



## COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP AND THE RESETTLEMENT OF REFUGEES

*Promising practices on how migrants can best be integrated into society in the European Union.*

*Paper to the European Parliament Intergroup Fighting Against Poverty, Caritas Europa and Citalia. European Parliament, Wednesday 25 January 2017.*

*Mark Wiggin, Caritas Social Action Network.<sup>1</sup>*

### ABSTRACT

This paper sets out to describe the Community Sponsorship model for refugee resettlement first developed in Canada<sup>2</sup> and now piloted in the UK<sup>3</sup>. This model is important to study as many countries are seeking new solutions to the resettlement of refugees. The model's strength is that it has the potential to allow citizens themselves to engage and lead in the resettlement process of refugees. Key to the success of the model is the partnership between government and civil society that leads to a new mutually beneficial relationship between the host community and the incoming refugee. The model has an advantage over existing government led initiatives as it offers a new pathway for the State to work in partnership with local communities to find enduring solutions to the problem of refugee integration into a new society. Through community sponsorship the benefits expressed in Catholic social teaching of association and participation have an exciting opportunity to flourish by bringing a wide variety of communities closer together in closer association to deliver the model, and by encouraging the full participation of refugees in their new host communities. The Community Sponsorship model is also congruent with the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity as expressed in Catholic social teaching and offers citizens themselves the opportunity to reframe the political debate on migration through the prism of engaged and welcoming communities.

### INTRODUCTION

It is a privilege to be invited to represent Caritas Social Action Network (CSAN), a member of Caritas Europe, to take part in such an important opportunity to share experience in the resettlement of refugees and strengthen the dialogue between governments and civil society. The exchange of best practice in the area of refugee resettlement and the integration of refugees into new, safe and welcoming communities is both timely and urgent as today the

---

<sup>1</sup> Mark Wiggin is the CEO of Caritas Diocese of Salford and a member of Caritas Social Action Network the official domestic social action charity of the Catholic church in England and Wales.

<sup>2</sup> Information on the Canadian model is based on Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada provided to participants at the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative held in Ottawa, Canada 15<sup>th</sup> December 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Information on the UK community sponsorship model is based on the first hand experience of Caritas Diocese of Salford and St. Monica's RC Parish, Flixton – the first community sponsor and host to a refugee family in the UK under the new scheme.

strains are felt across Europe by those countries that have opened their borders to offer protection to refugees. These countries are now facing the challenging task of integration and the full inclusion of refugees into their communities.

The protection and resettlement of refugees is a fundamental humanitarian responsibility of both the State and its citizens. The many charities and faith groups in the UK that have worked closely with the Home Office to create the first Community Sponsorship pathway have modelled the scheme on the Private Sponsorship model that has been operating in Canada for nearly 40 years. This model, known as the ‘Canadian model’, plays an important role in the State’s ability to protect refugees and to facilitate their resettlement, integration and inclusion into welcoming new communities.

### THE CANADIAN MODEL OF PRIVATE SPONSORSHIP

Canadian citizens and permanent residents provide opportunities for some refugees to find protection and build a new life through Canada’s Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) Program. Since the late 1970s, private sponsors have brought more than 288,000 refugees to Canada, over and above those resettled with government funding<sup>4</sup>. Under the private sponsorship scheme, Canadians, over the last two years have welcomed over 37,000 Syrian refugees into their country. The Canadian approach to refugee resettlement is a combination of government and private refugee sponsorship offered through three programme streams:

1. Canadian government assisted refugees – government provides income support, resettlement services and integration support
2. Privately sponsored refugees – community provides income support, resettlement services and integration support
3. Blended sponsorship - private sponsors and government jointly provide income support, resettlement services and integration support.

Private sponsorships are arranged by ordinary Canadian citizens and most sponsors are associated with faith-based organizations, community and humanitarian associations. These groups agree to provide incoming refugees with support for the duration of the sponsorship period. Support is usually provided for 12 months starting from the refugee’s arrival in Canada or until the refugee becomes self-sufficient, whichever comes first. Under the Canadian model private sponsors are required to demonstrate that they have the necessary funds and volunteer base to support the refugees they are sponsoring. Private sponsors typically support the sponsored refugees by:

- providing the cost of food, rent and household utilities and other day-to-day living expenses;
- providing clothing, furniture and other household goods;
- locating interpreters;
- selecting a family doctor and dentist;
- assisting with applying for provincial health care coverage;
- enrolling children in school and adults in language training;
- introducing newcomers to people with similar personal interests;

---

<sup>4</sup> Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. Presentation at the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative, Ottawa 15<sup>th</sup> December 2016.

- providing orientation with regard to banking services, transportation, etc.; and
- helping in the search for employment.

Two notable features of the Canadian model are 1) a group of five citizens can become a sponsoring group and 2) under the model there is a strong impetus towards refugee family reunification. There is also some interesting data emerging from the Canadian experience. First, it seems to be accepted that the process towards integration and self-sufficiency into Canadian society is quicker under the private sponsorship scheme than the government scheme. However, there is no clear proof that privately sponsored refugees have better long-term outcomes than the government-assisted schemes; an important caveat to this assertion is that the sponsored refugee cohorts are different in terms of vulnerability and family connections making direct comparison difficult. Second, and most important, is that there is no evidence of refugee sponsorship fatigue. On the contrary, demand for the scheme amongst citizens outstrips the supply of refugees that the Canadian government can supply.

Evidence from Canada also confirms that the role of volunteers goes far beyond the role of ‘welcoming the stranger.’ For example, volunteers help refugees under the scheme to gain a foothold in the labour market and since labour market integration is in many European countries still a medium term process, volunteering and volunteer involvement in job seeking needs to be an essential ingredient in any new European resettlement scheme as volunteers create networks, connect with society and help refugees to obtain professional experience.<sup>5</sup> Volunteers also make good advocates who maintain public and political support for refugees and positive government immigration policies.

The Private Sponsorship schemes also benefits the local communities by allowing communities to come together round a shared common purpose that gives meaning to people’s lives in a way that they may not otherwise have experienced without the beneficial life-changing opportunity to help vulnerable people in need. As one volunteer at St. Basil’s Catholic parish in Ottawa, Canada said about her involvement as a host to a refugee family, ‘it’s about joy. I have never laughed so much and had total pride in what they achieve.’

#### THE UK MODEL OF COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP

Since 2004, Britain has been resettling around 750 refugees every year through the Gateway Protection Programme. In September 2015, the UK Government pledged to resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees via the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement (VPR) scheme. This scheme is operated through the local authorities who deliver the scheme directly or contract out the responsibility to deliver it to either the private or voluntary sector. In July 2016, the UK government, through the Home Office launched the new Community Sponsorship scheme modelled on the highly successful private sponsorship programme in Canada. Syrian refugees coming to the UK under the new Community Sponsorship model are included in the 20,000 resettlement quota up to that the government had announced.

The Home Office Community Sponsorship scheme will guarantee that each family has resettlement status for a minimum of 5 years with entitlement to housing benefit and job seeker allowance. They will also provide independent monitoring and evaluation of the

---

<sup>5</sup> Responsibility and Solution Sharing: The role of religious organisations responding to large migrant and refugee movements. Petra Hueck, International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) Europe. Paper given in New York 19<sup>th</sup> September 2016.

project. The first Syrian refugees under the new Community Sponsorship programme arrived in Manchester on the 9<sup>th</sup> November 2015. The sponsoring charity was Caritas Diocese of Salford and the host community was the parish of St. Monica's in the Diocese of Salford.

The application to be a UK sponsor is currently restricted to registered charities. Like all sponsors, Caritas was required to submit a detailed resettlement plan, approved by the Home Office that covered one year of support to the refugee family and included:

- The provision of housing (guaranteed for a 2 year period)
- Orientation into new community provided by volunteers
- Registration with essential services e.g. Education & Health
- English language classes
- Assistance to find employment

The St. Monica's parish resettlement plan is supported by over twenty-five volunteers who have committed themselves to supporting the refugee family to integrate into their new community. In time, it is hoped these volunteers will lose the label of 'volunteer' and just become 'good neighbours' or 'friends' rather than people with a voluntary role to fulfil. Underpinning the plan is the target of assisting the family towards standing on their own feet and becoming self-supporting through employment.

So far, so good. The family of two parents and three children, all under the age of ten years, are settling in well, learning English and the children are already in school. Dad is a restaurant chef and is currently using his skills on a voluntary basis to cook food in a night shelter for homeless people before seeking paid employment. One volunteer at St. Monica's on an early visit to the father of the family noted, 'During our conversation I was able to establish his desire to work, his desire to learn English his feeling of safety, his appreciation of the support he is receiving, and his frustration of wanting to know more do more and to be self sufficient. I was humbled by his gratitude, his ambition, and his desire to help and to improve himself'.

Working alongside the host community of volunteers at St. Monica's is the charity Caritas Diocese of Salford that provides professional help to the volunteers especially in the areas of child protection and safeguarding, acting as a guarantor to the Home Office. The scheme to succeed will require the commitment and time of local people who as 'host' volunteers will need to be protected by the safety net of a professional sponsoring organisation such as Caritas that can support the parish to establish the scheme and can offer advice, guidance and expertise in management as well as accountability to the Home Office.

Even at this very early stage of the UK Community Sponsorship scheme pilot there are some identified challenges and potential barriers to the development of a success pilot that include:

- Securing housing and accommodation. This is a critical issue particularly in areas where housing stock is in short supply or where rents are high. Further involvement with the scheme by housing providers - housing associations, social and private landlords is needed.
- Narrowing the time between the approval of sponsors and the arrival of the refugee family. This will keep sponsors engaged and reduce the risk of the host community accruing unnecessary additional costs associated with retaining vacant accommodation.

- Focusing on the host volunteers stories rather than the stories of the refugees themselves can help develop positive publicity and win over sceptics. What key messages charities and volunteers galvanise around need to be identified at an early stage.
- Measuring the additionally and the inherent benefits of the community sponsorship model needs to start now. Social and economic progress is perhaps the most important indicator of successful integration. Socio-economic exclusion is a sign of integration failure. These indicator need to be captured to evidence the effectiveness of the model.

The Home Office, to accomplish its objective of welcoming refugees under the Community Sponsorship scheme now needs to build civil society's capacity to increase the number of trusted sponsors and develop an infrastructure that can deliver a scaled-up scheme. Finding and working with trusted partners will be crucial to a successful programme if the scheme is to attract high quality applications from local community groups. The time frame for capacity building offers only a small window of immediate opportunity for the current cohort of Syrian refugees the Government has committed to but in the long term investment in this model will offer the opportunity to welcome more refugees in to the UK and the scheme, will in time, also lend itself to addressing the important issue of family reunification.

#### ADVANTAGES OF THE SPONSORSHIP MODEL

The Community sponsorship model builds on the commitment of a community to play a vital role in the resettlement process and allows citizens to engage directly in the resettlement of refugees. This commitment creates strong support networks for current and future refugees and most importantly builds welcoming communities. Facilitating refugee integration requires a broad range of initiatives at all levels of society, by individuals, churches, and other local organisations. Recently published, *Welcome Migrants-Make Europe Stronger* stresses that 'successful integration is unlikely, if the burden of responsibility continues to be placed on the migrants without receiving communities fostering their full participation, empowerment, and inclusion'.<sup>6</sup> As the recent Casey Review on UK immigration and integration reported: 'For generations we have welcomed immigrants to the UK but left them to find their own way in society while leaving host communities to accommodate them and the growing diversity of our nation.'<sup>7</sup>

At a national level, Community Sponsorship allows for the advanced planning and preparation at community level for refugee arrivals. The addition of a Community Sponsorship programme alongside existing government assisted programmes also has the potential to significantly increase resettlement places for vulnerable refugees. Bringing together government policy and citizens committed to the welcome and inclusion of refugees is a powerful partnership that the new Community Sponsorship programme in the UK has now made possible.

In summary the advantages and benefits can be summed up as:

---

<sup>6</sup> *Welcome Migrants- Make Europe Stronger*, Caritas practices for an inclusive Europe. Antonio Fantasia and Shannon Pfohman, December 2016, page 16.

<sup>7</sup> *The Casey Review: a review into opportunity and integration*, Dame Louise Casey, Department for Communities and Local Government, December 2016. p.15.

1. Refugee resettlement becomes the responsibility of ordinary people, citizens and communities and not entirely the responsibility of government and local authorities as it currently is.
2. Sponsorship offers the potential for a new relationship between government and citizens leading to the joint ownership and a shared responsibility for the outcomes of the scheme.
3. Refugees are personally supported to be part of the community by volunteers not just paid professionals.
4. The sponsorship approach identifies and utilises a wide skills base from the parish and the community and can attract new people to volunteer from the parish or community.
5. The model puts the local community and volunteers at the heart of the refugee family and at the heart of the resettlement and integration process.
6. Integration and resettlement empowers volunteers and communities to be a positive voice to advocate for refugees.

Capturing the additional benefits of the Community Sponsorship model and its positive outcomes for integration, resettlement and community cohesion is an important task as an evidence-based approach to successful resettlement and is essential if the model is to be adopted and adapted by other countries. Of course, what works for Canada or the UK will not necessarily work for countries in Europe – but the experience of the Canadians and now the UK is invaluable to help other European countries develop their own models of community sponsorship.

## CONCLUSION

Community Sponsorship can add new pathways for refugees in need of protection, resettlement and integration. The Canadian experience of refugee resettlement has given other countries a very useful resettlement model to assist and encourage the expansion of resettlement programmes.

To bring the community sponsorship model to life requires a legislative framework to enable host countries to empower its citizens to take ownership and responsibility for the process. It also requires inter-agency cooperation and buy-in from a variety of government and non-government organisations to work together. Given the legislative framework can be put in place in a country to allow community sponsorship to thrive, a new partnership between government and civil society can be created with the ultimate goals of increasing refugee protection, mobilizing the compassion that exists in communities and bringing together people to help each other.

Integral to the success of the model is the role of volunteers. Volunteers can go beyond assisting refugees through the resettlement and integration process by taking responsibility for the process itself and its desired outcomes. To do this properly, volunteers need to become full partners in every stage of the process pre and post arrival through the development of inclusive policies, funding for coordination, and tools to support, manage and support volunteers.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Building a Resettlement Network of European Cities and Regions. International Catholic Migration Commission and SHARE December 2015 Page 47

At the heart of Community Sponsorship is the potential for a new relationship between the State and the citizen to protect refugees. This relationship is expressed in Catholic social teaching by the two interconnected principles of solidarity and subsidiarity. Solidarity promotes collaborative working for the common good between groups: the State, community and the individual citizen. Subsidiarity promotes the engagement of social issues at the grassroots community level and rejects the message that many have internalised: that we are powerless to change the world around us. Both principles recognise and promote the important idea that government, local organisations and citizens should work together in partnerships that promote the common good of all people, particularly the most vulnerable – the refugee seeking sanctuary and safety.

For further information please contact

Mark Wiggin  
Caritas Diocese of Salford  
Cathedral Centre  
3 Ford Street Salford M3 6DP  
T: +44(0)161 817 2250  
F: +44(0)161 833 1635  
E: [M.Wiggin@caritassalford.org.uk](mailto:M.Wiggin@caritassalford.org.uk)  
W: [www.caritassalford.org.uk](http://www.caritassalford.org.uk)

Dr Philip McCarthy  
CSAN (Caritas Social Action Network)  
Romero House,  
55 Westminster Bridge Rd.  
London, SE1 7JB  
Office: +44(0)20 7870 2210  
[philip.mccarthy@csan.org.uk](mailto:philip.mccarthy@csan.org.uk)  
[www.csan.org.uk](http://www.csan.org.uk)

Dr Shannon Pfohman  
Policy and Advocacy Director  
Caritas Europe  
Rue de la Charité, 43  
1210 Brussels – Belgium  
T: +32 (0) 2 235 26 51  
M: +32 (0) 4 76 98 44 77  
[SPfohman@caritas.eu](mailto:SPfohman@caritas.eu)  
<http://www.caritas.eu>