

The feasibility of

Community-based Sponsorship

of refugees in Denmark



This report is based on an internal scoping paper prepared for Amnesty International Denmark in April 2019 written by Nikolas Feith Tan and Annette Stubkjær Rimmer. This updated version provides an overview of existing literature and practice on community-based sponsorship of refugees and a preliminary assessment of the feasibility of the model in the Danish context.

Table of contents

1	Setting the scene.....	4
1.1	The current refugee situation and the role of resettlement	4
1.2	What is community-based sponsorship?	5
1.3	The current interest in community-based sponsorship	5
2	Features of community-based sponsorship	7
2.1	The role of national actors	7
2.2	Benefits of community-based sponsorship	8
3	Practice & Literature.....	10
3.1	Existing practice on community-based sponsorship.....	10
3.2	Existing literature on community-based sponsorship	12
4	The Danish context.....	15
4.1	Political context.....	15
4.2	Civil society context	16
4.3	Legal context.....	17
4.4	Financial context.....	18
5	Conclusion.....	20
	References.....	21

1 Setting the scene

1.1 *The current refugee situation and the role of resettlement*

Record levels of displacement show the need for innovative solutions to refugee protection. There are currently 20.4 million refugees globally,¹ 13.4 million of whom are in protracted situations.² Resettlement is one of three internationally recognised durable solutions for refugees, alongside voluntary repatriation and local integration, involving the transfer of a refugee to a state that has agreed to admit them for long-term settlement. There are currently 1.4 million refugees in need of resettlement, with just 55,600 refugees resettled in 2018 by UNHCR – showing the need for the scaling up of resettlement in years to come.³

Resettlement is a concrete form of responsibility sharing. The lack of a binding or detailed responsibility sharing mechanism for the protection of refugees is well-known, with no substantive obligations on states to cooperate on refugees in the text of the 1951 Refugee Convention. In the absence of a binding principle in this area, ‘responsibility by proximity’ has become the norm in the international refugee system.⁴ Resettlement is not an international legal obligation but rather a discretionary policy choice.⁵

Resettlement is attractive to governments for a number of reasons. First, resettlement involves the orderly movement of recognised refugees across international borders, in some contrast to the spontaneous arrival of asylum seekers.⁶ Second, resettlement involves the predictable allocation of annual quotas, allowing states to predetermine how many refugees receive protection in a given year. Third, resettlement allows states to permit access to recognised refugees only, thereby avoiding the entry of migrants not requiring international protection. This is particularly relevant in Europe, where return rates hover around 40 per cent.⁷ Fourth, in a number of states, admission of refugees under an organised resettlement program tends to be more politically popular than the admission

¹ UNHCR, *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2018*. This figure does not include Palestinian refugees under the United Nations Refugee Works Agency (UNRWA).

² UNHCR defines a protracted refugee situation as ‘one in which refugees find themselves in a long-lasting and intractable state of limbo. Their lives may not be at risk, but their basic rights and essential economic, social and psychological needs remain unfulfilled after years in exile. A refugee in this situation is often unable to break free from enforced reliance on external assistance’. UNHCR, ‘Protracted Refugee Situations’, Executive Committee of the High Commissioner’s Programme, Standing Committee, 30th Meeting, UN Doc. EC/54/SC/CRP.14, 10 June 2004, 2.

³ UNHCR, *Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2019*; UNHCR, *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2017* 29; UNHCR, *The Three-Year (2019-2021) Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways*. (2019).

⁴ Doyle, M. W. (2018). *Responsibility Sharing: From Principle to Policy*. *International Journal of Refugee Law*.

⁵ Selm, J. S. (2004). ‘The strategic use of resettlement: changing the face of protection?’ *Refugee* 22: 41.

⁶ In 2004 Van Selm noted: ‘The emerging thought in Europe is that if a country resettles refugees, as opposed to seeing them arrive spontaneously, the authorities know who they are, the people enter legally, and the process can be managed.’ Van Selm (2004) 43.

⁷ European Migration Network, *The effectiveness of return in EU Member States* (2017) 8.

of asylum seekers, as it avoids irregular entry through smuggling networks.⁸ Fifth, resettlement helps the most vulnerable people identified by UNHCR who may be stuck in refugee camps and do not have the means to leave themselves.

1.2 *What is community-based sponsorship?*

Community-based sponsorship can be categorised as either a tool for resettlement or a separate complementary pathway. Complementary pathways for admission are safe and regulated avenues providing access to international protection in third countries.⁹ Complementary pathways are diverse by nature and include family reunification, scholarships and education programmes, labour mobility schemes, and community-based sponsorship.

In recent years, community-based sponsorship has gained particular interest and momentum, with schemes operating – on a pilot or permanent basis – in countries including Argentina, Australia, Germany, Ireland, New Zealand, Spain and the United Kingdom.¹⁰ Community-based sponsorship is sometimes also referred to as private refugee sponsorship, which originated in Canada 40 years ago and has led to the resettlement of more than 300,000 refugees in that country.

There is no settled definition of community-based sponsorship, but the essence of the concept is to give individuals, groups or organisations the possibility to sponsor a refugee or refugee family to their country, thus transferring responsibility for some elements of refugees' integration from the state to civil society.¹¹ Community-based sponsorship comprises the following elements:

- The planned arrival of refugees for resettlement;
- Community responsibility for financial and integration support to refugees for a certain period; and
- Government authorities retain ultimate responsibility for community sponsorship.¹²

1.3 *The current interest in community-based sponsorship*

Historically, resettlement and refugee integration have been exclusively the function of government authorities. The European migrant and refugee crisis and the grave global refugee situation have driven a search for innovative and civil society-based solutions for refugees. The spontaneous arrival of more than one million asylum seekers to Europe in 2015 saw a surge of volunteer-based civil society groups helping asylum seekers and refugees. According to one study, one in ten Germans

⁸ Van Selm (2004) 47; and Fiona H McKay, Samantha L Thomas and Susan Kneebone (2015). It would be okay if they came through the proper channels': Community perceptions and attitudes toward asylum seekers in Australia *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25: 113.

⁹ OECD-UNHCR Study on third country solutions for refugees (2018).

¹⁰ See, for example, this joint statement by Ministers from Canada, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Argentina, Spain and New Zealand, <http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/PR18000245>

¹¹ European Resettlement Network (2018). Private Sponsorship Feasibility Study - Towards a Private Sponsorship Model in France 6; and European Commission. (2018). Study on the feasibility and added value of sponsorship schemes as a possible pathway to safe channels for admission to the EU, including resettlement 37.

¹² European Commission (2018) 4; and Fratzke, S. (2017). Engaging communities in refugee protection 1.

provided voluntary, financial or in-kind support to refugees in that year.¹³ In Denmark, groups like Venligboerne and Bedsteforældre for Asyl gained great support. Venligboerne, for example, whose mission is to meet every person with an open mind and a friendly attitude, were overwhelmed with new members wanting to help asylum seekers in 2015. Within the first five years of its existence, 150,000 members joined the organisation.¹⁴

Since 2015, there has been intense interest in community-based sponsorship in Europe and elsewhere.¹⁵ In 2016, the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (GRSI), a joint project of the Government of Canada, UNHCR, Open Society and the University of Ottawa, was created. The GRSI has a mandate to 'assist and inspire countries around the world to open new pathways for refugee protection.'¹⁶

In December 2018, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Global Compact on Refugees. The Compact, a non-binding and voluntary agreement, is a significant attempt at global responsibility sharing reform. The Compact calls for increased resettlement among both established and emerging resettlement countries (paras 90-3).¹⁷ The Compact also promotes the uptake of complementary pathways to third country protection, referring to a suite of avenues ranging from family reunification pathways, community-based sponsorship, humanitarian visas, humanitarian corridors and educational opportunities for refugees (para 95). The Compact underscores the importance of complementary pathways being additional to state resettlement.

In June 2019, UNHCR released its *Three-Year Strategy (2019-2021) on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways*, which builds momentum for the development of complementary pathways globally, including community sponsorship schemes. In December 2019, the first Global Refugee Forum will be held, with pledges sought from states and other stakeholders under the Compact.

¹³ Fratzke, S. (2017). Engaging communities in refugee protection, 3.

¹⁴ Information (2017), "Er kæmpesuccessen Venligboerne en døgnflue eller en bæredygtig bevægelse?", <https://www.information.dk/debat/2017/03/kaempesuccessen-venligboerne-doenflue-baeredygtig-bevaegelse>

¹⁵ Lenard, P. T. (2016). Resettling refugees: is private sponsorship a just way forward? *Journal of Global Ethics* 12(3): 300-310; Ritchie, G. (2018). Civil society, the state, and private sponsorship: the political economy of refugee resettlement. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*: 1-13.; and Hyndman, J., W. Payne and S. Jimenez (2017). Private refugee sponsorship in Canada. *Forced Migration Review* 54: 56-59.

¹⁶ For more information see <http://refugeesponsorship.org/>.

¹⁷ The 2016 New York Declaration and its Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) also call for the expansion of expanding of resettlement and other alternative avenues to asylum for refugees, as a form of responsibility sharing. New York Declaration, GA Res 71/1, UNGAOR, 71st Session, UN Doc A/Res/71/1, (2017).

2 Features of community-based sponsorship

2.1 *The role of national actors*

A successful community-based sponsorship model must include support and a close relationship between national civil society actors, immigration authorities and the government. The following briefly sets out the role and responsibilities of these key actors in a national community-based sponsorship model, drawing on international practice.

National immigration authorities

While community-based sponsorship is a 'bottom-up' approach, state ministries play a key role in setting the framework and providing oversight. In most countries with community-based sponsorship models, national immigration authorities are responsible for establishing a policy framework (in cooperation with civil society actors); conducting security screenings and issuing visas to sponsored refugees (as they do in relation to quota refugees); maintaining their quota of UNHCR resettlement referrals; and setting up arrangements for a civil society contact point.

Municipalities

Municipalities are important actors in all phases of designing, implementing and supporting a community-based sponsorship model. In the Danish context, municipalities play a vital role as the primary government authority providing integration support to refugees. They hold many years of expertise in this field, which is highly valuable for sponsor groups to learn from. The municipalities' main responsibilities are to work with local sponsor groups in sharing their expertise and take over the support of refugees once the sponsorship period has ended.

Civil society contact point

In other jurisdictions, trusted civil society organisations are created or contracted by the state to match sponsor groups with refugees selected for resettlement and provide training and support for both sponsors and refugees. In Canada, these organisations are referred to as Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs), while in the United Kingdom 'Reset' plays this role. In Germany, the civil society contact point (ZKS) is an alliance of Caritas Germany, the German Red Cross and the Protestant Church of Westphalia, and in Ireland, the newly constituted National Support Organisation will play a similar role. A civil society contact point's main responsibilities are to receive referrals from national immigration authorities; select, train and support sponsors; match sponsors with refugees; and support refugees in the case of relationship breakdown.

Sponsors

Sponsors are either volunteers of a registered charity or a group of five or more citizens or permanent residents that are found to be eligible by either a civil society contact point or the national authorities. Sponsors need to be committed, organised, trained in supporting refugees and able to show that they have the financial means available to cover the sponsorship period. Sponsors are therefore responsible for developing a detailed integration/resettlement plan; demonstrating financial capacity; knowledge of local services; demonstrating they have the skills that they need within their sponsor groups (such as an interpreter, accountant etc); and be willing to work with the local municipality.

Corporate actors

There is little current practice concerning corporate actors' role in community-based sponsorship. In Canada, companies have been engaged as sponsor groups, and in Germany, private foundations have supported the development of their national community-based sponsorship mode, NesT, by funding the creation of the ZKS. There is a great potential in involving corporate actors in community-based sponsorship. Companies could play an important role in providing employment opportunities to sponsored refugees and/or providing financial support to sponsors. Corporate actors could be responsible for guaranteeing an allocated number of jobs to sponsored refugees, in cooperation with the municipality or sponsors, and they could also provide financial support to sponsors, for example through a matching scheme (whereby a company matches sponsors' fundraising krone for krone) or a larger fund to which sponsors could apply.

Refugees

In most countries, sponsored refugees are selected by the state through UNHCR's resettlement programme, in a process similar to the selection of quota refugees. However, some countries also allow sponsors to 'name' the person they would like to sponsor, which is often used as a family reunification tool. As in resettlement programmes, the refugees sponsored will be responsible for adapting to their new community, learning the local language and engaging in integration programmes. In newly developed community-based sponsorship models, refugees have also been used in evaluating the successfulness of the models.

2.2 Benefits of community-based sponsorship

There is no conclusive evidence showing the financial or long-term societal benefits of community-based sponsorship programmes compared to state-run resettlement.¹⁸ However, actors involved in community-based sponsorship all point to the positive effects. The following is a list of benefits based on reports from actors involved in community-based sponsorship internationally.¹⁹

Benefits for the state

- Establishes orderly movement of recognised refugees with predictable allocation of annual quotas decided by the state
- Builds on global solidarity and burden-sharing towards states hosting most refugees, including under the Global Compact on Refugees
- Increases the chances of the refugees getting into the job market quicker, benefitting the state economically in the long run.

¹⁸ Interview with Russel Rook, Co-founder of Reset UK, 19 February 2019.

¹⁹ See, for example, Amnesty International New Zealand, "Community Sponsorship of Refugees: New Zealand's pilot programme and its potential" (2018); Amnesty International, "Amnesty International Advocacy and Campaign Strategy, Alternative Pathways" (May 2017); Mahdy Alraie, Hannah Collins & Andrea Rigon, "A comparison of community sponsorship and government-led resettlement of refugees in the UK, Key Findings" (September 2018); Phillimore, J., and Reyes, M. "Community Sponsorship in the UK: from application to integration" (July 2019); and SHARE, 'Fostering Community Sponsorship across Europe' (2019).

Benefits for society

- Creates a solid foundation for long-term engagement by the whole society in national efforts around the protection of refugees
- Better overall integration outcomes for sponsored refugees
- Creates 'welcoming communities' and a 'welcoming culture' at both local and national levels
- Combats negative and xenophobic narratives around refugees.

Benefits for sponsors

- Allows committed citizens to contribute to a global issue in concrete, local ways
- Creates new generations of socially aware and active citizens
- Increased cohesion between local citizens and refugees.

Benefits for refugees

- Provides a legal and safe pathway for refugees to reach protection and safety
- Increases the chances of getting into the job market quicker and learning local language faster
- Establishes local networks and close relationships that often last longer than the sponsorship period
- Reduces the risk of social isolation for refugees.

3 Practice & Literature

3.1 Existing practice on community-based sponsorship

Community-based sponsorship is best known through **Canada's** longstanding *private sponsorship model*. Originally conceived as a civil society-led response to the Indochinese refugee crisis, private sponsorship in Canada has since evolved into three distinct streams:

- *Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) programme*: first introduced in 1979, whereby accredited sponsors finance the first year of integration of refugees identified by sponsors. Ninety per cent of refugees resettled under the PSR are family members of sponsors.²⁰ The programme allows the sponsors to 'name' the persons they would like to sponsor, who thereafter must prove that he/she is entitled to receive refugee status in Canada. The PSR is completely additional to the state's resettlement quota.
- *Blended Visa Office Referred (BVOR) programme*: launched in 2013, the BVOR matches sponsors with refugees referred for resettlement by UNHCR. Sponsors and the state share the financial costs of integration for one year on a roughly 50-50 basis. The BVOR is part of the state's resettlement quota.²¹
- *Joint Assistance Sponsorship (JAS) programme*: rarely used, JAS involves resettlement with financial costs borne by the state. Sponsors support refugees that are categorized as being especially vulnerable with emotional and social support. The JAS is part of the state's resettlement quota.

Argentina's Syria Programme, which began in 2014, engages locals as sponsors of Syrian refugees coming to the country. The sponsors are responsible for the reception and integration of beneficiaries for a 12-month period, or less if they can attain self-sufficiency before. Refugees are granted a renewable two-year humanitarian visa, and after spending three years in Argentina they can access permanent residency. Since 2014, 412 Syrians have arrived in Argentina through this programme.

Australia's Community Support Programme was launched in 2017 following a pilot in place from 2013. The Programme provides for one thousand sponsored refugees per year *within* Australia's resettlement quota. The scheme supports refugees who are 'job-ready' with 'functional English'. The scheme is administered by 11 Approved Proposing Organisations (APO), who manage sponsoring groups and individuals. The cost of the Australian scheme is very high, with sponsors paying around 250,000 DKK for one refugee to cover costs related to visas, APO administration and integration.²²

²⁰ European Resettlement Network (2018) 37.

²¹ Fratzke (2017) 3; and Hyndman, J., W. Payne and S. Jimenez (2017). Private refugee sponsorship in Canada. *Forced Migration Review* 54: 56-59.

²² Interview with Asher Hirsch, Refugee Council of Australia, 31 January 2019. See also Hoang, K. (2017). Human rights: Private sponsorship of refugees and humanitarian entrants: Risks and rewards for Australia. *Law Society of NSW Journal* 37: 74.

Germany's Federal Länder Sponsorship Scheme, in place since 2013, is a family reunification programme focused on Syrians having admitted 23,500 people by the end of 2018. The scheme has been criticised for placing onerous requirements on sponsors (sponsorship can last up to five years²³) and restricting the rights of sponsored refugees.

Most relevantly, a national German community-based sponsorship scheme is being piloted in 2019 in cooperation with UNHCR. The NesT ('Neustart im Team') programme is additional to the state's resettlement program and was designed jointly by civil society, faith groups and the government. The pilot will include receiving 500 refugees provided with three-year residence permits. The sponsors, called 'mentors', are responsible for paying rent for two years, finding a house and providing integration support for one year.

Between 2015 and 2018, **Portugal** implemented a community-based sponsorship scheme to assist in meeting its relocation targets.²⁴ More than 1500 people were admitted under the model, the sponsors taking on responsibilities for 18 months in relation to accommodation and other support services. Sponsors were community organisations matched with refugees by the state.²⁵ Based on this temporary, relocation-specific scheme, the Portuguese government is currently considering a new model based on resettlement.²⁶

New Zealand's Community-based Sponsorship of Refugees model was piloted in 2017-18 with six families (23 people) sponsored, additional to New Zealand's quota of 1000 refugees resettled per year. In 2019, the quota of refugees resettled has been increased to 1500 refugees. Currently, the New Zealand government is considering the establishment of a permanent community-based sponsorship scheme, over and above the state quota. Refugees are either nominated by a community organisation or referred by the UNHCR, and all must be UNHCR-mandated refugees. To be eligible, refugees must meet English language requirements and are also required to have three years' work experience or a qualification that required two years of tertiary study. Sponsors are responsible for supporting the refugees in New Zealand for up to two years, including both financial and integration support.²⁷

Ireland's Community-based Sponsorship Programme was launched in March 2019. Initially, the scheme will sponsor refugees identified by UNHCR for resettlement within the Irish Refugee Protection Programme, but the government has committed to additionality in the medium to long-term. The scheme will initially aim to resettle a minimum of 50 refugees during a Pilot or Development Phase. During this period, infrastructure will be developed to allow for the programme to be scaled up at national level. Sponsors provide emotional, social and financial

²³ European Commission (2018) 130.

²⁴ The intra-EU relocation scheme in place between 2015 and 2017 transferred likely refugees from Greece and Italy to other member states. With a target of 98,000 transfers, around 34,323 people were successfully relocated under the scheme.

²⁵ European Commission (2018) 28.

²⁶ European Commission (2018) 43.

²⁷ Information received from Amnesty International New Zealand.

support to refugees for around 18 months (housing for two years) and need to raise around 75,000 DKK per refugee.²⁸

Spain began a pilot project on community sponsorship in 2019 with two civil society organisations taking the lead, Ellacuria Foundation and Caritas. The pilot is in the Basque region and involves the formation of five sponsor groups to support 25-30 refugees referred by UNHCR.²⁹

The **United Kingdom's** Community Sponsorship Scheme (CSS) was launched in 2016 as a strand of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) and Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS), and in October 2017 the first sponsored refugees arrived. Refugees are identified via UNHCR referral. Sponsors under the CSS, who must be registered charities, provide financial (around 90,000 DKK) and integration support for one year and housing for two years.³⁰ By the end of 2018, more than 200 refugee men, women and children had arrived in the UK through sponsorship and more than 140 groups had welcomed families or were in the pipeline to be sponsors.³¹ In June 2019, the Home Office announced the CSS would be additional to the UK's resettlement quota from 2020.

In sum, there is an emerging base of international practice on community-based sponsorship models for refugees. Beyond Canada, pilot or permanent schemes in Argentina, Australia, Germany, Ireland, New Zealand, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom provide important lessons learned for a potential future Danish model.

3.2 Existing literature on community-based sponsorship

Academic literature on community-based sponsorship is broadly supportive of the concept, with most work drawing on the Canadian experience. Scholarship generally focuses on the risks and opportunities posed by the private-public nature of community-based sponsorship, notably the risk of privatising refugee integration.³² In this context, the issue of additionality is frequently cited, where *complementary* community-based sponsorship expands refugee protection, while community-based sponsorship that *replaces* resettlement allows the state to outsource its responsibility. Some work has also emerged on the positive impact of community-based sponsorship on sponsors

²⁸ Interview with Tim Hanley, Amnesty Ireland, 7 February 2019.

²⁹ Manzanedo, C., Community-based refugee sponsorship in Spain: What are the experiences? (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung 2019).

³⁰ European Commission (2018) 60.

³¹ Sponsor Refugees, Citizens UK Foundation for Community Sponsorship of Refugees, https://www.sponsorrefugees.org/the_story

³² Ritchie, G. (2018). Civil society, the state, and private sponsorship: the political economy of refugee resettlement. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*: 1-13.

themselves.³³ In general, literature based on the Canadian model reflects the overall success of community-based sponsorship and is positive about its potential to be adapted to other countries.³⁴

In Europe, private refugee sponsorship (encompassing community-based sponsorship, humanitarian corridors, family reunification schemes and *ad hoc* schemes for religious groups) has been the subject of a number of recent reports. In 2017, the European Resettlement Network published a scoping paper on expanding complementary pathways for refugees to Europe, finding that private refugee sponsorship has ‘significant potential to further develop programmes that complement and add to government resettlement efforts on a permanent basis.’³⁵ The European Resettlement Network also conducted a specific study on the feasibility of private sponsorship in France, finding that a model supporting the reception system and complementary to quota resettlement would be feasible in that country.³⁶

The Migration Policy Institute, in a 2017 report, also emphasised the potential of community-based sponsorship in Europe. The report found that community-based sponsorship is a part of the solution to the migration crisis, with the potential to provide an additional pathway to refugees who otherwise would be excluded from resettlement. The report emphasised the need for flexibility in policymaking, viewing community-based sponsorship as part of a protection ‘toolkit’, alongside quota resettlement and territorial asylum.³⁷ A recent SHARE publication sets out three approaches to community-based sponsorship, comprising sponsorships linked to extended family reunification; Humanitarian Corridors; and resettlement-based community sponsorship.³⁸

Perhaps most significantly, in 2018 the European Commission concluded a detailed feasibility study on the added value of private refugee sponsorship, finding that ‘sponsorship could contribute to meeting the goal of promoting safe and legal channels of admission’ under the European Agenda on Migration.³⁹ The study highlighted the fact that there is no single definition of community-based sponsorship programmes making them highly flexible and adaptable to country’s national context, laws and practices. A current EU Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) Action Grant funds projects supporting integration through new community sponsorship schemes.⁴⁰

In the Scandinavian context, just one published study has considered the feasibility of community-based sponsorship in any detail. With direct reference to the Canadian model, a 2018 report for

³³ Macklin, A., K. Barber, L. Goldring, J. Hyndman, A. Korteweg, S. Labman and J. Zyfi (2018). A Preliminary Investigation into Private Refugee Sponsors. *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 50(2): 35-57; Phillimore, J., and Reyes, M. “Community Sponsorship in the UK: from application to integration” (July 2019).

³⁴ Lenard, P. T. (2016). Resettling refugees: is private sponsorship a just way forward? *Journal of Global Ethics* 12(3): 300-310.; and Hoang (2017).

³⁵ European Resettlement Network (2018) 35.

³⁶ European Resettlement Network. (2018) 33.

³⁷ Fratzke (2017) 11.

³⁸ SHARE (2019) ‘Fostering Community Sponsorship across Europe’.

³⁹ European Commission (2018) 11.

⁴⁰ AMIF Action Grant, ‘Fostering the integration of persons in need of protection through private sponsorship schemes’, <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/topic-details/amif-2019-ag-call-01> (closes 30 January 2020).

Stockholm-based think tank Fores found that community-based sponsorship is beneficial to refugees, sponsors and the government. The report noted certain challenges, notably the relatively fewer number of spontaneous asylum seekers to Canada than Scandinavia and Canada's 'de-politicised' public support for high levels of immigration.⁴¹ The report further noted that Sweden and Norway have shown recent interest in Canada's model.⁴² The report concluded that the Canadian approach could 'serve as an inspirational model for Scandinavia' if adapted pragmatically to the specific context.⁴³

In sum, there is currently high levels of interest in community-based sponsorship and other forms of private refugee sponsorship in Europe and elsewhere among policymakers, NGOs and academics. The EU is considering how to best support the national adoption of community-based sponsorship in members states and a number of pilot programs are being tested. The GRSI is actively supporting the development of community-based sponsorship internationally and Amnesty International has played a facilitating role in the establishment of a number of schemes, notably in Ireland and New Zealand. However, it is clear there are several barriers to be understood and taken into account if such a model should be tested and implemented in Denmark. These barriers are examined below.

⁴¹ Ugland, T. (2018). Canada Can – Can we? Sponsoring Integration of Refugees the Canadian Way (Stockholm, FORES) 33-7.

⁴² Ibid 31, 38.

⁴³ Ibid 42.

4 The Danish context

4.1 Political context

In 2015, European countries received record high numbers of people seeking asylum. 21,316 people applied for asylum in Denmark, the highest number of asylum seekers in many years.⁴⁴ This section examines the Danish political context focusing on the possibilities and barriers to a community-based sponsorship programme on a political level.

Denmark has recently transitioned from a right-wing government to a left-wing, one-party government run by the Social Democrats. The former government (2016–2019) had a strict immigration policy passing multiple laws that restricted access to Denmark for immigrants, suspended the annual quota of refugees from UN's resettlement programme⁴⁵, and passed a bill referred to as 'the paradigm shift' that, among other things, changed all integration programmes and efforts to focus on repatriation and changed the status of refugees and their family members so that they from 1 March 2019 are granted time limited residence permit with a view to *temporary residence*, instead of an assumption of permanent residence.

The Social Democrats voted in favour of many of the restrictions to Danish immigration policy and have announced that they will continue to follow the strict immigration policies. However, new developments and small changes in the immigration policy and rhetoric suggest that there might be an openness from the government to examine internationally successful refugee models, such as the community-based sponsorship model.

Firstly, in July 2019, the Minister for Immigration and Integration announced that he had contacted UNHCR to declare that Denmark wants to participate in the UN resettlement programme again.⁴⁶ It is still not clear how many quota refugees Denmark will receive the coming years, however, it is a positive sign that the Danish government is willing to open up for quota refugees again.

Secondly, in the political agreement between the Social Democrats and the supporting parties it is highlighted that integration is key to a well-functioning immigration policy. The agreement emphasises the need for Danish communities to become more interlinked, as split societies threaten social cohesion.⁴⁷

The community-based sponsorship model plays well into these new developments, as the model has the strong potential to provide better integration outcomes, controlled access to protection, long-term economic benefits for the state, and better cohesion between newcomers and locals.

⁴⁴ Ministry of Immigration and Integration Denmark, "Tal på udlændingeområdet per 31. januar 2019", 4.

⁴⁵ L80: Forslag til lov om ændring af udlændingeloven (ny kvoteordning), 20 December 2017.

⁴⁶ Politiken, "Danmark vil tage imod nye kvoteflygtninge allerede i år", 29 September 2019.

⁴⁷ Regeringsgrundlag (2019), Retfærdig Retning for Danmark, https://ufm.dk/ministeriet/regeringsgrundlag-vision-og-strategier/regeringen-mette-frederiksen-forstaelsespapir/retfaerdig-retning-for-danmark_2019-06-25_endelig.pdf.

Finally, the Global Compact on Refugees could be a valuable tool for civil society to push for the development of a Danish community-based sponsorship model. On 17-18 December 2019, the first Global Refugee Forum will be held, a ministerial-level meeting to ‘announce concrete pledges and contributions’ under the Compact.⁴⁸ Denmark is co-sponsoring the themes “Burden and Responsibility sharing” and “Solutions” which may provide a chance for civil society organisations to advocate for a Danish model of community-based sponsorship.⁴⁹

4.2 *Civil society context*

Denmark is known for its strong civil society and traditions of volunteering in a wide range of local organisations, from football clubs and theatre groups to mentor programmes and local church groups. Moreover, Danes are loyal supporters of the work done by NGOs in Denmark, with around 74 per cent of all Danes providing financial support to NGOs.⁵⁰ Despite the strict immigration policies developed by former Danish governments, civil society actors are stepping up their efforts to support asylum seekers and refugees in Denmark.

When Denmark experienced high numbers of asylum seekers in 2015, thousands of Danes signed up as volunteers to help people seeking asylum. Volunteer organisations such as Venligboerne, Refugees Welcome and Bedsteforældre for Asyl became a place for Danes to meet and help newcomers with everything from legal counselling, logistical support, cultural exchange, social activities, emotional support and, in some instances, financial support.⁵¹

In 2015, Red Cross and Danish Refugee Council received state funding to develop a new initiative called ‘Venner Viser Vej’. The vision of the initiative is to give all newly arrived refugees a Danish friend in the municipality they reside. The friend is a Danish volunteer who agrees to assist the newcomer in settling into the neighbourhood by providing social support. An evaluation published in March 2019 shows that 93 per cent of all Danish municipalities are involved in ‘Venner Viser Vej’. Most of the actors involved in the initiative highlight positive effects in integrating refugees such as stronger ties to the local community, more awareness of Danish culture, and better language skills.⁵² These positive results have provided the initiative with extra funding until 2022. The results of ‘Venner Viser Vej’ offer an ideal platform from which a community-based sponsorship programme could build upon and learn from.

This study included meetings and a workshop held with several civil society actors giving valuable insights and views on the possibility of developing a community-based sponsorship model in

⁴⁸ Pledges may take the form of ‘financial, material and technical assistance; resettlement places and complementary pathways for admission to third countries’. UNHCR, ‘The Global Refugee Forum: Concept Note’ December 2018.

⁴⁹ UNHCR 70th ExCom, General debate. Statement by Denmark, October 2019.

⁵⁰ Fremforsk and CBS, “Danskerne og velgørenhed anno 2013”, 2013.

⁵¹ For more information see <http://www.venligboerne.org/> and <https://www.bedsteforaeldreforasyl.dk/>.

⁵² LG Insight, “Evaluering: Projekt af Røde Kors og Dansk Flygtningehjælp, Venner Viser Vej, Integration af nyankomne flygtninge”, March 2019.

Denmark.⁵³ All participants were interested in supporting the development of this, however, they were also sceptical about the feasibility of such a model in Denmark due to the political context, pointing to some of the same challenges described above. That being said, it is clear that civil society in Denmark consists of active, committed and organised volunteers and professionals with interest and experience in supporting the integration of refugees. Furthermore, Denmark has a number of well-established and trusted NGOs with the capacity and experience to support the development and implementation of community-based sponsorship.

4.3 Legal context

In countries including Ireland, the United Kingdom and Germany, refugees supported through community-based sponsorship are admitted under the same legal conditions as refugees under the state's resettlement quota. These countries have not made legislative changes to their national laws but implemented community-based sponsorship at a policy level.⁵⁴ In Denmark, a community-based sponsorship model could therefore be based on the legal framework used to govern quota refugees. Under Article 8 of the Aliens Act, refugees admitted for resettlement receive a two-year visa, which can be renewed if the refugee is still in need of protection.

In most existing programmes, sponsored refugees are provided with long-term protection status with the intention of subsequent permanent residency or citizenship. As mentioned above, all refugees in Denmark are granted protection on a temporary basis. As a legal matter, international protection for refugees is temporary in the sense that Denmark is only bound to protect a refugee for the duration of risk. However, UNHCR resettlement is generally accepted to provide a durable solution for refugees involving permanent residence.⁵⁵

While the recent 'paradigm shift' in Danish refugee policy clearly changes the assumption of refugee protection from permanent to temporary, community-based sponsorship requires long-term or permanent integration of refugees, as it will be difficult to find sponsor groups that will be willing to spend a year or two fundraising money and providing social and emotional support to a newcomer that might be sent home quickly again. Furthermore, some refugees may even decline resettlement in Denmark. This temporary protection status is a clear challenge for community-based sponsorship in a Danish context and would require legal adjustments to be changed.

⁵³ Organisations/individuals participating at the workshop held on 28 February 2019: Red Cross, Action Aid Denmark, Danish Refugee Council, Refugee Welcome, Venligboerne, Foreningen Nydansker, Folkekirkens Migrantsamarbejde, Mozdeh Ghasemiyani and Næstved municipality

⁵⁴ A recent article concluded: 'community sponsorship programs do not require significant, dedicated legislative infrastructure.' Bond, J., and Kwadrans, A., 'Resettling Refugees through Community Sponsorship: A Revolutionary Operational Approach Built on Traditional Legal Infrastructure' (2019) 35 *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees* 86, 95.

⁵⁵ UNHCR's Resettlement Handbook defines resettlement in the following terms: 'Resettlement involves the selection and transfer of refugees from a State in which they have sought protection to a third State which has agreed to admit them – as refugees – with *permanent* residence status.' UNHCR. 2011. Resettlement Handbook 3.

4.4 Financial context

Community-based sponsorship includes financial costs shared between sponsors and the state. Each country has developed their own model for how to share the expenses between sponsors and the state, but the costs generally cover pre-arrival costs (flights, medical and security checks), on-arrival costs (transport from airport, initial accommodation and essentials, clothing), income support, housing, health, education and benefits/social protection.

Denmark has a strong welfare system with equal rights to free education and healthcare financed by high taxes. Some of the strongest concerns about community-based sponsorship raised in meetings and interviews held with politicians and civil society actors in Denmark relate to whether sponsors can raise enough money to support refugees, and how to ensure that sponsored refugees enjoy the same social welfare services and integration benefits as other refugees in Denmark.

As mentioned earlier, other countries with community-based sponsorship models have used the legal framework governing quota refugees in their national community-based sponsorship programmes. In Denmark, this would provide sponsored refugees with the same rights as other quota refugees. This means that sponsored refugees will have the right to free education, healthcare, family reunification, benefits, such as *'boligstøtte'*, and the same state services as Danish citizens.⁵⁶

However, besides these basic welfare state services that are equal to everyone in Denmark, refugees with status under Articles 7.1, 7.2 and 8 of the Aliens Act receive a special form of benefits, which was previously called *'integrationsydelsen'* and has now changed name to *'selvforsørgelses- og hjemrejseydelse'*. A single person on *'selvforsørgelses- og hjemrejseydelse'* receives 6.182 kr. per month before taxes. This amount can be increased by applying for subsidy for rent, and the municipality can also choose to provide subsidies for transport, dental care and other special expenses, if needed. However, the amount of benefits received per month in total as a refugee with status under Articles 7.1, 7.2 and 8 cannot exceed *'kontanthjælp'* which is the benefits that Danish citizens receive when they are out of the job market, providing a single person with 11.282 kr. per month before tax. The right for refugees to *'kontanthjælp'* is only obtained after nine years of legal residence out of the past 10 years, and 2 ½ years of full-time work in Denmark. Finally, the right to *'dagpenge'* is obtained after seven years of legal residence in Denmark.

All newly arrived refugees in Denmark are obliged to take part in an integration programme run by the municipality, offering free language classes and employment assistance. This integration programme is scheduled to run for one year with the aim of getting the refugee into the job market within this period, and it can be prolonged up to four extra years if necessary.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Refugees Welcome (2019) "Modtageprogram i kommunen", <http://refugees.dk/fakta/integration-job-uddannelse/modtageprogram-i-kommunen/>

⁵⁷ For more information go to the Ministry of Integration and Immigration's website: <http://uim.dk/arbejdsomrader/Integration/integrationsprogrammet>

Any future community-based sponsorship model in Denmark will have to decide how to share some of the start-up costs, such as integration benefits or rent, between sponsors and the state. The sharing of costs can be arranged in a range of ways. This paper does not provide a detailed plan for how to share the costs, as this will be a task for the actors involved in developing a model. However, the following will discuss some lessons learned from international practice.

Firstly, the sponsor groups could be responsible for *on-arrival* costs, such as furnishing the house and welcoming the refugees in the airport, while the state will pay most of the *pre-arrival* costs, including among other things flight tickets, and preparation courses in the refugee camp. The state should moreover cover education costs, such as schooling and Danish language classes, offered through the integration programme. However, instead of the state paying for employment assistance, sponsor groups could be responsible for providing employment assistance through their own networks and knowledge and offering help with job applications and CV. This would save the state costs associated with employment assistance.

Secondly, a key consideration is *how* sponsored refugees receive money paid by the sponsor group. Sponsors should not give money directly to refugees, as this will not be beneficial for their relationship. Instead, sponsored refugees could receive their benefits through the state – as all other refugees – which will then be repaid by sponsors after the sponsorship period. Alternatively, sponsors could transfer a fixed amount of money to a national fund or municipality that would then be responsible for distributing the money to the sponsored refugees every month.

5 Conclusion

This paper has provided an insight into the elements and practice of community-based sponsorship models and the feasibility of developing such a model in a Danish context. There is currently international momentum around developing community-based sponsorship models among civil society, academics and policymakers. New schemes have been developed and tested in several countries in recent years, bringing valuable lessons learned and evaluation to what has previously been based solely on Canadian practice.

There are multiple benefits for all levels of society and actors involved in community-based sponsorship. In particular, experiences show that involving local communities in welcoming refugees establishes more cohesion among citizens, supports better integration outcomes and has the potential to create financial savings for the state in both long and short term.

The paper identifies opportunities in the Danish context that could support the development of a community-based sponsorship model, including a strong tradition of volunteerism, a robust civil society committed to supporting refugees and momentum from the 2015 influx. Furthermore, there has been positive interest among NGOs, authorities and politicians in Denmark in this study.

The paper also identifies political and financial challenges in Denmark that need to be considered if pursuing this model in Denmark. This is first and foremost the 'paradigm shift' creating the assumption of temporary protection. Moreover, NGO actors have questioned the possibility and willingness for sponsors to raise money to support integration costs for refugees. This is an element that needs more attention.

In sum, community-based sponsorship is legally feasible in Denmark given the pre-existing avenue for resettlement under Article 8 of the Aliens Act. Moreover, Denmark's strong civil society supports the operational feasibility of the concept. With respect to financial feasibility, there are some questions on the capacity of sponsors to share the integration costs with the state, given Denmark's high taxation rate and relatively high cost of living. However, these challenges are not insurmountable. Finally, the political feasibility of community-based sponsorship faces barriers, notably the paradigm shift to an assumption of temporary protection of refugees.

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- Asher Hirsch, Refugee Council of Australia, 31 January 2019
- Khanh Hoang, Associate Lecturer at the Australia National University Migration Law Program, 19 February 2019
- Russel Rook, Co-founder of Reset UK and Partner in Good Faith Partnership, 19 February 2019
- Thomas Gammeltoft-Hansen, Professor at the legal department of Copenhagen University, 5 February 2019
- Tim Hanley, Campaigns Officer, Amnesty International Ireland, 7 February 2019

Participants at workshop the 28 February 2019

- Eva Singer, Asylum Director in Danish Refugee Council
- Lars Koch, Policy Director in Action Aid Denmark
- Marie Munch Roager, Danish Church's Migrant Work
- Michala Bendixen, Refugees Welcome
- Mozdeh Ghasemiyani, Doctors without Borders
- Nicolai Kopperup Larsen, Venligboerne Copenhagen
- Parvaneh Ghorbani, Project Lead in Action Aid Denmark
- Sine Hav, Integration Consultant, Danish Refugee Council
- Sira Støhrmann, Project Manager in Danish Red Cross
- Tenna Fonseca Kaarslev, Næstved Municipality
- Torben Møller-Hansen, Director of Foreningen Nydansker

This report is based on an internal scoping paper prepared for Amnesty International Denmark in April 2019 written by Nikolas Feith Tan and Annette Stubkjær Rimmer. This updated version provides an overview of existing literature and practice on community-based sponsorship of refugees and a preliminary assessment of the feasibility of the model in the Danish context.