations, like churches, mosques or non-governmental organisations (NGOs)¹. In some program contexts, volunteers are individual members of a sponsor group without any contractual obligation to support the settlement of a particular refugee or refugee family. For example, in the United Kingdom (UK), Germany and Ireland, ‘volunteers’ are people who take on sponsorship responsibilities as a group of individuals, who apply to their governments to participate in sponsorship programs. These groups of volunteers are required to meet mandatory conditions before they can be matched with a refugee family, and they are often described as ‘volunteer sponsors’.

Evidence from long term programs indicates that regardless the model, the effectiveness of the community sponsorship relies on its ability to recruit, engage, and retain individuals with strong commitment, appropriate skills, knowledge, and interpersonal skills ([The Refugee Sponsorship Training Program Canada, 2009](#)). De Vries and Barret (2021) argue that it is also important that sponsorship groups embrace diversity, recruiting staff and volunteers from a range of ages, ethnic groups, and cultural backgrounds. Diversity in sponsor groups also enhances opportunities for relationship-building with the refugee families.

Once sponsor groups are formed, the next stage involves their development. This phase is largely informed by the primary goals of the scheme, the state’s legal framework authorizing and governing sponsor relationships, the country’s service infrastructure, and the civil society culture, while clearly defining the roles and responsibilities between public and private actors in order to develop the programs ([Phillimore and Reyes, 2019](#); [Hyndman et al., 2021](#)). Efficient methods of communication and coordination among key stakeholders are crucial for the groups’ effective functioning, and it is important to have in place a responsive, transparent, and appropriate settlement plan that considers the various needs of the sponsored families (SHARE – ICMC Europe and Caritas Europa, 2019; GRSI, 2020a).

¹ The terminology used in this brief is based on the Canadian model and its definition of ‘sponsor group’ and ‘volunteers’ except when it refers to the European programs noted in this paragraph.

The sustainability and continuity of sponsorship groups may depend to a great extent on building upon the “momentum” that motivated people to participate in the first instance, and to maintain the desire to support additional families (Macklin, 2020; [Phillimore et al., 2020](#); Hyndman et al., 2021). Different stakeholders, like local authorities, agencies and independence advisors, can improve the sustainability of the programs, providing financial support to cover some expenses during the sponsorship period, or even in case of breakdown. Finally, monitoring the functioning of the programs is essential to ensure groups run efficiently in the long term. This policy brief concludes by identifying some knowledge gaps and future opportunities for research in this topic.

Internationally, there is a highly diverse range of approaches to sponsorship programs based on their design and implementation, as well as their goals (Fratzke and Dorst, 2019). This brief encompasses a range of community-led refugee welcome practices, including those referred to as private or community sponsorship, and those referred to as humanitarian corridor programs.² The following sections outline the fundamental elements that cut-across the sponsorship programs outlined:

- Recruit sponsorship volunteers
- Form sponsor groups
- Develop skills and expertise among those groups working together (and with external stakeholders) to support newly arrived refugees.
- Motivate sponsor groups to maintain their commitment to their work throughout the term of the sponsorship and motivate them to apply many times over.

II. Recruiting sponsorship volunteers

Volunteer recruitment is the essential first step in building on-the-ground support for sponsorship groups. This section discusses how volunteer engagement is catalyzed by mass media, the role of emotional gratification and sense of empowerment, and methods of recruitment.

II.1 Pivotal events and media coverage

Social mobilization literature helps explain how communities organize strategically to create and lead sweeping social change ([Engler and Engler, 2016](#)). Other approaches have explored how relational context prompted by ‘enthusiasm’ for another’s goals or a ‘shared past and implied future’ can encourage mobilization ([Han, 2016](#)). Studies have found that pivotal events that create immigration crises are critical moments for the recruitment and mobilization of sponsorship volunteers who want to help. For example, Australia, the United States (US), and Canada put in place for the first time a private sponsorship in the context of the [Southeast Asian refugee](#) crisis of the late 1970s. The

² Currently, there are two prevalent models of community sponsorship. They are: ‘The Community Sponsorship’ and the ‘Humanitarian Corridor Programs’. On the one hand, models of community sponsorship place emphasis on involving private individuals - who are members of the local community- in refugee settlement support, especially in its social and emotional dimensions. Tan (2021) identifies three components in this model: First is the sharing of responsibility for financial and social support among stakeholders; second, the controlled arrival of refugees; and third, this model should be additional to state resettlement programs. Countries that have adopted community sponsorship schemes include Canada, the United Kingdom, Spain, Germany, Argentina, Australia, and New Zealand (Fratzke et al., 2019). On the other hand, the humanitarian corridor model is based on memoranda of understanding between government and civil society groups who are responsible for identifying refugees for resettlement in cooperation with local organisations, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and International Organisation for Migration (IOM) (Collyer et al., 2017). Humanitarian corridor programs offer a safe and legal entry to vulnerable people in evident need of protection, and who have been identified in a first stage of assessment as prima facie refugees (Mallardo, 2017). Characteristically, they follow three-stages: First, staff carry out exploratory visits to refugee camps in the chosen countries. Second, they secure a flight to the country of refuge. Third, they welcome newcomers into civil society networks that support beneficiaries through the phases of reception and socio-economic integration. Italy and France are representative of this approach (Agatiello et al., 2019; ERN-ICMC 2017).

Australian and US programs have since ended, but the Canadian program has continued. In Canada, the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program (PSRP) officially began in 1978. Two major movements of refugees define its emergence and development. The first relates to the arrival of some 60,000 Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians in the late 1970s and early 1980s, including 29,269 privately sponsored refugees in 1979 alone. The second one started in 2015, in which more than half of the 62,000 Syrian refugees who have been resettled to Canada were privately sponsored ([Government of Canada, 2019](#)).

Recently, 2015 media images of migrants fleeing conflict and losing their lives in the Mediterranean Sea mobilized grassroots groups who empathized with the refugee situation ([Proitz, 2018](#); [Raja and Alotaibi, 2018](#); [Smith and Thomas, 2018](#)). Indeed, volunteers who joined the community sponsorship programs in different countries of the world mentioned being deeply impacted by the image of Aylan Kurdi, the three-year-old boy whose body was washed up on a beach in Turkey (Phillimore and Reyes, 2019:12). This image ignited the largest surge in public support for refugees; several global north organizations advocating for their cause experienced an increase in inquiries about the scheme, immediately after the news coverage about Kurdi's death ([Bond, 2021](#); Coffin-Karlin, 2020:155). Similar collective shock was experienced in 2021 when media coverage of the unfolding conflict and violence in Afghanistan caused civil society organizations and people from all over the world to express interest in supporting displaced Afghan people and to host them as refugees in their countries (['Welcome US' initiative](#); [Australian CRSI response to Afghanistan](#)).

II.2 Motivations of sponsor organizations and volunteers for joining the programs

There is little research on the reasons why volunteers and sponsor groups decide to get involved in refugee settlement, although recent studies in Canada and the UK have revealed interesting findings. Canadian scholarship found that family groups wishing to sponsor family members are the most active in private sponsorship, as they are allowed to select refugees through their “naming” option ([Hynie et al., 2019](#)). The ‘echo effect’ refers to the pattern of sponsors agreeing to assist families and individuals already sponsored, who have family members left behind in refugee situations. Research on the Canadian (BVOR) program, which used a data set tracing the motivations of 530 private sponsors who supported Syrian refugees after November 2015, shows that the clear majority of respondents were first-time sponsors (80%), with no ‘echo effect’ considerations ([Hyndman et al., 2021](#)). Macklin (2020:31) found that, in the context of the refugee crisis of 2015, many Canadians lining up for the first time to sponsor Syrian refugees perceived themselves as engaging in an ‘apolitical’ humanitarian undertaking.

In 2021, the [Environics Institute for Survey Research](#) conducted an online quantitative study of a representative sample of 3,000 Canadians aged 25 and over. It found that what most interested Canadians who would consider participating in sponsorship was a desire to help people in need (41%), followed by wanting to help refugees start a new life (18%). Such aspects were confirmed by a study (Hyndman et al, 2021:5) that explored the motivations, relationships, and practices of private refugee sponsorship in five provinces of Canada. Hyndman concluded that sponsorship is predicated on a commitment to social justice and human rights across local, national, and global scales.

In an interim evaluation of the UK community sponsorship program, Phillimore and Reyes (2019:14-16) identified three categories of sponsorship volunteers, with distinct motivations to join the scheme. These were:

- Value driven volunteers who saw helping refugees as an opportunity to stand up for values such as social justice and the common good. Most of these volunteers were affiliated to religious groups.
- Civically driven volunteers are individuals who saw in the sponsorship the opportunity to become civically active. The majority were members of secular organizations.
- Personally driven volunteers whose involvement in sponsorship gave them a sense of purpose. Some of these volunteers had a family link.

Lee (2018) found some evidence that ethnic and faith groups get involved to help people of the same ethno-national or religious background. Findings emerging from evaluations on humanitarian corridor programs suggests that the primary motivations for faith-based organizations supporting resettled refugees include viewing their work as part of their internal values and mission (Agatiello et al. 2019:15-16). Eby and colleagues suggest that churches support settlement in conjunction with other faith groups “to help build inter-faith understanding” (2011:594). In Canada, the BVOR program was designed as a public-private financial partnership to encourage faith-based, ethnocultural and other organizations to resettle refugees referred by the UNHCR. Under this program, the Government of Canada provides up to six months of income support through the Resettlement Assistance Program, while private sponsors provide another six months of financial support, and up to a year of social and emotional support (McNally, 2020:25-26).

Special interest-groups have also been motivated to sponsor members of their own communities. For example, in Canada, the [Rainbow Refugee Project](#) supports and assist LGBTQ+ or HIV+ refugees, and a similar initiative exists in Argentina promoted by [Fundacion Amal](#). In Australia, [Operation #NotForgotten](#) is also an interesting example of diaspora groups being leveraged to support refugees who have been affected by Australia’s offshore processing and detention policies.

Finally, the [GRSI Global Sponsors summit](#) that took place in May 2021 agreed that the Covid-19 pandemic represented a major challenge for maintaining engagement in the sponsorship programs. In that respect, sponsor groups from Argentina and the UK implemented creative solutions for expanding and sustaining their membership when the arrival of newcomer families was suspended. This included holding regular online campaigns, organizing virtual group meetings, and expanding their community networks.

II.3 Volunteer empowerment

A sense of collective agency, emotional gratification, and empowerment appear to be powerful drivers to activate sponsor groups and volunteers. Recent research has argued that much activity supporting refugees depends on members taking on tasks and responsibilities associated with collective action ([FeischmidtandZakarias, 2019](#); Reyes-Soto, 2020:22). Participation in programs has made them aware of the challenges faced by refugees and to identify structural barriers for their long-term integration. Sponsor groups and volunteers have found in the sponsorship programs a space to express their empathy with and to advocate for refugees, as well as to manifest their anger at their plight ([Yarriset al.,2020](#)). This, in turn, has transformed volunteers from ‘ordinary’ individuals who just want to help, into active citizens who advocate for an improvement in the refugee situation ([Fleischmann and Steinhilper, 2017](#)).

Sponsors’ direct and personal commitment to refugee settlement in Canada also provides them with a private interest and political voice in the settlement regime. Macklin reported that many first-time sponsors in Canada were drawn from the mainstream, middle class, educated echelons of society, who framed their actions in humanitarian rather than activist terms. Macklin also reported that sponsors felt comfortable making political demands on government to expedite the arrival of refugees, precisely because they were private citizens contributing their own time and money and doing the ‘heavy lifting’ (Macklin, 2020:35). Finally, Canadian volunteers who are connected by family or social ties to the sponsored refugees have shown agency and a sense of responsibility that explains their motivation and sense of mission (Hyndman et al., 2021).

II.4 Recruitment methods

To expand the number of individuals participating, various civil society groups have adopted different approaches to their outreach strategies. In Canada, for example, volunteer recruitment involves a combination of historical strategies and innovative initiatives. Traditionally, Canadian sponsor groups use word of mouth to form groups and invite friends and neighbours from the same community network to join them. They also encourage faith-based groups to form internal committees to assess the extent of interest for their churches to become involved. However, more recently, [Refugee 613](#) and

the [Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization](#) set up the [ReSpo](#) project as an innovative and dedicated effort to enhance sponsor recruitment and sponsor-experience practices. Another creative initiative was envisioned by [the East Kootenay Friends of Refugees Society](#), which made a film about refugee sponsorship and travelled with formerly sponsored refugees to different communities to present the film and to talk about the program ([Citizen and Immigration Canada 2009b](#)). The [Canada Sponsorship Agreement Holders \(SAHs\)](#) have also been working on re-recruiting members of faith-based communities who have previously acted as sponsors. They are incorporated organizations that have signed a sponsorship agreement with the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship. A SAH may be a local, regional, or national organization who may partner with groups or individuals to sponsor refugees under their agreements.

In the UK, the charity [Citizens UK Sponsor Refugees](#) approached potential volunteers, sharing the experiences of established sponsorship groups through individuals who act as ‘ambassadors and mentors’ (Citizens UK Sponsor Refugees, 2021; Phillimore and Reyes, 2019:40). In a similar vein, in Canada, ‘champions’ are individuals selected for their passion for enlarging Canada’s role in refugee settlement (GRSI, 2020b). Among sponsors it is very common to encourage the promotion of the scheme and recruit sponsorship volunteers within their own networks through events to talk to people about the plight of refugees and how they could help ([Sommers, 2021](#)). The [Argentine sponsorship support network](#) provides information and resources about the sponsorship program. International events like the [Global Sponsorship Summit organized by GRSI](#) in May 2021 can be excellent platforms for sponsor groups to promote their desire to continue connecting, share experiences, tools, and best practices, and feel plugged into a global movement.

II.5 Social media and recruitment campaigns

Several sponsorship groups and the international organization supporting the scheme use social media and local newsletters to recruit sponsorship volunteers and engage with their local communities ([UNHCR, 2016](#)). Most governments in countries with sponsorship programs have developed forms, guides, and other resources that are publicly accessible online. The British government has funded the civil society organization ‘[Reset Communities and Refugees](#)’, better known as ‘Reset’, to provide public information about the community sponsorship program and train and support recruited sponsors. Reset uses a framework and [toolkit](#) for sponsorship volunteers interested in spreading the word about private sponsorship through various social media and communication channels (Reset, 2019). In Canada, this function is undertaken by organizations like the Refugee Sponsorship Training Program (RSTP), Refugee 613 and the [Catholic Centre for Immigrants](#), to name but a few. In Argentina, the [Sponsorship Support Network](#) provides information and resources about the sponsorship program. In Ireland, the launch of the [Irish Community Sponsorship](#) program was accompanied by press releases and celebratory events.

The [GRSI](#), which works to assist and inspire countries around the world to open new pathways for refugee protection, has made [several videos](#) which draw on personal anecdotes and testimony from sponsors from different countries, emphasising that anyone can become involved in community sponsorship. Reputable and well-known personalities and public figures have been used to promote the programs. For example, in the case of the humanitarian corridor programs in Italy and France, mainstream media has mostly presented them as a powerful message of solidarity to people across Europe, reinforced by Pope Francis who has lauded the initiative on numerous occasions ([Collyer et al., 2017](#)). In the UK, community sponsorship has been endorsed by Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and well-known British actors like [Peter Capaldi](#) have championed the scheme.

III. Forming groups of sponsors and volunteers in sponsorship schemes

When a community sponsorship group is formed, basic aspects about their structure and management must be taken into consideration. This section discusses how groups determine the number of volunteers, the influence of institutional arrangements in their organization, and how groups adopt different conformations.

III.1 The number of volunteers

The number of volunteers involved in a sponsorship group is highly influenced by the requirements of the scheme ([Marshall and Béland, 2019](#)). However, all models consider a minimum size to prevent the sponsor groups and volunteers from being overburdened and exhausted. In the Canadian model known as the ‘[group of five](#)’, it is compulsory to have a membership of at least five individuals, although the groups can include as many members as possible (The Sponsorship Training Program, 2009). In the UK, the average group consisted of six-to-eight core members who were involved in development and leadership, and an additional ten-to-fifteen sponsorship volunteers who offered support with specific tasks like driving refugees to hospital (Phillimore and Reyes 2019). In Ireland, a minimum of five people is required; three of these must be over 18 years of age and include a primary and secondary sponsor (Finn 2019:26). In the German [NesT – New Start in a Team](#) pilot program, a group must be made up of at least five people, including two who serve as the lead contacts ([Bertram et al., 2020](#)).

III.2 The impact of institutional arrangements

Studies suggest that the formation of sponsors groups depends significantly on how municipal, national, and international authorities facilitate or impede private hospitality by individuals and groups, and how these actors perceive the action -or inaction - of the state (Macklin, 2020; [Krivenko, 2012](#)). All responsibilities taken on by a sponsor are generally outlined in an agreement or contract. This document may contain information about the nature, allocation, and duration of responsibilities between parties involved in the operation of a community sponsorship program. Canada has a sophisticated design that incorporates various modes of sponsorship groups which the government regulates and monitors in different ways. Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs, explained above) are referred to as Constituent Groups (CGs) and the individuals that partner with SAHs are known as sponsors. [Community Sponsors](#) can only sponsor people who have already been officially recognized as a refugee by the UNHCR, other agencies or a foreign state. The policy framework in Canada also includes a role for “[co-sponsors](#)”, who are usually family members who join up with sponsor groups and agree to provide similar mentoring roles ([Government of Canada, 2021](#)). Finally, a [Group of Five \(G5\)](#) comprises five or more Canadian nationals or permanent residents who collectively wish to sponsor the settlement of a refugee and commit to support the refugee throughout the sponsorship period. They are also only able to sponsor people who are recognised as refugees by UNHCR or a foreign state.

In the United Kingdom, Germany, Ireland, and Argentina the governments determine which organizations or groups are eligible to become accredited sponsors until they meet specific requirements ([Bond and Kwadrans, 2019](#)). In Australia, the government appoints [Approved Proposed Organizations](#) who are enabled to support refugees. In Spain, the Basque Government launched the Auzolana II pilot community sponsorship initiative in 2019. In this model an agreement was signed by the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country, the Spanish Ministry of Work, Migration and Social Security, the UNHCR and four organizations of the civil society ([Basque Country, 2021:143](#)).

In contrast with the sponsorship models, the experience of the humanitarian corridor programs indicates a more flexible approach that relies on a close and trusting relationship between the authorities and established sponsor organizations. They sign an accreditation agreement with the authorities and be accountable for the eligibility and financial capacities of groups of sponsorship volunteers at the local level (Agiatello et al., 2019; [MPI-ICF- European Commission, 2018](#)).

III.3 The make-up of sponsor groups

The multi-stakeholder approach, represented by partnerships between grass-roots organizations, community groups, the private sector, individuals, international organizations, and governments, is a much-vaunted feature of sponsorship models. It has been argued that faith-based organizations are the most active in settlement programs worldwide ([Ives and Sinha, 2010](#); [Jones and Teytelboym, 2017](#); [Sacramento et al., 2020](#)). In Italy and France in particular, organizations linked to faith groups are involved in the process of refugee selection, and collect information about applicants from within refugee camps ([Ricci, 2020](#); [ICMC, 2017](#); Mallardo, 2017). Humanitarian corridor programs often operate with sponsorship volunteers, social workers, and the families allocated in each city along the corridor. For example, the Caritas Italy program relies on various kinds of sponsorship volunteers, including a person who acts as a “Family Mentor”. This person is given a leading role in the integration process once the refugees arrive in their host communities. The family mentor shares everyday life with beneficiaries and explains the social and cultural norms and practices that pertain to a refugee’s particular community and city ([Panchetti, Bandl Schnyder, 2020a:9](#)).

More recently, universities have become involved in refugee settlement and in particular in private sponsorship. Programs launched by the World University Service of Canada and the University of Bologna in Italy offer examples of how such organizations can mobilize and reach out to a wide range of resources to build a welcoming environment, not only for refugees, but for the whole university community ([McKee et al., 2019](#); [ICMC Europe and Caritas Europe, 2019](#)).

IV. Developing sponsorship groups

Although the roles of sponsors, settlement service providers and other stakeholders necessarily vary depending on context, all countries with a sponsorship or humanitarian corridor program have a settlement plan that governs how groups will function, organize, and provide services to newly arrived refugees. This section focusses on sponsor motivation and what aspects contribute to sustain their work.

IV.1 Settlement plans

Typically, sponsorship and humanitarian corridors have settlement plans that include the activities and programs to support the integration of the newcomer refugees. The Settlement Plan is a useful planning tool for sponsoring groups to formulate how they intend to deliver the various aspects of settlement assistance needed to help the refugee in a realistic manner. A completed Settlement Plan is proof that a group has carefully thought about the support the newcomers will need to settle successfully in their new country (Citizen and Immigration Canada, 2009ab). The UK and Canada are two countries that have defined guidelines and expectations for their respective settlement plans. In Canada, all [private sponsor groups](#) (Sponsorship Agreement Holders, Group of Five or Community Sponsors) have to submit a Settlement Plan to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) as part of their private sponsorship application. IRCC uses the settlement plan to assess “whether the sponsors have the capacity to fulfill their [financial](#) and non-financial obligations to support the refugees so they can establish successfully in Canada” ([Refugee Sponsorship Training Program Handbook 2014](#)).

In the UK, the government provides a template for the resettlement plan that is included as part of the [community sponsorship application](#). Applicant groups of sponsorship volunteers are required to produce a detailed and credible resettlement plan to illustrate how they will deliver effective support for the sponsored families to make a life for themselves and integrate in the UK (UK Home Office, 2019).

IV.2 Targeting the roles and the responsibilities of sponsors

To sustain the interest of sponsors in sponsorship and encouraging repeat sponsors and new sponsors roles, responsibilities between public and private actors must be clearly defined (GRSI, 2020b). Organizations supporting the schemes have argued that there is a need for formal sponsorship agreements that strike a balance between offering flexibility and clearly defining mutual obligations and implementation frameworks ([ERN-ICMC Europe, 2017](#)). Settlement support roles, responsibilities, and costs are commonly shared by varied actors and the majority of the programs combine local governmental resources with those offered by private citizens, religious organizations, and community groups (Fratzke et al., 2019). Since 2018, resettlement procedures in Germany have been determined by order of the Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community (BMI) in accordance with section 23 sub-section 4 of the Residence Act (Aufenthaltsgesetz) ([German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, 2019](#)). Similarly, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Spain and Argentina have invested in developing a solid framework to define sponsorship roles and responsibilities ([UK Home Office, 2019](#); [Irish Department of Justice and Equality, 2019](#); [Basque Government, 2019](#); [Cymant, 2019](#)). Finally, the humanitarian corridor programs in Italy and France have worked based on a Memorandum of Understanding that formalizes in broad terms the cooperation between government and sponsors, with few details in respect to implementation ([Tardis, 2018](#)).

IV.3 Coordination and communication among stakeholders

Despite the need to clearly demarcate responsibilities between government, civil society, and sponsor groups (as discussed above), sponsorship programs experience challenges in organization and motivation due to the number of actors that are involved in the sponsorship program, and the complexity of the settlement system. Research has found that a direct line of communication between government and the actors involved in the programs helps to improve their coordination to support sponsors doing their job and maintain their sustainability (GRSI, 2021b; Nancarrow and Taylor, 2020). In France, a protocol signed in March 2017 between the French Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and five faith-based organizations encourages strong coordination between the sponsoring organizations, the French embassy in Beirut, and the UNHCR and IOM (Tardis, 2018:11-12). The Basque Government in Spain promotes regular meetings among integration stakeholders to facilitate refugees' social and financial integration (Basque Government, 2019). In Germany, the responsibility for implementing the NesT program lies with the Federal Ministry of the Interior in close cooperation with the UNHCR, social welfare organizations and the Protestant and Catholic churches. The Civil Society Contact Point (ZKS) was set up as a focal point to inform, advise and train sponsors ([UNHCR Germany 2019](#)).

Coordination platforms in some countries are supported by national governments, such as [Reset](#) in the United Kingdom, or Amnesty International in [Argentina](#) and [New Zealand](#). In Italy, the pre-arrival stage is accomplished through several actions aimed at giving sponsorship volunteers the necessary training and information. A highly developed multilevel structure was created between sponsors of the program operating at the national, diocesan, and parish level (Panchetti, B and I Schnyder, 2020a). In Canada, SAHs play a coordinating role across the country on over-arching policy issues and speak with a common voice to the Government of Canada (Kwadran, 2021). In 2021, the [Allies for Refugee Integration](#) (ARI) Project launched the [Intentional Connections for Welcoming Communities](#) initiative in Canada, focused on creating more welcoming communities for privately sponsored refugees through improving communication and coordination among stakeholders. The ARI Project addresses gaps in knowledge, relationships and operations between private sponsors and the formal settlement sector, as sponsors often do not know what services sponsored refugees are entitled to, or how to access those services.

IV.4 Skills and training

The development of a sponsor group can be improved with the skills and training provided to their membership. Indeed, the extent to which sponsorship facilitates integration depends to a certain degree on how well-prepared sponsors are able to fulfill their responsibilities. Strong Training programs with easily accessible support should be available on an ongoing basis as good practice in all sponsorship programs. Meanwhile, insufficient training or support for sponsorship volunteers and sponsors can lead to gaps in service provision and, in extreme cases, re-traumatization of refugees (Fratzke et al., 2019:9; GRSI, 2021a). In some program policy settings, training is mandatory (for example, the UK and Germany), whereas in others it is optional (for example, Canada).

In the UK, [Citizens UK](#) and [Reset](#) provide special training and advice for sponsorship volunteers in specific areas like: how to build a strong group; working with local authorities; benefits; language; employment; and preparing for the end of the sponsorship agreement. In Germany, the ZKS liaises with organizations who have years of experience in working with refugees and volunteers to provide training. In Canada, the IRCC makes standardized learning tools available through the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program. These include [the Refugee Sponsorship Training Program](#) and online material to help better manage the outcomes of sponsorship (Citizen and Immigration Canada, 2009ab; The Refugee Sponsorship Training program, 2009). Many other resources are offered by settlement agencies, non-profit organizations and SAH organizations that provide workshops, webinars and support ([GRSI, 2015](#); Neelin, 2020).

V. Sustainability

The growing body of research on sponsorship programs indicates that the ability to address sponsor groups' internal needs, expectations and performance contributes to their long-term maintenance. This section focuses on good practice around group management, including mentoring and expectations about the duration of the programs. It also discusses the relevance of financial support, especially if a sponsorship breaks down. It concludes by explaining the relevance of evaluation.

V.1 Good practice in managing sponsor groups and volunteers

There is evidence that successful sponsor groups are those who provide their team members with the right conditions to develop and grow. In the UK, research that included 145 volunteers from 22 sponsorship groups identified the following good practices that allowed them to build their groups (Phillimore et al., 2020:12-13): clear direction and good leadership; appropriate delegation of activities; open communication; responsibility and internal accountability, enabling teams to achieve their aims; engaging with different opinions; friendship; and a sense of humour.

Arguably, sponsorship sustainability also depends on the positive experiences and encouragement that volunteers and staff from the sponsor groups gain along their journey resettling refugees. In the Canadian model, SAHs support groups and cosponsors at every milestone, encouraging them throughout the entire sponsorship process (The Refugee Sponsorship Training Program, 2015:27). Similarly, mentoring between experienced and new sponsors can help the latter to better understand their roles, and provide guidance and support when unexpected challenges arise. Conferences or conventions for sponsors at a national or regional level, supported by private funders, provide another way for sponsors to share best practices and lessons learned (Citizen and Immigration Canada, 2009ab; Canadian Council for Refugees, 2017).

On the other hand, sponsorship programs can be emotionally exhausting endeavours, and sponsor 'burnout' is a very real risk. Policy literature argues that it is good practice to convene fora that provide a safe space for sponsorship volunteers to share their experiences and express frustration, discuss challenges, and seek advice (Fratzke and Dorst, 2019).

V.2 The need for clear information about the duration of the program

Providing support directly to sponsors is time-consuming and often not something that national authorities are well-equipped to provide ([Agrawal and Sangapala, 2021](#)). Despite extensive planning, sponsors generally find the first months after a family's arrival to be challenging. Completing all the paperwork associated with settlement is a huge task for sponsorship volunteers and refugees, many of whom had not come across such bureaucracy before (Nancarrow & Marlow, 2020; [Bolt, 2020](#); [Phillimore et al., 2020](#)). On the other hand, refugees frequently struggle with employability because of a lack of recognition of previous education, experience or training. Hence, sponsorship groups and volunteers need to realize that the settlement process can take longer than expected due to a denial of paid work ([Phillimore et al., 2020](#); [Hyndman and Hynes, 2016](#)).

V.3 Financial support and breakdown

Providing dedicated financial resources to sponsor groups is important to expand the reach of volunteer programs and improve their effectiveness in the long term ([Fratzke and Dorst, 2019](#)). Nevertheless, taking into consideration rising costs of living and housing in the global north, it is uncertain whether the next generation of sponsors will have the financial security to engage in supporting refugee settlement to the same extent as today ([Bateman, 2021](#)).

Some programs require sponsors to take on most of the settlement costs for the sponsorship period (for example, Canada, Argentina, and Italy), while other programs such as that of the UK require volunteers to fundraise for a minimum amount, and to ensure that a combination of public benefits and sponsors' financial contributions will be adequate to covering the beneficiaries' basic needs. In Europe, except for the UK and Ireland, sponsorship programs have not envisaged official screening of sponsors to ensure that they have the financial capacity to implement sponsorship initiatives ([ERN-ICMC, 2017](#)). In the UK, once a group of volunteers has formed and gained the appropriate organisational status, or partnered with a sponsor charity, the group must submit evidence of financial capacity and a viable settlement plan as preconditions for approval (UK Home Office, 2019). In France and Italy, there is no such formalized procedure. Their programs have emerged after intensive advocacy efforts of organizations and negotiations with government ([Agatiello et al., 2020](#)). In Canada, the SAHs, CGs, or co-sponsors can be responsible for providing one year of financial support to the refugees; however, they must show that they have sufficient financial resources available to support the sponsored refugees for the duration of the sponsorship period ([The Refugee Sponsorship Training Program, 2018](#)).

All community sponsorship models involve an important financial responsibility on the part of sponsors toward sponsored refugees. Occasionally, however, sponsorship relationships break down and when they do, mechanisms need to be in place to ensure refugees get the support they need, and to reduce the liability for sponsors. A sponsorship breakdown is an official declaration of an "irreparable failure" to meet the sponsorship arrangement between the sponsors and the newcomers they have sponsored ([GRSI, 2021b:21](#)). In the case of Canada, the responsibility for a sponsorship breakdown may rest with the sponsors, the newcomers, IRCC, or none of the parties. If the sponsoring group is determined to be responsible, IRCC will assess if they should be found to be in default of the sponsorship ([Refugee Sponsorship Training Program, 2018](#)).

V.4 Evaluation and monitoring

To sustain sponsors' and volunteers' motivations for their work over the long term, screening and monitoring of their functioning is essential, especially in early pilot phases. This type of support would build knowledge about sponsorship program operations and impact as part of, or in addition to, government monitoring ([Beiser, 2003](#)). Civil society organizations may be able to more effectively gather data on certain program elements, such as the impact on sponsors and communities. This data can be used in campaigns to recruit sponsorship volunteers and generate incentives to boost the emergence of new groups ([Nancarrow and Marlow, 2020](#); [Hyndman et al., 2021](#)).

The French and the Italian schemes envisage evaluation at the end of their programs. Midterm evaluations and feedback among practitioners can be used to improve groups' experiences at an even earlier stage (Tardis, 2018). In the United Kingdom, the government focuses primarily on collecting quantitative data, while the charity Reset, in collaboration with the University of Birmingham, uses qualitative indicators, collecting personal stories from all key stakeholders to understand the scheme's functioning (Phillimore et al., 2020). In the Canadian model, as per the Sponsorship Agreement, SAHs are responsible for monitoring CGS or cosponsors and their individual undertakings. Moreover, when problems arise which could lead to a possible breakdown, the SAH will work cooperatively with IRCC to resolve the issues (The Refugee Sponsorship Training program, 2015: 23). IRCC also has an [evaluations unit](#), and conducts program evaluations of the PSR, BVOR, and GAR programs at intervals.

VI. Knowledge gaps

The literature reviewed in the above sections identified some key topics where there is scope for further research:

- The first one is related to the motivations of sponsor groups and volunteers to join e community sponsorship and humanitarian corridor programs. Although community-based models create a unique structure for people to channel their motivation to support refugees, only a few qualitative studies have explored individuals' reasons for pursuing that responsibility.
- The definition of the roles and responsibilities of the different stakeholders involved in the humanitarian corridor programs has scarcely been studied. Some policy papers have pointed to the need for stronger legislative frameworks in this model, scaled up across Europe, but those arguments lack empirical evidence.
- Another aspect worthy of further research is related to the national government's responsibility for providing resources and services to refugees supported by private sponsorship models. High financial costs discourage the involvement of prospective sponsors, and fewer (and less diverse) people will sponsor refugees. So far, the sponsorship programs devolve settlement work to the local level, reducing the government's responsibilities. However, some scholars have warned that shifting costs onto private citizens may affect the quality of services offered to refugees during their initial settlement. In Australia, the community sponsorship program has been criticized for requiring sponsors to pay fees that bear no clear or direct correlation with the real costs of settlement. Hirsch and colleagues argued that the cost of participating in the program is prohibitive and it has been used as a revenue-raising measure led by the privatization of public services (2019:118)
- Looking at the challenges ahead for private sponsorship models, it is also necessary to reflect on the demographic change that is taking place in the global north and its potential impact on the sustainability of the programs.

VII. Ongoing and future research opportunities

Private sponsorship initiatives can learn from frameworks and experiences developed under national settlement programs, particularly with respect to methods for recruiting new volunteers, best practice in developing a group, and incentives and ideas for sustaining them for the duration of the program. Combining innovative practices implemented under sponsorship programs with the experience of traditional settlement actors allows civil society, the private sector, and local and national governments to develop successful programs across the board.

Experienced sponsorship groups, international organization such as the UNHCR and IOM, local authorities, and other stakeholders such as local refugee service providers, can offer decades of experience and technical expertise that can be very beneficial for emerging groups. In that respect, ongoing research is focusing on new practices to continue supporting the sponsorship groups and volunteers in the face of international crises, or economic downturn.

The Covid-19 pandemic that started in 2020 was a huge test for the flexibility, management, and creativity of all sponsorship stakeholders. The experience of services adapting rapidly under pandemic conditions have led groups to imagine that, once pandemic restrictions are lifted, they can adopt a hybrid model of support that will combine in-person attention with new modalities of virtual support when it is appropriate and more cost effective ([Panchetti, Bandl Schnyder, 2020b](#); Reyes-Soto and Phillimore, 2021). In 2020, the GRSI ran a series of workshops for sponsors, civil society partners and Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs) on this topic.

Finally, it is necessary for new research projects to focus on concerns about how to grow and maintain strong sponsor groups and learn from other humanitarian and social justice projects that also mobilize the support of volunteers.

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