

Community Sponsorship Scheme

Insights for the Home Office

Recommendations for the Home Office from the Community Sponsorship Evaluation

Following an evaluation of the Community Sponsorship Scheme (CS) involving interviews with 14 groups this practice brief sets out some of the key learning identified for the Home Office.

Application Process

Preparing an application

Most groups found the application process challenging and at times felt overwhelmed by the requirements.

- *Manage expectations by setting out average timeframes for application processes including length of time to develop the application, get a decision and receive a family.*
- *Provide basic example documents i.e. for safeguarding that groups can personalise.*
- *Offer a clear and realistic description of the levels of time commitment needed for CS at different stages.*
- *Outline the kinds of skills that will be needed in order to complete the application process and support a family.*
- *Encourage groups to be realistic about what they can achieve.*
- *Inform groups about the extent of support refugees will need.*

English language

Groups appeared unprepared for refugees' lack of language ability and the amount of time it takes to learn English especially where refugees are not literate in their own languages.

- *Increase requirements for the levels of English language support CS groups are expected to offer to include one to one support.*

- *Increase expectations around the number of hours ESOL classes that should be made available.*
- *Provide specific guidance to CS groups about how to work with refugees who lack formal education - there is now much learning from existing groups.*
- *Be flexible about the need for formal classes as these are hard to access in rural areas and other approaches may be more effective.*

Expectation Management

CS Group

It was evident that several groups were completely unprepared for the cultural differences that they encountered and how long it would take for refugees to become independent. It is important that they understand what to expect as this will help to avoid demotivation.

- *Use pre-application visits to educate about the challenges associated with supporting a refugee family.*
- *Ensure CS groups are aware of the differences between life in the UK and refugee sending countries especially around socialising, organising and gender relations.*
- *Manage expectations about what refugees are likely to be able to achieve at different stages.*

Refugee families

It was evident that some refugee families had not understood the information they had been given by IOM in advance of arrival especially around cultural differences, access to work and the levels of diversity in the areas to which they were being settled.

- *Families coming on CS should receive clearer information about life in the UK before they accept the resettlement package. This should cover gender relations, barriers to employment, and the presence of other Arabic speakers or Muslims in the area to which they are moving.*
- *Information should be offered in multiple formats with non-written information essential i.e. podcasts.*

- *It is important to check that refugees have understood the information they have been given.*
- *Families must be informed before they arrive that family reunion is unlikely and dependent on stringent conditions.*
- *Provide specific guidance about UK cultures including how we socialise and organise.*
- *Manage refugee expectations the kinds of work that are likely to be available and the amount of time it can take to access work.*
- *Families should be advised that speaking English is essential in order to access work and other resources and thus learning the language will be necessary before they can access work.*

Partnership with other departments

Biometric Residence Permit

- *Establish a dedicated contact that CS groups can access when there are problems with Biometric Residence Permits.*

Benefits and Employment

- *Coordinate with DWP to ensure guidance about the rights, entitlements and needs of resettled refugees is available to all staff in resettlement areas.*
- *Ask DWP to provide a phone contact for general enquiries and advice re non-urgent issues.*
- *Jobcentre Plus staff in resettlement areas might benefit from training so they understand refugee needs and can assist CS groups to understand and navigate UK job market.*

Well-being/health

- *Ensure that NHS providers know that refugees are exempt from NHS charging policies – perhaps providing refugees on resettlement schemes with documentation to prove their exemption.*
- *Encourage the Department of Health to consider including refugee representatives on NHS user groups*

Qualifications

Work with the Department of Education to explore mechanisms to transfer refugees' qualifications to UK equivalents.

Connecting refugees

Despite excellent social networks built with volunteers and high levels of trust and affection between refugees and volunteers, high levels of isolation were reported especially by refugee women. The psychosocial wellbeing of refugees will benefit from actions that connect them to others.

- *Help to connect refugee families already in the UK under CS and VPRS by establishing a social media forum.*
- *Establish “regional hubs” of resettled families to aid network development and reduce isolation.*
- *Encourage the establishment of refugee women’s groups.*
- *Encourage CS groups to think about how they can connect the refugee family they support to others in the UK but also how they can help them stay in touch with friends and family overseas.*
- *Not all refugees will want to participate in social activities with other refugees – it is important to encourage CS groups to think of multiple ways that they can connect all refugees to the wider community.*

Working with VPRS

In some areas VPRS refugees are contacting CS groups to ask for additional support. Where CS groups are prepared to extend their help to other refugees the local authorities their contractors can be reluctant to allow information sharing. Rolling out CS support to VPRS refugees might be seen as an additional gain from CS and should be supported.

- *Provide guidance for local authorities and their contractors on information sharing protocols*
- *Encourage contractors supporting refugees on VPRS to connect with CS groups in their area*
- *Support CS groups to work in partnership with local organisations, such City of Sanctuary and welcome groups to coordinate activity for all local refugees.*

Integration

Integration is a long-term process that is multi-directional and multi-dimensional. Groups who had little experience of working with refugees lacked knowledge about how to support refugees to long-term integration.

- *Share the Home Office's new Integration Indicators with all groups and provide guidance about how to use them*
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/home-office-indicators-of-integration-framework-2019>.
- *Manage expectations about integration and especially what is possible in the short-term. Labour market integration is known to take time – if groups and refugees are aware of this they will feel less anxious about slow progress.*
- *Set out potential integration pathways helping groups unfamiliar with refugees to understand the different steps which contribute to integration*
- *Work with Reset to offer specific support around how to counter negative media and attitudes.*

Looking ahead

- *As CS expands in the UK consider matching refugees to areas more carefully or even giving refugee families choice about where they go.*
- *Explore the possibility of CS expanding to include named reunion like the Canadian Private Sponsorship scheme enabling refugees to be reunited with their families. This will benefit integration by reducing family's levels of anxiety around the wellbeing of relatives.*
- *Support local CS groups to offer advice to families who wish to apply for indefinite leave to remain so that they can stay permanently in the UK.*

For more information contact:

Professor Jenny Phillimore
j.a.phillimore@bham.ac.uk