

Global Literature Synthesis Report:

Refugee Sponsorship and Integration Outcomes



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2021



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Introduction

This literature review investigates, collects, and synthesizes available evidence indicating potential links between refugee sponsorship and integration outcomes. Research for this synthesis review included a thorough literature search of migration and refugee studies, social sciences, geography, health sciences, and migration integration academic and policy literatures, as well as recent evaluation and monitoring reports of sponsorship programs in the UK, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, Spain, Italy, France, and Argentina. This paper briefly touches on Canadian scholarship and academic debates on sponsorship and integration outcomes to inform its analysis, but focuses primarily on the global state of play on this issue outside of Canada. The Canadian scholarship on this question is extensive, and a critical review of that literature is beyond the scope of this piece. Rather, this piece conducts a descriptive review of the global state of play on the issue of links between sponsorship and integration outside of the Canadian context.

Susan Fratzke and Emma Dorst define sponsorship as “a level of commitment beyond volunteering that gives an individual or group responsibility for outcomes” (Fratzke and Dorst 2019). This review adopts this broad definition of sponsorship, emphasizing the importance of community welcome and citizen support of newcomers, with a strong focus on settlement and integration support. The focus is aimed at the impact of citizens working to support newcomers, not on different structural models of sponsorship. For this reason, this review includes Humanitarian Corridor programmes (HCP) as well as explicit “community sponsorship” and “private sponsorship” models.

There is a lack of consensus on theoretical and methodological conceptualizations of integration. Critics argue that this lack of clarity reinforces the conceptualization of the migrant as “other”, as well as the conceptualization of the state as a homogenized group of prototypical nationals into which migrants must blend seamlessly (Spencer and Charlsey 2021). In this way, integration risks being seen not as a complex multi-factored process, but as an idealized result based on normalized behaviour and outcomes (Spencer and Charlsey 2021).

Defining 'Integration'

Indeed, 'integration' in the context of migration is defined in different ways by different jurisdictions and scholars, with economic indicators generally being the leading factor in integration analysis (Kaida, Hou and Stick 2020; Kyeremeh et al. 2019; IRCC 2016; IRCC 2019). Within the study of integration and migration is a sub-field of research on refugee integration, with which this paper actively engages. However, the economy-centered conceptualization of integration common in empirical research, both in discussions of general migration and refugee migration, generally does not reflect conceptual developments on understandings of integration. This challenge is evident throughout this report, as will be discussed below.

More recent work in integration studies has moved away from the concept of an end state "integrated society", recognizing integration processes as fluid, interactive, and multi-directional, as well as shaped by institutions and inequalities (Spencer and Charlsey 2021). This has sometimes been characterized as "holistic integration". Recently, Jenny Phillimore has argued for an increased emphasis on the role of receiving societies in multi-directional conceptualizations of integration, highlighting critical factors in receiving societies themselves that influence refugee integration ("opportunity structures") (Phillimore 2021). This would be a new direction for research into refugee integration.

One particularly well-received holistic model of integration is the UK Home Office's 2019 Indicators of Integration Framework (IOI). Phillimore et al. (2021) describe the IOI as "one of the most comprehensive articulations of the multiple dimensions and holistic nature of integration processes" (2021a, 3). Two of the authors of that paper, Jenny Phillimore and Linda Morrice, are also co-creators of the IOI framework, pictured below.

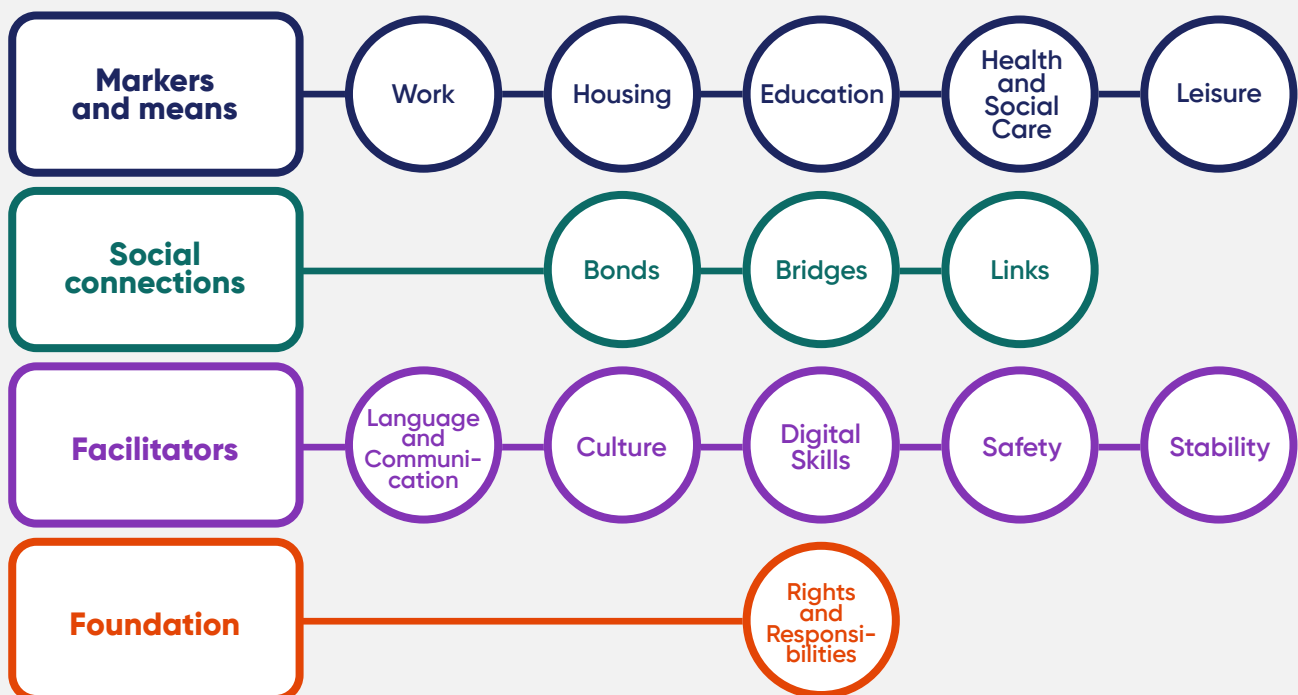


Fig. 1 Indicators of Integration Framework (Ndofor-Tab et al. 2019)

The IOI framework outlines fourteen indicators of integration, categorized under four headings of “markers and means”, “social connections”, “facilitators”, and “foundation”. Through this framework, the IOI engages with the idea that these factors both indicate and increase successful integration for migrant newcomers. For example, the factors under “markers and means” include work, housing, education, health and social care, and leisure. These factors are both indicative of successful integration and are the means by which the integration process is assisted (Ndofor-Tah et al. 2019). In this way, these factors are understood as both interactive and interdependent, as access to them both improves and is improved by successful integration.

Holistic models of integration not only consider multiple integration factors together, but also tend to highlight the need for multi-directional integration. Multi-directional integration looks beyond the development of the newcomer as gradually becoming more like the host community, and additionally considers how the host community adapts in response to the newcomer joining their community (Spencer and Charsley 2021). Michaela Hynie et al.’s (2019) model of holistic integration illustrates the interaction between subjective, interactional, and social integration factors with social identity and socio-economic contexts, noting that “holistic and equitable integration requires policies [...] to help overcome colonial/racist and xenophobic world views, policies, and socio-economic conditions (28). Multi-directionality is also one of the fundamental principles which inform the Indicators of Integration Framework, along with multi-dimensionality, shared responsibility, and context specificity (Ndofor-Tah et al. 2019, 20).

This global literature review engages with holistic models of integration to the fullest extent possible, taking into account data on social and cultural elements of integration as well as economic and linguistic integration. However, this approach faces data limitations since the source material largely focuses on economic integration factors. Few of the reports observed consider multi-directional integration. The relatively small scope of the available data may also be a result of some of these evaluation reports being completed at very early stages of sponsorship pilots and programs.

Limitations *Availability of research*

Due to the fairly recent introduction of many sponsorship programs around the world, there is (to date) relatively little empirical research outside of Canada on the subject of whether privately sponsored refugees have a smoother path to integration than refugees arriving under other programs (Kumin 2020). Of the data that is available, much of it does not offer a comparison to the integration of government-assisted refugees, whether as a control group in data collection or otherwise. Several scholars have called for more monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of refugee sponsorship programs in order to assess their effectiveness and determine which aspects of sponsorship pro-

grams are the most effective, including from an integration perspective (Phillimore 2021). Increased investment in M&E could reduce costs, support evidence-based policy making, and increase public support for sponsorship programs, particularly if results indicate that refugee sponsorship projects continue to show positive results despite setbacks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Finn 2020; Solano and Savazzi 2019; Beirens and Ahad 2020; European Union 2020).

In the absence of consistent evidence types and sources across contexts, this report considers both empirical data and anecdotal evidence published by scholars, migration organizations, and government bodies regarding the impact of refugee sponsorship on integration outcomes. Based on the limited availability of information in more nascent sponsorship contexts, any trends or results discussed in this paper should not be taken as conclusive, but rather indicative of early trends in a developing field. It will be valuable to continue reviewing documents in M&E and academic literature as newer sponsorship programmes scale over the next few years, particularly in the EU, where the European Commission has invested extensively in sponsorship research and policy development through the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF 2019).

Available source material

Many of the studies included in this review consist of comprehensive assessments of sponsorship programs, including but not limited to integration factors. This review will not summarize all of the findings in these studies, but rather will highlight the particular findings that point toward a difference in opportunities or services provided to sponsored refugee newcomers versus non-government sponsored refugees. Some of the studies do explicitly provide comparisons between sponsored and government-assisted refugees, and these comparisons are discussed. However, literature directly comparing these two cohorts is limited. In order to draw out the specific impacts of sponsorship on integration, therefore, this review also includes findings where no specific comparison is explicitly drawn, but an inference can be made that a similar support or service would not be available for non-sponsored refugees. For example, a finding that sponsored refugees attended government-funded language classes may not be relevant to this review. However, a finding that refugees struggled to attend those classes, and that the sponsoring community organized personalized language classes in response, would be relevant and included, since non-sponsored refugees would not have the same community support.

Types of sponsorship observed

Based on the research examined in this review, it is evident that different forms of sponsorship likely affect integration in diverse and multiple ways. UNHCR-referred sponsorship (which has been described as ‘sponsored resettle-

ment' (Tan 2020)) and named sponsorship each have their different policy features, and each can be placed in contrast with government resettlement programmes, in terms of how settlement and integration supports are managed. However, while there are clear differences, there is little data directly comparing the outcomes of these two types of sponsorship within one country, except in Canada and Argentina. For this reason, this review largely groups UNHCR-referred and named sponsorship together, although it does take note of differences in impact and advocacy where that information is available.

The combining of these two groups for joint consideration does create some limitations, which can be demonstrated by Canadian data. Distinctions between UNHCR-referred and named sponsored newcomers may skew overall assessments of the combined categories. For example, according to Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada's 2019 [Syrian Outcomes Report](#), only 1% of blended-visa office referred refugees (BVORs) (UNHCR-referred) had a Bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 18% of privately sponsored refugees (PSRs) (named). In the particular context of education levels, therefore, this aligns BVORs more closely to government-assisted refugees (also 1%) than to PSRs (IRCC 2019). In addition to education level, other factors such as shorter periods of displacement before arrival and better health upon arrival generally give PSRs a better starting position than BVORs (Kaida, Hou and Stick 2020). Thus, we must recognize that the practicality of considering different types of sponsorship together may lead to inaccuracies and overgeneralizations, and we should take care to consider that individuals' experiences may differ vastly based on a number of factors.

Canadian Refugee Sponsorship: an overview

Canada has two principal refugee protection categories: Government-assisted refugees (GAR) and sponsored refugees. Several Canadian programs fall under the category of sponsorship. The largest is the Canadian Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program (PSRP), which has been running for over 4 decades and has brought 325,000 refugees to Canada (Hyndman et al. 2021). The PSRP is a collaboration between the Canadian government and civil society, allowing groups of residents to sponsor a refugee or refugee family for one year. In 2013, a third, hybrid category was introduced: the 'blended-visa office referred' (BVOR). The BVOR programme allows groups of residents to support UNHCR-identified refugees, with 50% of the financial support coming from the Canadian government (Hyndman et al. 2021). While GARs and BVORs are both based on UNHCR referral, PSRs can be named for private sponsorship, and the vast majority of PSRs in Canada are named (Hyndman et al. 2021). The sponsorship category also includes a number of sub-programs, such as the Joint Assistance Sponsorship (JAS) program. The JAS is a partnership between the IRCC and organizations to support refugees with special needs, including medical issues and trauma experiences. JAS sponsorships are named and generally run for two years rather than one (IRCC 2020).

In the Canadian context, positive connections between refugee sponsorship programs and integration outcomes have been well-established. According to studies conducted in Canada, sponsored refugees tend to have higher employment rates and earnings, find permanent accommodation more quickly, learn the local language more quickly, and receive referrals to employment services more often and more quickly than government resettled refugees (Bond 2021). Kaida, Hou and Stick (2020) suggest that this may be partially due to pre-migration characteristics, such as levels of education, which tend to be higher among PSRs. However, there are disagreements in Canadian scholarship on the degree to which private sponsorship leads to better integration outcomes compared to the GAR program over time. For example, despite the abovementioned finding, Kaida, Hou and Stick (2020) also found that even allowing for these difference in pre-arrival characteristics, some categories of sponsored refugees still did better in employment outcomes over the following fifteen years than GARs. In contrast, Hynie and Hyndman (2016) note that the relative advantages that PSRs have over GARs, particularly in terms of employment outcomes, slowly diminish and eventually disappear after around eight years in Canada, and argue that this indicates that long-term outcomes of both programs may be comparable.

Canadian evidence analysing the relationship between sponsorship and integration trajectories and indicators (in relation to either economic or more holistic models) has been variously synthesised and discussed in Canadian literature (for example: Bond 2020; Kaida, Hou and Stick 2020; Hyndman et al 2017; Hynie et al, 2019), and presents too large a field to be discussed extensively in this global review. However, it is important to note that many of the studies and articles on sponsorship programs around the world cite evidence from the Canadian program as being fundamental to their establishment in terms of garnering support and designing the programs. Many programs also report receiving direct support from Canadian organizations (CAREF 2018; Tan 2021; Fratzke and Dorst 2019; European Commission 2018). Additionally, international reports on integration outcomes tend to cite Canadian studies to support their claims (Kumin 2020, Fratzke and Dorst 2019). This highlights the importance of regular M&E mechanisms that provide country-specific data and analysis, as findings from one context may not translate directly to another. For example, the fact that the majority of Canada's sponsored newcomers are named by sponsoring groups may be a significant factor impacting integration outcomes. This report does not attempt to compare Canadian and European results, nor does it compare the results of UNHCR-referred and named programs.

Refugee Sponsorship Programmes

The refugee sponsorship programmes outlined and discussed in this report are as follows:

Argentina (2014 – present): Syria Program

UK (2016 – present): Community Sponsorship Scheme

Italy (2016 – present): Humanitarian Corridors Programme

France (2017 – present): Humanitarian Corridors Programme

Australia (2017 – present): Community Support Programme

New Zealand (2017): Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship Pilot

Ireland (2019 – present): Community Sponsorship Ireland

Spain (2019 – present): Basque region: National Resettlement Program

Germany (2019 – present): NesT (Neustart im Team/“New start in a team”)

Where possible, the following integration factors and outcomes are identified and discussed:

Language

Employment

Housing

Education

Health

Social connections

Legal Status

The selection of these factors is based partially on the IOI framework and partially on the availability of data-based research which addresses these factors. The consistent application of the IOI framework in this analysis would be ideal; however, as noted above, most studies do not include data for all of these factors, or do not use them in categorizing the data. Indeed, for some of these programs, empirical data is thus far completely unavailable. Therefore, some programs will be much more thoroughly examinable in relation to this list than others. Consequently, some of the conclusions in this report are drawn by the author after a careful review of the sources, and then grouped thematically according to the IOI framework indicators.

Going forward, M&E reports on migrant integration should aim to consistently apply the IOI framework. Since it meets all the requirements of holistic integration, it would be an ideal framework around which to continue developing our understanding of sponsorship and integration outcomes.

Consistent application of the IOI framework would be helpful for researchers evaluating future M&E material, particularly regarding the comparison of different sponsorship models.

United Kingdom: Community Sponsorship Scheme

Background

The UK's Community Sponsorship Scheme (CSS) was introduced in 2016 by the Home Office. It was officially closed in 2021 but is still in operation pending the remaining arrivals who were delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The program was initially launched as a strand of the government's overall resettlement quota, in order to focus on improving integration (Tan 2021). As of its formative evaluation in June 2020, around 400 refugees had been resettled through the CSS, supported by about 70 CSS groups (Phillimore et al. 2020).

Under the CSS, refugees were referred to the Home Office through the UNHCR's Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) and Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (Bolt 2020). The CSS has now been replaced by a new UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS), announced in 2019, which combines the two former programs with its former Gateway Protection Program (UNHCR 2021). At the time of its announcement, the British government committed to resettling around 5,000 refugees in the first year of the UKRS. However, since then, both the target number and timeframe have been abandoned, and no new targets or timelines have been announced (Bulman 2021).

Under the new scheme, community sponsorship will initially focus on resettling vulnerable refugees from the Middle East and North Africa region, who have been waiting for resettlement the longest, and eventually expand to other areas of the world (Reset 2021). The [New Plan for Immigration](#) also includes a commitment to ensuring more refugees can be resettled in the UK through community sponsorship (HM Government 2021).

Sponsors in the CSS program were required to be registered charities or have some formal constitution. They provided financial and social support for one year and housing for two years. Groups were supported by Reset Communities and Refugees, a charity established by the government to support community sponsorship groups (Phillimore 2021: Emotions).

Several studies have been conducted on the results of the CSS. These studies are briefly outlined below, and their results are analysed and addressed together in the following section.

In 2018, University College London conducted a [study](#) comparing community sponsorship and government-led resettlement of refugees in the UK. The study used a multi-dimensional framework approach which includes the need for the host community to adapt in response to receiving newcomers (Alraie et al. 2018).

In 2019, the UK Home Office conducted a [study](#) on effective techniques for refugee integration (Coley et al. 2019). Also in 2019, a [paper](#) written by Jenny Phillimore for the Institute for Research into Superdiversity of the University of Birmingham (IRiS) was published on methods that the government could use to boost migrants' English language skills (Phillimore 2018).

In 2020, IRiS undertook a [formative evaluation](#) of the CSS. The research was conducted in two phases, over a total of 250 semi-structured interviews with community sponsorship groups and sponsored refugees in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and England (Phillimore et al. 2020).

Two additional academic studies were also conducted in 2021, [one](#) comparing the resettlement programs in Japan and the UK and [one](#) on the role of emotions in community sponsorship.

Despite differences in focus, these studies all found clear evidence that volunteers supported refugees in many ways and used their personal networks to facilitate solutions when they were unable to meet certain needs themselves. Examples of this kind of work are provided in the following sections.

Language

Language skills were identified as the top priority for new refugees' integration and wellbeing, but also the biggest struggle (Phillimore et al. 2020; Coley et al. 2019). Available ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes varied in quality, and many refugees found that they were not progressing as quickly as they had hoped. There are also several accessibility concerns regarding English language learning. ESOL classes in the UK are about £450 per year for 150 hours; although unemployed individuals can access these for free, those who were employed but low-income struggled to afford these classes. Lessons provided through Further Education colleges are generally offered during work hours, creating a similar barrier to working individuals. Classes are rarely provided on weekends and childcare availability is low and cost prohibitive, possibly contributing to a gendered difference in English competency (Phillimore 2018).

In response to this problem, sponsorship groups started to employ their own qualified ESOL teachers or sent volunteers for training on how to teach English themselves. It was found that one-on-one sessions with tutors and volunteers were the most effective route to learning English (Phillimore et al. 2020). This is a clear example of how sponsorship groups' efforts to supplement or replace government-provided programming can be effective where the latter fall short of meeting the needs of newcomers. Other forms of tailoring to individual needs, including teaching methods specific to those with limited education or no literacy skills and providing childcare on site, are also important in optimizing language learning (Coley et al. 2019, Phillimore 2018).

Volunteers noted that interpreters, who were required to be available for the first 12 months of sponsorship, played a crucial role in the initial phase because they formed the main point of contact with refugees (Phillimore et al. 2020; Alraie et al. 2018). Notably, interpreters who were part of the core group of volunteers, rather than contracted externally, were more effective because they could better explain the aims of the CSS and tell refugees what to expect. Furthermore, interpreters familiar with both British and Middle Eastern lifestyles acted as cultural mediators (Phillimore et al. 2020).

Employment

Another area of important sponsorship support was regarding jobs and financial independence; however, the extent of sponsors' ability to provide support in this context was inherently limited. Refugees struggled with converting their qualifications to the UK equivalent. Additionally, navigating job centres was considered a challenge, since it requires both confidence and perseverance (Alraie et al. 2018). Volunteers expressed frustration with job centres' lack of understanding about challenges faced by refugees in securing employment and were concerned that refugees were being actively discouraged by job centres from seeking work (Phillimore et al. 2020). Newcomers also expressed the feeling that the job centres did not prioritize helping them find a position and that they did not even receive assistance in writing a CV, despite attending the job centres for several months (Alraie et al. 2018, 15). In response to this, community sponsorship volunteers assisted where they could by helping refugees navigate the job centres' processes, finding employment opportunities through networking (Alraie et al. 2018), and by connecting newcomers with volunteer opportunities to build employability (Phillimore et al. 2020).

Housing

All interviewees in the [UCL study](#) drew attention to the housing crisis in the UK as a major difficulty in securing housing for newcomers. The government was reluctant to house newcomers in state housing, and so even government-supported newcomers relied almost entirely on the community in finding new homes and landlords willing to rent their properties to refugees. At the GRISI-moderated sponsor forum in 2020, sponsor groups and CSOs noted that affordable housing remains a critical issue for sponsors across different sponsorship contexts, including Canada. Housing is identified as one of the biggest practical hurdles for sponsorship groups worldwide.

Physical distance from necessary amenities like medical providers, halal stores, and mosques were a particular challenge for newcomers arriving in rural communities. Community sponsorship groups were more effective in ensuring that newcomers had access to what they needed beyond what government authorities could provide, for example helping out in the evenings or on weekends when government workers were off shift (Alraie et al. 2018).

Education

Community sponsorship volunteers helped children access education, attended parent-teacher meetings, provided one-on-one tutoring to help the children in school (Phillimore et al. 2020), and helped students and their parents navigate the transition to school (Alraie et al. 2018). Refugees interviewed in the [IRiS study](#) stressed that this particular type of support was very valuable (Phillimore et al. 2020). Groups also advocated to have schools hire teaching assistants or ESOL teachers (Phillimore et al. 2020). The [UCL study](#) also noted that local communities and schools benefited from the newcomer children's arrival and were enriched by the exposure to other cultures (Alraie et al. 2018).

Health

Volunteers helped refugees register with their local GP and requested interpreters when booking appointments. Volunteers were generally unprepared for how much assistance refugees needed with medical appointments; as refugees arriving in the UK on resettlement programs often have health problems, many medical appointments were required. Considering childcare and transportation, supporting refugees to attend medical appointments could potentially require three volunteers per visit (Phillimore et al. 2020). Community sponsorship volunteers drew on their social connections and personal experience to help newcomers access the best care possible. Volunteers provided translation services, helped ensure that the newcomers were being directed to the proper resources, and helped them follow up after appointments (Alraie et al. 2018). The [UCL study](#) notes that while the healthcare system being accessed by government- and community-supported newcomers is identical, the functional awareness of community members of what is needed to effectively navigate the healthcare system made a significant difference in supporting newcomers (Alraie et al. 2018).

Social connections

Social connection was identified as being both crucial to integration and the main difference in integration support between the government resettlement and community sponsorship schemes (Alraie et al. 2018). Community awareness of resettled newcomers increased friendliness and familiarity with them, which in turn increased their willingness to learn English. Community groups hosted get-togethers and social events for the newcomers. By contrast, some government-resettled newcomers had still not met their neighbours after a year of living in the UK (Alraie et al. 2018).

Volunteers tried to expand refugee families' network of friends by organizing social events, introducing them to local people, or connecting them with other Arabic-speaking refugee families nearby. Notably, the latter efforts sometimes backfired if families were socially incompatible or from different cultural back-



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grounds, which could result in disappointment and discouragement (Phillimore et al. 2020). However, connections with other Arabic-speaking families were a source of comfort and belonging for many newcomer families, and provided an additional resource for understanding and access to the job market. Some newcomers also relied on other Arabic-speaking families when they did not wish to overburden CSS volunteers (Phillimore et al. 2021a). In ethnically diverse communities where newcomers had access to other Arabic-speaking families, social relations with CSS volunteers remained more formal, and meaningful interaction was sometimes lacking (Phillimore et al. 2021a).

In rural areas or areas with few or no other Arabic speakers, newcomers found it more difficult to make social connections, and some reported having made no meaningful social connections at all (Phillimore et al. 2021a). However, where social bonds were made with CSS volunteers, they were much stronger in rural areas than in more urban and ethnically diverse areas. Refugees found common ground to build connections with locals, such as parenting, which eventually helped build friendships and even family-like ties based on mutual care and support (Phillimore et al. 2021a).

CSS volunteers were identified as the primary source of cultural awareness and company for refugees, and refugees expressed appreciation at being invited to celebrations such as birthdays and holidays. High-quality social connections are extremely important as they promote integration; social networks also

facilitate access to various forms of support and reduce feelings of depression (Coley et al. 2019). However, even in situations where strong social bonds with locals were made, some newcomers reported feeling exhausted by the absence of bonding relationships with other Arabic speakers (Phillimore et al. 2021a).

Family reunion was a top priority for refugees, who noted that full integration was impossible while they were separated from their loved ones. Indeed, the presence of family members has been found to facilitate integration, and family reunification is therefore likely to have a positive impact on integration (Coley et al. 2019). However, naming refugees to sponsor is currently impossible through the CSS.

Social connections between newcomers and community groups also created positive outcomes for host communities. Volunteers experienced feelings of fulfillment and interconnectedness within the community that they had not experienced before (Alraie et al. 2018). Volunteers reported a desire for emotional connection with the newcomers, and the joy and sociability from their relationships with the newcomer families, as well as a sense of purpose and pride in their accomplishments, were a major motivator for them to stay involved in sponsorship (Phillimore et al. 2021b).

Elements of multi-directional integration were more evident in community groups, who worked to create respect and understanding within their communities of the newcomers' right to maintain their own culture. By contrast, government-resettled newcomers were required to fit within the existing system which did not offer the same flexibility and adaptability to their specific needs (Alraie et al. 2018, 17). Some volunteers organized through NGOs to address ~~newcomers' needs outside of the parameters of the specific services offered~~ through government resettlement, which offers a good example of how communities can support government-resettled newcomers. However, this work depends heavily on how much the outsourced NGOs are willing to do, as those NGOs control and facilitate engagement with the newcomers (Alraie et al. 2018).

Legal Status

Some newcomers noted that support from the host community created more trust than support received from the state or from state-outsourced NGOs. Host communities were often more effective in following up with requests for support or information than NGOs. One newcomer noted that NGOs were unresponsive and required several follow-ups, which eventually led them to give up because “our dignity does not allow us to keep pushing” (Alraie et al. 2018, 13).

The 2018 [UCL study](#) also noted that community sponsorship “has more potential than the [government-led resettlement scheme] to ensure newcomers achieve rights and citizenship, not because the government does not recognize

these rights, but because the level of support required in attaining them is beyond [the] government's current capacity" (Alraie et al. 2018, 13).

Argentina: Syria Program

Background

The Syria Program in Argentina was introduced in two phases: the first in 2014, and the second in 2016. Large numbers of Syrian and Lebanese migrants arrived in Argentina during the first half of the 20th century, with many families still remaining split between continents or traveling back and forth between the two (CAREF 2018). The Syria Project was therefore able to be introduced as a combination of a humanitarian visa program and a family reunification program.

The first Syria Program (2014) enabled Argentinian relatives of Syrian and Palestinian refugees to sponsor family members. Argentinian relatives (referred to as "callers") provided letters of invitation attesting kinship bonds, proof of identity, and proof of domicile. In the year following the program's introduction, over 200 applications were submitted.

Momentum for the project was renewed in 2016, when Argentina pledged to resettle 3000 Syrian refugees at the United Nations Leaders' Summit on Refugees (UNHCR 2016). The 2016 program included an expansion of the eligibility of sponsors; sponsoring organizations (referred to as "requesters") could also assist with the resettlement of Syrian refugees. Argentina is the only country in the world that plans to deliver its entire Syrian resettlement program via community sponsorship; this puts it in a unique situation as compared to other sponsorship programs (Bond and Kwadrans 2019).

In April of 2018, the Argentinian Commission for Refugees and Migrants (CAREF) conducted a [study](#) on the Syrian Program. This is the only empirical study that currently exists regarding the Syrian program. It observes the experiences of five family-sponsored refugees and six stranger-sponsored refugee families in the city of Córdoba, with the observations structured as case studies of each individual or family. Because the two types of sponsorships (called and requested) are examined distinctly, this study offers some insight into differences in the experience of those sponsored by family members and those sponsored by strangers. These experiences are compared and contrasted below.

Family-sponsored refugees

The refugees surveyed in this portion of the study arrived either as small family units or solo travelers, including one woman traveling alone, who indicated that she had only done so because she was being sponsored by a known family member, and that otherwise women would generally not travel alone (CAREF 2018, 116). Many of these refugees were sponsored by family members with whom they had little or no previous contact until they began the sponsorship process.

Language

The children observed in the study learned Spanish quickly by attending school, and within two years their Spanish was perfect (CAREF 2018, 110). Children were well accepted in their school. Adults overall expressed less enthusiasm for learning Spanish, but also experienced more barriers to doing so; although there were opportunities, such as an evening Spanish course at the Faculty of Languages at Universidad Nacional de Córdoba specifically designed for Syrian Program newcomers, there was difficulty in attending classes. One participant pointed out that many people in his class, which was taught by his aunt and in which he did well, rarely attended because they worked in food services, which required them to be available in the evenings (CAREF 2018, 115). Some adults felt that finding work was a higher priority and believed that they would learn the necessary Spanish by working.

Employment

Family sponsored adults had relatively few issues finding employment. Sponsors used their own resources and contact networks to create or find work opportunities quickly. Family callers who had their own businesses (often restaurants) employed newcomers, and sometimes helped them start their own businesses. Although the work that refugee newcomers found was not necessarily related to past experience or qualifications, it was at least a way to temporarily solve the problem of income. However, the study also suggested that being employed principally in Arabic-speaking workplaces may have slowed the newcomers' progress in learning Spanish (CAREF 2018).

Stranger-sponsored refugees

This set of data followed six families who were sponsored by Refugio Humanitario Argentino, an informal association of people moved by the situation in Syria but with no familial links. These families were referred to Refugio Humanitario Argentino by a Catholic priest in Syria. The families in this portion of the study were not interviewed, but information was provided by people who knew them.

Employment

In the case of stranger-sponsored refugees, difficulties related to finding work were a main hurdle and a principal reason for returning to Syria for those who chose to do so, as well as the main difference in experience between family- and stranger-sponsored refugees. Of the six families discussed in the study, three decided to return to Syria within a year of arriving, due to frustrations with getting work, difficulty adapting to the new culture and learning the language, and feelings of insecurity.

This difficulty in finding employment was a source of disillusionment and frustration for the newcomer families and demanded large intervention efforts from service providers in order to mitigate. According to the field study, those who arrived in Córdoba through sponsorship by family members created a much lower demand on local institutions.

This contrast in experiences points to two significant elements for further observation. First, while evidence has pointed to the fact that the presence of family members facilitates the process of integration (Coley et al. 2019), this study suggests that the presence of one or two family members who are already integrated in the new society may be more effective for integration of newcomers than having a whole family unit arrive as newcomers together. Second, while the present report primarily attempts to observe differences in integration experiences between sponsored refugees and government assisted refugees, there may be an additional significant difference in experiences between those who are sponsored by family (including by family which is not very well known to them) and those who are not. It is important to note, however, that there is only one available evaluation, and the data pool is very small. More research would be needed to accurately assess the integration experiences and challenges experienced by both family-sponsored and stranger-sponsored participants of the program.

Italy: Humanitarian Corridors Program

Background

The Humanitarian Corridors Program (HCP) was introduced in Italy in 2015 when a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between three religious and community groups and representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior, guaranteeing access to Italy for 1000 refugees from Lebanon, Morocco, and Ethiopia. This program is funded primarily through Italy's "8x1000" (otto per mille) system, where a 0.8% mandatory income tax goes to individuals' choice of charities or faith-based organizations. While this situates it as unique from most private sponsorship programs, it is still included in this report as a program that encompasses direct community welcome of refugee newcomers, has significant elements of similarity with sponsorship programs, and has important outcomes which can speak to the impact of community support for refugees. The HCP program was replicated in France, and this program is discussed below. A pilot was run in Belgium from 2017 to 2019 providing for 150 visas for Syrian nationals from Lebanon and Turkey, and another in Andorra from 2018 to 2019 providing protection for 20 refugees who were residing in Lebanon (Humanitarian Corridors 2019).

Participants are selected based on applications to the HCP submitted via organizations working in transit countries (Humanitarian Corridors 2019). Applicants are identified by the precise admission criteria of "exceptional vulnerability": Female victims of trafficking, single women with minor children, people in need of urgent and unavailable care in refugee camps, and families

forced to live in unsustainable conditions (European Union 2020). Successful applicants then go through three stages of interviews to confirm their eligibility. Participants do not have to meet the UNHCR definition of a refugee to qualify for the humanitarian visa (Bianchini 2020). The program runs on a shared-responsibility model between faith-based organizations and the government, although the community groups provide most of the integration support. Faith-based associations commit to providing accommodation, food, legal assistance, language training, and work training for refugees for around 18 months, with possibility of extension on a discretionary basis, but the program includes a safeguard that allows the State to take over the sponsorship if for some reason the sponsor is unable to continue. The government also provides healthcare, schooling, and welfare benefits, if necessary. However, as of the enactment of a recent Decree Law, only individuals with certificates of residence are eligible to access healthcare. This creates a barrier for HCP participants, as asylum seekers are not usually able to obtain this type of certificate (European Union 2020; Bianchini 2020).

The first participants arrived in February 2016 and were welcomed by Protestant and Catholic groups and families (European Union 2020). Participants immediately applied for asylum at the airport and then were transferred to different cities across the country. HCP asylum applications take only six months on average to process, in comparison to regular asylum applications which take around two years. While some participants do qualify for refugee status, others received renewable permits to remain in Italy for periods between six months and five years (Bianchini 2020).

An [impact assessment report](#) was conducted by the European Union in 2020, surveying 894 HCP participants who arrived in Italy between 2017 and 2020 (mostly Syrians arriving from Lebanon). Most had arrived within the previous 6 months before the survey. At that time, 9.5% of respondents considered themselves to be well-integrated in Italy, with an additional 30.5 perceiving themselves as being accepted. The most common response was a feeling of being neither isolated nor accepted, which the study attributed to those participants still being in the early days of resettlement.

Of the surveyed newcomers, many were highly educated, with an average of 10.6 years of education. More than half were also highly skilled or skilled professionals in their home country. This was flagged as a concern since Italy generally only offers immigrants access to a sector of the labour market rejected by natives; as a result, 34.4% of foreign workers in Italy are employed below their educational level, compared to 23.5% of Italian workers (European Union 2020).

The [study](#) identifies specific pathways of integration: perceptions of personal safety; perceptions of sociocultural differences with respect to host society, friends and family relationships; neighbourhood relationships; language skills; job placement; housing; access to social/health services; participation in social/religious life; and access to consumer goods.

In addition to community sponsors, the HCP includes dedicated staff members within the supporting organizations, known as ‘operators’, assigned to look after one or more individuals or families and provide them with a wide range of services and goods, including food and shelter, identification of training opportunities, and other activities aimed at social inclusion and integration in local host communities. Most surveyed refugees (78.8%) said that HCP staff provided adequate or very good support in their integration (European Union 2020).

Language

A vast majority (91.8%) of respondents said that learning Italian was useful, if not fundamental, to their integration. 78.4% said that they had been offered special Italian courses.

Employment

Also notable was the HCP’s role in assisting refugees’ efforts to find employment in Italy. HCP operators developed ad hoc agreements with local training centres in order to include participants in training courses. However, while 84.5% of respondents said that finding a job was a priority, only 25.6% had access to job orientation courses despite continuous support from HCP operators in the search for training and employment opportunities. 20.7% of respondents had secured work; of those, most (69.2%) said they had found their job with the help of the HCP, while a small minority said they had found work on their own or with the help of friends. None of the respondents who had secured jobs had received assistance from public services, private work administration agencies, or work-producing cooperatives; this indicates that the HCP operators’ strategy of tapping into both formal and informal networks was much more effective than conventional job search strategies. However, the study noted that despite the significant level of human capital in the pool of respondents, educational and professional qualifications were not yet influencing the success of the program participants due to difficulty in having those qualifications recognized in Italy, creating a high risk of “brain waste” (European Union 2020).

Finding employment was identified as the main driver toward autonomy. 85% of respondents prioritized work over family reunification when asked what they were missing the most, and the largest fear identified was being unable to find work (European Union 2020).

Housing

Participants are housed in several types of facilities including family apartments, shared apartments, and individual rooms in private homes or reception centres. Access to housing is coordinated by networks of civil society stake-

holders, which the study notes differs significantly from the Italian public reception system.

While the initial sponsorship accommodation system was met with general satisfaction, it does entail limitations, such as cohabitations and sharing spaces with different families. Getting their own space was a high priority for respondents.

Social connections

Overall, it was found that while the HCP can enable social and professional integration, it can also deconstruct the fear of strangers, raise awareness about asylum seekers and contribute to a shift in perspective within majority societies (European Union 2020).

France: Humanitarian Corridors Program

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Inspired by the Italian program, France's agreement was signed in 2017 between five faith-based associations and networks and the State Departments of Homeland Security and International Affairs. 500 temporary political asylum visas were issued within 90 days for asylum seekers escaping Syria and Iraq. The temporary political asylum visas are part of a larger category of D Visas, which allow the right to make an asylum request after arrival (European Union 2020). Successful asylum applications under this type of visa can result in two types of renewable status cards: a 10-year "status refugee" card, if French officials have deemed them to meet the requirements of refugee status, or a 4-year "subsidiary protection" card, if the officials find that while they do not qualify for refugee status, they still face a risk of death, torture, or threats if they are returned to their country of origin (European Union 2020).

Participants are identified based on conditions of vulnerability (e.g. families with young children, people with medical problems), endangerment (e.g. homosexuals), and particular attachment to France (e.g. with family already living there). Italian and French authorities work together to identify candidates in Lebanon. Additionally, the French program offers an online language learning platform, as well as videos in Arabic aimed at managing expectations regarding accommodations, livelihood, and possible future issues with administrative procedures (European Union 2020).

Unlike the Italian program, the French program does not include the possibility of a State takeover of sponsorship, and is instead 100% reliant on faith-based organizations and their volunteer host groups (referred to as "citizen committees"). However, the State does provide a regular allowance and the same services provided to all asylum seekers and refugees, with the exception of housing. The five faith-based organizations, with the help of citizen com-

mittees, are tasked with accommodation, integration, language training, and administrative assistance. The Protestant division of the program, coordinated by the Federation of Protestant Mutual Aid (Fédération Entraide Protéstante – FEP), also includes social workers assigned to five regional platforms that support local host groups (European Union 2020).

This section is principally based on two studies on the Humanitarian Corridors Program (HCP) in France. First is an [impact assessment study](#) by the European Union, similar to the one conducted in Italy, also in 2020. The results of the European Union study are based on FEP central platform data on the 236 participants in the FEP division of the HCP, questionnaire responses of 35 adult participants, and 8 semi-direct interviews with different actors involved in the HCP (European Union 2020). The EU study does not include any discussion of the Catholic sponsorship program.

Second is a [study](#) conducted by the five abovementioned faith-based organizations in 2018 surveying both sponsorship groups and sponsored newcomers. The results of this survey are based on completed questionnaires from 21 newcomer families (79 individuals) and 27 sponsoring groups (Caritas 2018). Newcomers were surveyed on their situation regarding employment, education, language, housing, access to healthcare, their administrative situation, and the support received by the HCP. Sponsorship groups were asked about characteristics of the organization, various aspects of the project, and successes and challenges (Caritas 2018).

It is significant to note that the Catholic and Protestant sponsorship programs are separate, though the reports do not point to this difference explicitly. Comparison of the two programs is therefore impossible with the available data. For example, while the [EU study](#) asks participants to assess the helpfulness of the social worker network used only in the Protestant program, there is nothing in either study comparing the experiences of sponsored refugees in France who did have access to specialized HCP social workers with those who did not. A collaborative impact study on the integration results of each program could lead to potential improvements of both.

One of the main goals of the HCP is to give participants as much independence as possible in a short period of time. Most HCP participants also expressed a genuine desire to integrate into French society, become independent, and exit the program quickly. To facilitate this, citizen committee members and social workers tried to speed up legal, sociocultural, and economic integration of newcomers, with varying degrees of success (European Union 2020). The [Caritas report](#) notes that although the HCP participants have access to the same rights and services as non-sponsored migrants, one of the purposes of the HCP is to help participants secure effective access to these services and rights (Caritas 2018).

Language

Knowledge of French was essential for securing employment. While citizen committee volunteers could organize French lessons to help newcomers learn faster, it is unclear in the survey's results whether the improvement shown in

French language skills was through additional HCP aid or through standard French programs for refugees (European Union 2020). Respondents to both the EU and Caritas surveys indicated that they would have liked more support in learning the French language (European Union 2020; Caritas 2018). The [Caritas study](#) noted that French language skills improved even among newcomers who did not participate in government-provided language training. The study attributed this result to community-organized lessons and positive efforts on behalf of the newcomers (Caritas 2018).

Employment

EU survey respondents in France noted a similar emphasis on the importance of finding employment. Of the adults who were eligible to work (based on 3 months having passed after securing a status card), 87% were actively seeking work and only 7% were employed or engaged in vocational training. When asked about their hopes for the future, the most common response was finding work (European Union 2020). Despite difficulties finding employment, more than half of the respondents to the Caritas survey, and/or one of their family members, had taken up unpaid work, including volunteer work with local charities (Caritas 2018).

Housing

HCP participants transitioned out of housing hosted by community groups largely within a year of arrival, after they began receiving social benefits and could secure private accommodation. However, even after transitioning out of hosted housing, participants continued to be supported and assisted by community groups in other ways.

Most respondents to the EU survey indicated that finding private accommodation was important to them, and most of the respondents who expressed dissatisfaction with their housing were still being hosted in the homes of community group members. The survey suggested that this dissatisfaction was more related to reliance on hosts than on having to share spaces, since most respondents who shared rooms with other family members said that they were satisfied with their current accommodation (European Union 2020).

Several respondents to the Caritas survey also expressed that their hosted housing was too small or far away to access services by public transport, and one indicated that the housing was not adapted to the medical needs of their family members. The report noted that this difficulty most likely came from the fact that most community groups were located in small towns, and that costs were prohibitive to secure housing that met all the newcomers' needs (Caritas 2018).

Education

The [EU study](#) identified three significant factors that assist in sociocultural integration: Being hosted in a small town, schooling children, and improving French language skills. The most important of these was found to be schooling children, as children learned French faster than adults, and children's social networks could extend to their parents. Schools also gave opportunities for refugee adults to tell their stories, for example in assemblies or class discussions, which could promote values of peace, tolerance, and anti-racism (European Union 2020).

Social Connections

Social networks in small towns were found to be helpful for expediting administrative processes; one citizen committee founder recalled that a local official accepted their verbal account of the newcomer family's income, rather than requiring them to obtain paper documents. Community groups in rural areas reported increased social cohesion within their communities, both in integrating newcomers in their communities and connecting with other community members to coordinate tasks and events (European Union 2020). Over half of the respondents of the Caritas survey reported living close by to friends that they made after their arrival in France, pointing to a significant difference from the isolation often experienced by refugees long after their arrival (Caritas 2018).

Legal Status

Another key element of integration assistance was the legal and moral support offered by citizen committee members at the asylum tribunals and appeals, which had a fundamental impact on the integration process. A "reciprocal lack of transparency", where asylum seekers did not know how their documents were being handled and judges and lawyers did not understand the past experiences of the asylum seekers, was a common obstacle that could be mitigated by volunteers (European Union 2020).

Based on the findings of the [EU study](#), the researchers concluded that the citizen committees and associations do help refugees to integrate more easily, even if some problems persist. Results were heavily dependent on the level of engagement of citizen committee members, and high levels of cultural, social, economic, and symbolic "capital" of participants and volunteers could make integration smoother. The research team also strongly advocated for allowances for more thorough research, as they felt that the number of people they were able to survey (35) was not sufficient to come to any certain conclusion. The [Caritas report](#) concludes that their study demonstrated the importance of the social and financial support provided by sponsoring groups. It also highlights the effect of sponsorship on community groups, who reported positive impacts on their community engagement and their views of migrants.

The report also indicates that sponsorship increased participants' ability to form social connections and make progress in learning French (Caritas 2018).

Australia: Community Support Programme

Australia's Community Support Programme (CSP) was announced in 2017, after the relative success of a Community Proposal Pilot (CPP) which began in 2013. The CPP offered 500 places per year within the offshore component of Australia's humanitarian program. Sponsors participated via Approved Proposing Organisations, who charged a fee for sponsorship.

The CSP was introduced with an increased yearly quota of 1000 places, which are also included within the Australian government's existing resettlement quota. The CSP's criteria for selection focuses on "job-ready" refugees: applicants must be 18 to 50 years old, have adequate English language skills, and have job skills or a job offer in Australia. It also includes high fees for applications; the visa fee alone is estimated to be over \$19,000 (Kaldor Centre 2020). These fees have attracted strong criticism.

Based on anecdotal evidence, integration outcomes have been positive, since refugees can tap into the social capital of their new community (Sparkes 2018). Sponsored newcomers have been able to find employment and become financially independent quickly. However, some commentators suggest that this success is largely tied to the eligibility criteria, which favour economically self-sufficient and "easy-to-integrate entrants" (Hirsch, Hoang and Vogl 2019); that is to say, the successful integration of refugees may be attributable to the required "integration-ready" characteristics of the refugees rather than aspects of the program itself. The program is not designed to prioritize the most vulnerable or at-risk refugees, and the "job ready" aspect means that female-headed households or individuals with major care responsibilities are unlikely to qualify as primary applicants (Hirsch, Hoang and Vogl 2019).

Empirical data related to the existing program is currently unavailable. However, a 2019 review entitled "[Investing in Refugees, Investing in Australia](#)", also known as the Shergold Review, examined and recommended changes to the CSP, including lowering the costs to applicants and sponsorship groups (Shergold, Benson and Piper 2019). In response to the Shergold Review, the Commonwealth Coordinator-General for Migrant Services conducted its own [review](#) of the CSP, which was submitted to the Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs in May 2021. The recommendations these two reports largely aligned and complemented one another. The government has responded to these reviews and indicated that their recommendations will be considered in its review of the CSP (Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs 2021).

New Zealand: Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship Pilot

New Zealand's government announced the Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship (CORS) pilot in their 2016 triennial review of refugee quotas. The CORS pilot was confirmed in August 2017 with 25 sponsorship places available. These 25 sponsorship places were in addition to the existing resettlement quota, due in part to a belief by government that this would increase the motivation of community members to participate (Stephens 2020).

The pilot engaged four community groups to resettle six refugee families throughout New Zealand. Refugees were provided a two-week orientation term at Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre, a program which normally takes six weeks for government assisted refugees but was expedited in this case (Stephens 2020). Refugees accepted under the CORS pilot had to be registered as such by the UNHCR, and also meet additional requirements: Principal applicants had to be 18 to 45 years old and have work experience or qualifications as well as English language skills.

The CORS program has been found to be beneficial because it has the potential to unlock community resources outside the government's reach, enabling sponsored refugees to access opportunities not inherently available under government resettlement programs (Stephens 2020). Furthermore, a [study](#) conducted 3 months after the refugees' arrival found that the CORS pilot successfully brought communities together to support refugees. Sponsored refugees were very positive about their relationships with their sponsors, and credited the emotional and practical support of their sponsors as what helped them the most in the first few months of resettlement. They also identified their sponsors as key in their progress towards integration (Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment 2019).

This bringing together of communities also manifested in contexts outside sponsorship; after the Christchurch mosque attack in 2019, sponsor groups supported resettled families and the broader Muslim community in ways that were not apparent in communities that did not participate in sponsorship (Stephens 2020). Members of the South West Baptist Church in Christchurch provided accompaniment to hospital visits, helped with household tasks, and gave food and financial aid to Muslim families who were affected by the shooting (Meier 2019). Host communities became more engaged and connected with one another in the process of helping newcomers, and communities developed better understandings of refugee issues, multicultural societies, and different sets of beliefs or faiths (Stephens 2020).

The selection criterion of having English skills was identified as being helpful during the initial months of settlement. One sponsor said that the refugees were well-selected based on their ability to integrate into the sponsoring community. Immigration New Zealand workers also noted that CORS refugees had higher levels of independence and confidence than is generally the case with government assisted refugees. As in other countries, this indicates a possibility that successful integration can be partially attributed to selection criteria that make it inherently easier for newcomers to adjust to their new communities, such as language skills. This drew criticisms from some sponsorship

groups; one community organization chose not to participate in the pilot due to concerns that the “cherry picking” of skilled refugees meant that the resettlement program ceased to be a humanitarian program, becoming “about capability rather than vulnerability” (Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment 2019).

Another concern was that despite the fact that the selection criteria included having employment qualifications, this did not necessarily guarantee that sponsored refugees would be able to work in New Zealand using those qualifications. Sponsors raised concerns that refugees were unlikely to have their qualifications recognized by New Zealand’s Qualifications Authority, and would require additional schooling and qualifications in order to find appropriate work. The Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment recommended an outcome evaluation of the pilot be undertaken at around 18 to 24 months to determine whether this had changed, and whether the pilot ultimately helped sponsored refugees to enter the labour market.

In May 2020, the New Zealand government announced that the CORS pilot would be extended, allowing up to 150 further sponsored refugees to be resettled from July 2021 to June 2024. The extended pilot is currently in its design phase, and the first new sponsored refugees will be arriving starting in mid-2022 (New Zealand Government, 2021).

Ireland: Community Sponsorship Ireland Pilot

The pilot project Community Sponsorship Ireland (CSI) was developed between 2017 and 2019 and implemented between March and October of 2019 (Finn 2020). It was focused on providing protection for refugees identified by the UNHCR. Sponsors commit to providing social and financial support for 18 months and housing for 2 years. Although the initial 50 people resettled by the pilot were included within the Irish government’s existing resettlement quota, the government has committed to additionality in future iterations of the project (Tan 2021).

In 2020, the Department of Justice and Equality commissioned an evaluation of the pilot project. The evaluation report explicitly states that the impact on integration outcomes for resettled refugee beneficiaries could not be assessed due to the fact that all beneficiaries had been in Ireland for less than one year, most of them only a few months, at the time of the study. However, it does discuss several ways that sponsorship impacted beneficiaries’ access to essential elements of integration support such as housing, healthcare, and social support. It also indicated that while it was too early to tell for certain whether the foundations laid by the CSI created pathways to integration, indicators pointed to a strong possibility of that outcome. Although the evaluation identified the community at large as “the other beneficiary group in the CSI vision”, the impact of sponsorship on that group was not assessed (Finn 2020).

The evaluation found that the sponsoring community essentially functioned as a replacement for resettlement workers in mainstream services, helping re-

settled refugees through mandatory processes (e.g., immigration registration) and social protection mechanisms (e.g., healthcare, welfare). It concluded that the direct support given by the community constitutes a new pathway for refugee acquisition of support. Community sponsors were also able to go beyond what resettlement workers would be able to do. By using their social capital and local knowledge, community sponsors helped refugees navigate challenging day-to-day barriers and overcome barriers that might be impossible in any other circumstance, for example accessing healthcare when there is no room on patient waiting lists (Finn 2020). All community groups in the pilot also helped to facilitate religious practices and access to cultural, social, and sporting opportunities.

However, there were limits to how much support community groups could provide. Some migrants experienced anxiety and depression caused by post-migration living difficulties, which in turn exacerbated the impacts of trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder. The report stressed that community groups require additional support where these deeper challenges require professional help and recommended the engagement of culturally and linguistically appropriate and gender- and age-specific mental health service providers.

Housing

The evaluation identified the provision of housing as the most significant material benefit of the CSI program. Refugees have access to private rented housing from the day they arrive, and it is paid for by sponsors for 24 months. Sourcing housing was done through the use of local networks and social capital, although a general lack of knowledge about the program as well as misconceptions about Syrians and refugees posed a barrier.

While the findings of the evaluation were generally positive and promising, the author also cautioned that the reliance on informal systems to solve and navigate systemic barriers was unlikely to be scalable to a larger sized project. They noted that the community groups had developed good practices around countering opposition to migration in a productive and non-confrontational way, fundraising, and navigating social protection mechanisms, which should be shared for future initiatives. Finally, they recommended that future programs have a clearer process flow in order to speed up wait times for migration processes such as obtaining documentation and securing social assistance.

Ireland's permanent community sponsorship programme was launched in March 2019 (Clarke, 2019). In July 2021, a new national community sponsorship support organization, The Open Community, was launched. The goal of this organization is to expand the Irish sponsorship programme, to make sponsorship sustainable, and efficiently prepare both sponsors and beneficiaries. The Open Community offers a Swift Integration mobile app, available in English and Arabic, which provides information on education, citizenship, accommodation, employment, entitlements, and English terms to guide the settlement process. Its website (theopencommunity.ie) offers information and guidance on community sponsorship and will soon launch an Interactive Learning Centre for the training of sponsors.

Spain: Auzolana II Pilot Program

In 2019, Spain launched Auzolana II, a community sponsorship program to be carried out in three cities in the Basque region (Basque Government 2021). 5 Syrian families (29 people) referred by UNHCR were selected by the Spanish government for the community sponsorship program. This number was included within the existing resettlement quota, and selected families were already part of the general resettlement programme (Manzanedo 2019).

The Basque regional government took responsibility for the refugees and selected faith-based organizations (Caritas and the Jesuits) to participate in the pilot based on their work with vulnerable populations. The Basque government also supplied €300,000 in funding, including funding for a part-time social worker for each family, formally employed by the organizations. This created a blended approach between government and private sponsorship.

The organizations' responsibility was to make a house available for each family and maintain a bank account with €10,000 to fund the family's needs. They also were required to form local citizen groups, made up of 6 to 8 people who typically already knew each other and had previous social ties. The local citizen groups helped with the social aspects of integration support, such as assisting with registration for school and language training and access to public services (Basque Government 2021). They also helped with financial management; although funding was provided by the organizations, it was managed by the families, who sometimes needed guidance.

Volunteers adapted well to unforeseen problems, including contributing to additional expenses. When social activities and education were cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, volunteers worked to install Internet connections in the refugees' homes and arranged educational support for the children. Local groups also met regularly to self-assess and reflect on key issues. They demonstrated a strong capacity for adapting and identifying areas of improvement.

Although there is no information currently available on the actual experiences of refugees with respect to integration, this pilot has been hailed as a successful experiment in integration and is currently being considered for implementation in other regions (Basque Government 2021). In April of 2021, the region of Valencia announced a pilot sponsorship program which will receive five Syrian families currently residing in Lebanon (European Commission 2021).

Germany: Neustart im Team (NesT)

Germany's first private sponsorship program, entitled Neustart im Team or “new start in a team” (NesT), was launched in 2019. This pilot project may have been inspired in part by the Berlin-based Syrian Refugee Sponsors association, which was established in 2015 to help private individuals act as guarantors for family reunification visas through funding and programming. Recognizing the benefits of civil society involvement in resettlement, the German government set up an official private sponsorship program (Pohlmann and Schwiertz 2020).

Under the NesT pilot, 500 “particularly vulnerable refugees” were admitted under the 2018-2019 humanitarian admissions quota. They were supported by groups of at least 5 mentors, similar to Canada’s “Groups of Five”, who would help them run errands and find accommodations, apprenticeships, or jobs (Bathke 2019). Commitment by the mentors includes providing integration support for one year and housing for two years (Tan 2021). Mentors do not have the right to name refugees and are not involved in selection, so family reunification via NesT is not possible (Pohlmann and Schwiertz 2020).

There is no currently available study observing the results of the NesT pilot, and its potential future as a permanent program is uncertain. An M&E-based evaluation report is currently underway, and is scheduled to be released in 2022.

Cross Program Patterns

Patterns

The results of these studies show that despite some challenges, sponsorship programmes tend to have a positive impact on integration indicators, and that participating in sponsorship is beneficial to the host communities as well as newcomers. These programs were largely well received and seen as successful by policy makers, and most pilot programs resulted in state commitments and/or actions to expand sponsorship programming in receiving countries (Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative, 2019).

In the empirical surveys conducted and analysed above, finding work and reuniting with family were found to be the most important priorities for refugees; however, learning the language of the new country was the most important factor in being able to achieve those goals and was also essential to overall integration. Housing was the greatest challenge to sponsorship groups, but also one of the principal material benefits of sponsorship. A significant aspect of the success of programs was the ability to tailor services offered to meet the newcomers' specific needs; for example, finding or facilitating the correct type of healthcare required by newcomers or creating language classes to suit their schedules and rate of progress.

Social connections formed in sponsorship groups helped with all aspects of integration, as sponsors could use their personal networks to help newcomers access services and navigate legal processes, and sometimes to connect them with other families who share their cultural and linguistic background. However, a lack of cultural knowledge was a barrier to the strengthening of these relationships. Sponsors sometimes did not understand cultural values which could lead to misunderstandings, difficulties creating relationships, and difficulties understanding the newcomers' needs. Having an interpreter who was familiar with the newcomers' culture as well as their language could help in this aspect. This dichotomy is particularly evident in small and rural towns, where newcomers struggled to access services and form relationships, but the relationships that were formed – both within the host group and between hosts and newcomers – were especially strong.

Inconsistencies

There are several different models of sponsorship programs covered in this review, and the studies included use several different methods of collecting and analyzing data. Inconsistencies in results – beyond the inherent uniqueness of every individual's experience – are therefore inevitable. The use of UNHCR referrals versus naming, for example, may create significant differences in the experience of sponsorees, due at least in part to their differing pre-arrival characteristics and social and/or family connections in the host country. Moreover, there are many variations within each of these broad categories that may affect integration support and experiences.

This review does not aim to compare or promote either of these models. Both have strong advocates, and the choice of program design may reflect policy priorities. While UNHCR referred programmes tend to be more effective in prioritizing protection of vulnerable refugees, named sponsorship might create better outcomes where sustained and fast integration is the goal. Notably, UNHCR has urged resettlement states not to use “integration potential” as the basis for selection practices (Brekke et al. 2021).

Some inconsistencies were not related to the particular model of sponsorship, but rather were caused by differences between the operation of different sponsorship groups, even within the same program. Several reports point to differences in engagement across different sponsorship groups, which affected the experiences of the newcomers.

Different state contexts have different expectations around state involvement, which affected the amount of type and funding as well as the types of government services to which newcomers had access. Additionally, levels of state involvement vary with regard to providing support to sponsorship groups. Some states are very prescriptive about how local authorities must support sponsorship groups (e.g. the UK), while others allow the groups to make more decisions and find solutions independently (e.g. Canada). There is a wide diversity of policy design indicating how national governments, local governments, and civil society work together in a sponsorship program. Consequently, depending on the type of support available from the state, sponsored newcomers could be more or less dependent on their sponsorship groups for differing periods of time.

Finally, integration support and experiences may be affected not only by the make-up of the sponsorship ecosystem and the role and functions of sponsor groups within it, but also the make-up of sponsor group themselves. For example, the Argentinian non-named program stream, where organizations had primary responsibility for providing integration supports, seemed to have limited success compared to sponsor groups made up of volunteers who had committed to the sponsorship effort. While other countries also had partner organizations or offices responsible for coordinating sponsorship groups, support was still provided largely by the sponsor groups themselves. Therefore, the nature of the groups providing the support (organizations vs groups of individuals) may also have a significant impact on newcomers’ experiences.

Looking forward

Considered together, the consistencies and inconsistencies mentioned above point to several areas in which improvements could be made to the practice and study of refugee sponsorship and integration.

The positive impact of sponsors and their networks in helping newcomers access and navigate services was clear. Multiple studies pointed to examples of newcomers finding more success through their sponsors' networks than through government-provided services. This indicates that a non-siloed approach, which acknowledges the interactivity between social and professional networks, access to services, and integration outcomes, is favourable in the design and implementation of sponsorship programs. This non-siloed approach is also likely to create a larger network of local citizens working on integration of refugees; solidifying and extending those wraparound networks to provide newcomers with support is likely to help them feel comfortable to continue the process of integration.

More work should be done on educating sponsors before the newcomers' arrival, as generalizations about culture, ethnicity, and language were problematic. More engagement between newcomers and sponsors prior to arrival would help develop positive relationships and develop workable plans – and manage expectations – for settlement and integration. Pre-arrival resources such as Ireland's Swift Integration mobile app and France's online learning platform could both supplement and facilitate this additional contact with sponsors.

More work should be done to ensure that sponsorship programming as well as understandings of integration take a holistic approach. Indeed, clearly defining "integration" and the factors by which it is measured is central to conducting consistent analysis of sponsorship programming. The reports examined in this review did not tend to address integration as a holistic experience, as multidimensional, or as a two-way process. If M&E is to look more carefully at integration outcomes, it will do this best if investigations consider all aspects of integration, including how pre-arrival determinants and receiving community conditions affect integration.

More comparative research into different integration outcomes across sponsorship models is also needed in order to better assess the impact of different types of sponsorship programming. This could be considered alongside and in combination with Phillimore's (2021) "opportunity structures" model, looking to the impact of the host society and its particular sponsorship programming on integration. Such holistic considerations would be essential in identifying best integration practices in refugee sponsorship.

All this considered, the need for more holistic data-based research on integration is clear. While it is unlikely that a universal method for all data-based research on sponsorship and integration will be agreed upon, studies which examine a wider range of integration factors are needed in order to more accurately assess the effectiveness of particular sponsorship programs in this regard. The IOI framework is recommended for future M&E studies on integration, as it provides a holistic model around which to shape understandings of integration outcomes. Indeed, the results of the studies observed in this report can be interpreted as reflecting several elements of the IOI framework, particularly in the way that markers and means of integration are understood as built on, and interacting with, different forms of social connections.

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