

Community Sponsorship in the UK: from application to integration

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Formative evaluation

INTERIM REPORT

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Executive Summary

Chapter 1: Introduction

The UK's Community Sponsorship Scheme was introduced in 2016 and developed by the **Home Office in partnership with civil society and local government**. This report presents the interim findings of a formative evaluation which aims to help shape the development of Community Sponsorship in the UK.

Chapter 2: Community Sponsorship in the UK

The UK's Community Sponsorship Scheme (CS) was inspired by the Canadian Private Sponsorship model. A key dimension of the CS is that community groups take responsibility for **welcoming, supporting and settling vulnerable refugee families** and provide an effective way to support refugee integration. In early 2018, the Home Office made available grant funding to support the creation of a new arm's length organisation called "**Reset Communities and Refugees**" (**Reset**), intended to become the main infrastructure organisation for CS. Reset work closely with partner organisations to promote the CS and support CS groups. In order to become a CS group, organisations must have some formal constitution, raise appropriate funds, identify housing, obtain local authority consent, develop a safeguarding policy, engage in training and complete an application form. Groups must demonstrate that they are **capable of meeting key responsibilities** once the refugee family they plan to support arrives.

Chapter 3: Research methods

Between January 2017 and January 2019, a **team of researchers from IRIS** conducted 112 interviews with refugees, CS volunteers and thought leaders. The team followed eight CS groups from establishment to arrival of the family and 12 months after arrival. They also interviewed **15 refugees who had been in the UK in excess of 12 months and 36 volunteers who had supported those refugees**. Interviews took place in urban, rural and suburban areas and in England, Scotland and Wales. Some 12 thought leaders who had been involved in the development or promotion of the CS were also interviewed. Full ethical approval for the evaluation was received **from the University of Birmingham Ethical Review Committee**. The interviews covered the period in which the CS was developed in the UK with findings feeding in to the development of the scheme and associated support services.

Chapter 4: Before arrival

Volunteer recruitment is fundamental to the CS. Many individuals were motivated to establish groups or to volunteer by media coverage of the 2015 crisis or by calls from faith leaders to act. The role of **social or faith values, interests in civil society action and the desire to overcome personal challenges** were all important in encouraging volunteers to get involved. Volunteers brought wide ranging skills to the CS from former careers or their own personal experiences. They gained **new skills and knowledge** especially around team working, communications, charity development and the CS. Many groups spent a great deal of time working on the application focusing

collectively on different requirements. They faced challenges around raising funds, preparing the resettlement plan and identifying affordable housing. Fledgling CS groups gained support from some of the larger charities promoting the CS, from more established CS groups, local authorities and from communities with origins in the Middle East.

Chapter 5: From reception to integration

Arrival of the refugee family was one of the high points for CS volunteers, with refugees reporting that arriving to a small welcome committee at the airport was extremely reassuring. Most groups and refugee families bonded quickly, with kin-like relationships developing in some instances. **Volunteers reported gaining a great deal from the CS: friendship, new knowledge, learning about different cultures and a sense of purpose.** Refugees clearly benefited from the social capital gained from having a ready-made network to help them settle in. Volunteers aided refugees with accessing healthcare services and welfare benefits. They were pivotal in engagement with schools and in supporting English language acquisition. They also offered emotional support and tried to connect refugee adults with other refugee families.

Both volunteers and refugees also faced challenges. Some refugees did not quite “fit” in the local environment if it differed enormously from their former life. Communication was tricky in the early months. **Refugees and volunteers struggled with unanticipated social and cultural differences.** Refugees were used to an open-door approach to socialising while volunteers liked to schedule activities. The nature of gender relations in some of the families concerned volunteers used to more egalitarian gender dynamics. Despite important social connections with volunteers, many refugees, especially those in rural areas or women, felt isolated and worried about the friends and family they had left behind.

Progress with English acquisition was slower than anticipated and refugees not literate in Arabic felt out of their depth in ESOL classes to the extent that their difficulties learning English impacted on self-confidence and self-esteem. Having expected to access work quite quickly after arriving in the UK, refugee adults were disappointed at not getting a job and concerned that accessing work depended on language acquisition. **Neither refugees nor volunteers were aware that gaining work is acknowledged to be a major challenge in refugee integration per se**, and so lack of progress towards self-sufficiency was a frustration to all. Lack of work and progress with English combined with the horrific experiences which led to forced migration combined to impact on refugees’ psychological wellbeing but as yet no group reported engaging with the counselling services, partly because of concerns about language barriers. Several groups reported racist opposition to the CS before their family arrived, and one refugee adult reported being racially harassed.

CS groups received support to address the above challenges from various sources including the charities and organisations which had previously encouraged their application. Many groups interviewed were set up before the establishment of Reset, who now provide extensive advice and support refugee resettlement.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

Our data reflects the fledgling nature of the CS and identifies some of the teething problems that are in the process of resolution. Despite our work focusing on what was a challenging period for the CS, overall we find that **the CS is working well in the UK** and that groups, volunteers and refugees are benefitting from the scheme, often in ways that were not anticipated. Further work is planned to try to identify the benefits of the CS that move beyond refugees and volunteers to include the wider community.

Chapter 7: Recommendations

This chapter sets out a range of recommendations about the ways in which the CS in the UK can be enhanced, some of which are already in hand. These touch upon encouraging group formation, the application process, recruiting and retaining volunteers, managing expectations, training, support, education and English, integration and employment and identifying the key stakeholders who might respond including Reset, the Home Office, IOM and UNHCR and CS groups.

GLOSSARY

BRP	Biometric Residence Permit
CS	Community Sponsorship Scheme
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
IoM	International Organisation for Migration
IRIS	Institute for Research into Superdiversity
LSCB	Local Safeguarding Children Board
NHS	National Health Service
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VCRS	Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme
VPRP	Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme
VPRS	Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme
