



An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt
agus Comhionannais
Department of Justice
and Equality

Community Sponsorship Ireland

A Guide for Prospective
Sponsors

Introduction

Someone was forced to flee their home to escape persecution or war every 2 seconds last year. The number of people worldwide who have been forcibly displaced is currently at an all-time high of 68.5 million. The vast majority of these people have either moved within their own country, or have fled to a neighbouring country. Africa and the Middle East host over 50% of the world's refugees with approximately 17% living in Europe.

Many refugees have no prospect of returning home safely in the foreseeable future; the situation in the country where they have sought protection may also be perilous or they may have specific needs that cannot be addressed there. In such circumstances, UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, may refer their cases to other countries who will consider admitting them by way of resettlement to enable them to restart their lives. Ireland is one such country and it has committed to offer safety and protection to approx. 1,200 people through its resettlement programme between 2018-19.

Now communities across Ireland are being asked for the first time to play an important and direct role in this resettlement process. Through Community Sponsorship, they will be encouraged to come together to show solidarity with those affected by war and persecution and to assume responsibility for welcoming them to their community. Community groups will themselves be provided with training and support so that they feel empowered with the knowledge and skills to effectively assist refugees coming to Ireland to build a new life in a safe and welcoming environment.

This guide explains how Community Sponsorship works, the obligations of sponsors and the application process involved should your community group wish to play a part in welcoming refugees to Ireland.

What is Community Sponsorship?

Community sponsorship started in Canada in the 1970s. Unlike traditional refugee resettlement models, where the State or State-supported actors provide settlement and integration services directly to refugees, community sponsorship invites members of the public to play a key role in the delivery of these supports. It has been shown that community sponsored refugees tend to have relatively early, positive integration and settlement outcomes, thanks in large part to the social support they receive from sponsors. Canada has resettled more than 300,000 refugees since its community sponsorship programme began and now a number of other countries are seeking to replicate the success of that programme in the unique context of their national systems.

Under such programmes, private citizens and community organisations, rather than government officials, become the face of welcome for resettled refugees arriving to their country. Sponsors commit to provide social and emotional support to refugees over a specific period of time, to source suitable housing and help them find employment, learn the language, enrol in schools and more; they play a key role in introducing them to state services and social and professional networks in the new community in which they have settled. For communities, such programmes are a great way to build broader awareness of refugee-related issues and to help promote understanding and intercultural exchanges. Often both sponsors and refugees have a life-changing experience, bringing communities together to share positive and enriching experiences.

Through the establishment of a Community Sponsorship programme in Ireland, communities will for the first time be supported to provide direct assistance to refugees settling in their locality through a structured programme backed by a unique collaboration between government, UNHCR, NGOs and civil society. It will begin on a pilot basis in 2018 with the goal of resettling a minimum of 50 refugees by August 2019. It is hoped that the programme will be fully operational and in a position to accept applications on an on-going basis by the end of 2019.

What is resettlement and how does it work?

Resettlement involves the selection and transfer of refugees from a state in which they have sought protection to a third state that has agreed to admit them as refugees with permanent residence status. The status provided by the resettlement state ensures protection against return to their country of origin where they will be at risk of persecution. The resettled refugee and his/her family or dependents will be provided with access to civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights similar to those enjoyed by nationals. Resettlement also carries with it the opportunity to eventually become a naturalised citizen of the resettlement country.

In 2018 the number of people in need of resettlement is estimated to be close to 1.2 million – the number of places available falls far short with just over 65,000 persons transferred in 2017. New Community Sponsorship schemes, such as this one, will play an important role in expanding the capacity of states to provide resettlement places and, the Canadian experience indicates, will in time result in additional places becoming available.

Any person or family that is being considered for resettlement will have already been registered with UNHCR and declared entitled to refugee protection based on an individual assessment. Resettlement is a measure of last resort and eligibility is based on precise criteria by reference to protection needs and potential vulnerabilities. UNHCR's Resettlement Submission Categories include: Legal and/or Physical Protection Needs; Survivors of Torture and/or Violence; Medical Needs; Women and Girls at Risk; Family Reunification; Children and Adolescents at Risk; and Lack of Foreseeable Alternative Durable Solutions.

The final decision to accept a refugee for resettlement remains with the resettlement country, not UNHCR. States are provided with detailed fact sheets on the persons referred and are facilitated to interview resettlement candidates and to conduct security screening. In the case of the Irish resettlement programme, each candidate is the subject of a Garda security assessment and interview, the checking of fingerprints against national and international databases and pre-departure health screening.

The refugee resettlement programme in Ireland has been in operation since 2000 and is run by the Irish government in collaboration with UNHCR. Between 2000 and 2013, over 1100 refugees from approx. 30 nationalities were resettled to Ireland. Since then almost 1000 refugees displaced by the conflict in Syria have arrived initially from Jordan but more recently from Lebanon. As refugees admitted to Ireland have already been determined by UNHCR to meet the definition of a refugee, they are not required to apply for refugee status in Ireland upon arrival. Their rights are set out in the International Protection Act 2015. In most respects, including education, employment and social protection, they have the same rights and entitlements as Irish citizens upon arrival. They will become eligible to apply for naturalisation after three years.

Who is eligible to be resettled via the Community Sponsorship Programme?

Referrals to Community Sponsorship Ireland will be made via existing procedures already in place for the government managed resettlement programme. Persons eligible for this programme will be refugees who currently reside outside of Ireland and who have been identified by UNHCR and accepted by the Irish Government as individuals who are in need of resettlement. The individuals selected will also be asked to agree to participate in this programme and to provide written consent to share basic information with sponsors in order to be part of a Community Sponsorship Programme. Resettled refugees being referred currently by UNHCR to the Irish resettlement programme are all living in Lebanon, the vast majority of whom are Syrian nationals. This may be subject to change in the future by agreement between UNHCR and the government.

Who can submit a community sponsorship application?

Participation in community sponsorship is voluntary and applications are open to all kinds of community groups, including local community groups, faith groups, businesses, neighbourhoods, charities etc.

Engaging in Community Sponsorship is a substantial undertaking requiring the assumption of a significant responsibility. A Community Sponsorship Group (CSG) must consider all aspects of their commitment before applying.

In order to submit an application your group must consider and demonstrate the following:

- » Your Group must be comprised of a minimum core group of five people (a primary and secondary sponsor and a minimum of three additional CSG support personnel), all of whom must be over 18. They should have an interest in other cultures, respect for diversity and a demonstrated connection to their community.
- » Each member of the group must be legally resident in Ireland.
- » You need to find a Regional Support Organisation (RSO) who will advise you in preparing your application and be available to provide help and support to your group throughout the sponsorship period. Participation in the programme is contingent on the availability of an RSO with sufficient capacity to work with your group

where you are located. During the initial pilot phase RSOs will only be available in certain regions of the country; a list of RSOs currently approved for the pilot phase can be found at Appendix A.

- » Your Group must nominate a Primary Sponsor who will assume responsibility for applying for approval to become sponsors in the first instance, and if approved, for leading the co-ordination and the delivery of the sponsorship commitments. He/she will be the primary point of contact for the Community Sponsorship Group.
- » Your Group must also nominate a Secondary Sponsor who will support the Primary Sponsor in the co-ordination and the delivery of the sponsorship commitments. He/she will be the primary point of contact when the Primary Sponsor is unavailable.
- » Community Sponsorship Group support personnel are people who will play a regular or significant role in the delivery of settlement supports to the family. While friends and family may also help you on an occasional basis, it's important for safe-guarding reasons that you identify everyone you anticipate will be playing a regular or significant role in the delivery of supports.
- » Your Group should include individuals with a range of skill sets so that a varied level of experience is covered. For example, someone with experience in education, employment, financial supports and someone who has experience in working in an intercultural context or supporting vulnerable people would all be beneficial. In your settlement plan you will be asked to designate who has responsibility for each area.
- » Your group must agree to undergo training in advance of the commencement of the programme.
- » Your group must commit to raising a minimum of €10,000 to support a sponsored family, of which a maximum of €2,000 may be in-kind contributions. In your application you will be asked to provide details on any fundraising efforts to date and how you plan to raise funds to support the implementation of your resettlement plan and to cater for unexpected eventualities.

How long is the Community Sponsorship Group commitment?

Your Community Sponsorship Group will be expected to commit to sponsor a refugee family for a period of eighteen months and to ensure that housing is secured for a minimum period of two years.

Sponsoring means your Community Sponsorship Group will provide all necessary supports to the family during the initial period of their resettlement in Ireland and assist the family's successful integration into your community.

What are the responsibilities of a Community Sponsorship Group?

Community Sponsorship does not curtail in any way the existing rights and entitlements of resettled refugees to access state services. The legal rights of resettled refugees are set out in s.59 of the International Protection Act 2015¹. Resettled refugees have a right to legal residence upon arrival and in most respects, including education, employment and social protection, they have the same rights and entitlements as Irish citizens. They become eligible to apply for naturalisation after three years.

How Community Sponsorship Ireland differs from traditional resettlement is that, rather than being offered accommodation initially in an Emergency Reception and Orientation Centre (EROC), the sponsored refugees will go directly to the community to begin the process of resettlement. Your Community Sponsorship Group will meet them in the airport on day one to welcome them to Ireland and bring them to their new home where you will help them to get set up and provide some initial orientation. You will also need to assume responsibility for promptly registering the refugees and introducing them to essential state services to meet their basic needs in areas such as health, education, and social protection. You will also need to ensure that appropriate interpretation services are available as required, particularly during the initial months. Your Regional Support Organisation will provide you with the training and support you need to ensure your group is well-prepared to fulfil this role.

In addition to ensuring access to key services and entitlements, your Community Sponsorship Group will play a vital role in helping refugees to become self-reliant and to develop the capacity to participate fully in Irish life. In other words you will be asked to promote positive integration outcomes for the refugees you are matched with. Integration in this context is understood as the: "ability to participate to the extent that a person needs and

¹<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2015/act/66/enacted/en/print#sec59>

wishes in all of the major components of society without having to relinquish his or her own cultural identity.”² In particular, you will be required to support and enable them to:

- » Interact with the local community and participate in cultural, sporting and other activities while preserving also their own traditions as they wish.
- » Celebrate their national, ethnic, cultural and religious identities.
- » Develop language skills sufficient to enable them to participate in economic life and in the wider society.
- » Access and navigate public services.
- » Access education appropriate to their needs and capacities.
- » Participate in economic life – in employment and self-employment.
- » Develop a knowledge of Ireland, its history and culture.
- » Participate in politics and public life.
- » Become full and active members of the community and Irish society.

Your group will be asked to plan in detail for the provision of these supports and to demonstrate your preparations through the submission of a settlement plan. Your Regional Support Organisation will also help you with this and provide you with initial feedback when you have completed it. Supports for every family will be different and your Community Sponsorship Group must prepare for many challenges and opportunities and how the group will provide supports to the family.

The application process

Once you have established your local Community Sponsorship Group, you will be required to undertake the following steps:



1. Come together to form a Community Sponsorship Group; nominate a primary and secondary sponsor and determine who the other members of the group will be.
2. Register your initial expression of interest with an approved Regional Support Organisation (RSO). An RSO is a sponsorship support organisation who will provide training advice and guidance and support you to develop your application.
3. Complete and submit to your RSO a detailed application form which will include clear plans for fundraising and a sponsorship undertaking whereby all members of the group commit to meet the obligations of the programme.
4. Participate in mandatory training to be arranged by your RSO.
5. Complete and submit to your RSO a detailed settlement plan. Where housing is not available at the time of completion the plan should set out how this requirement is intended to be met at a later date. A Child Safeguarding Statement and proof of completion of the E-Learning Programme must also be submitted along with your settlement plan.

Financial Commitment and Fundraising

Sponsors will be required to demonstrate that they have a minimum of €10,000 on hand to support a sponsored family, of which a maximum of €2,000 may be in-kind contributions (e.g. a commitment given to provide professional interpretation services, English classes, child care etc. free of charge). Refugees are entitled to access a range of social welfare benefits on the basis of the same eligibility criteria as Irish citizens. Applications can usually be made in person at local Intreo Centres or Social Welfare Offices³ or with the local Community Welfare Officer⁴. In the first few months after arrival, the family will typically require a range of financial supports and expenses such as food, medical expenses, clothing, supports for education such as books and school uniforms etc. Refugees may qualify for supplementary or discretionary welfare schemes, such as the exceptional needs payments, but Community Sponsorship Groups are expected to demonstrate that they have fully considered the needs and requirements of the family and to plan financial needs accordingly. Additional funding may also be required to ensure that the refugee family can participate fully, to the extent they wish to, in local society and community activities.

Financial Planning

Essential criteria

- A draft budget should be prepared initially to project monthly expenditure.
- A fundraising plan must be drawn up and set out in your Application Form.
- A minimum of €10,000 (€8,000 where €2,000 is committed by way of in-kind contributions), which is to be held in a secure account (with a minimum of two signatories) to be drawn down, as required, over the duration of the community sponsorship period.

Meeting the criteria

- **Prepare an initial budget**
 - » Examine the areas that your community will be responsible for and how you plan to address this over the course of the sponsorship period. When preparing your budget take into account which resources can be provided in-kind, through donations and which can be covered by social welfare until such time family members access employment. You will also need to ensure contingency for any additional or unforeseen costs such as urgent dental work, or any special needs the family might have. Back to Education supports for children and adults should also be fully researched and planned for (e.g. childcare arrangements while parents attend classes). You may also need to factor in delays in accessing certain entitlements.
- **Fundraise**
 - » It is essential to put together a fundraising plan with realistic targets as to how your community can reach the financial commitment of this programme. Community Sponsorship is a community endeavour so your initial fundraising targets should start within your community. This is also a great way to work together towards a common goal and to spread the news about your plans. A broad approach can also be useful, mixing fundraising with donations from local businesses for example.
- **Evidence of funds**
 - » A dedicated account should be set up for the purposes of administering and holding in trust any funds raised with appropriate oversight and controls established – for instance a minimum of two co-signatories should be required prior to any withdrawal. Bank statements will need to be submitted along with your settlement plan in order to provide evidence that your group has a minimum of €10,000 available (€8,000 where €2,000 is committed by way of in-kind contributions) but also, more generally, sufficient funds to meet the anticipated costs set out in the budget by reference to the overall settlement plan.

Safeguarding

The National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012-2016 make it mandatory for people working with children or vulnerable adults to be vetted by the Garda Síochána National Vetting Bureau. You must ensure that all personnel as part of your Group are fully vetted to support working with children and vulnerable adults and that they are suitable and of good character.

Children First guidance and legislation must be strictly adhered to in the implementation of community sponsorship. Organisations working with children and vulnerable adults are required to:

- » Keep children safe from harm while they are using the service
- » Carry out a risk assessment to identify whether a child or young person could be harmed while being supported by the group
- » Develop a Child Safeguarding Statement that outlines the policies and procedures which are in place to manage the risks that have been identified
- » Appoint a relevant person to be the first point of contact in respect of the organisation's Child Safeguarding Statement.

Your Regional Support Organisation will assist you in meeting your safeguarding requirements. Every member of your group will be required to complete a Garda vetting form which will be facilitated through your RSO. Successful completion of the vetting process must be submitted along with your settlement plan.

Your group must also designate a Child Safety Liaison Person; this person and all members who will have direct contact with the family will be required to complete Tusla's Children First E-Learning Programme⁵ and work with the RSO Designated Liaison Person to develop a Child Safeguarding Statement, which can be based on the existing policies of the RSO and which may rely on its reporting procedures. The Child Safeguarding Statement and proof of completion of the E-Learning Programme must be submitted along with your settlement plan.

Data protection and privacy

Maintaining the privacy of the resettled family is important therefore your Community Sponsorship Group must commit to:

- » Never share personal information, documentation or data provided by or relating to the family without their informed consent.
- » Get informed consent from the resettled family in relation to any proposed media exposure, requests or interest⁶.

Your group should inform itself of its statutory obligations more generally with respect to the Data Protection Acts 1988 to 2018, for example to keep personal data secure or to notify affected parties in the case of a breach.

⁵<https://www.tusla.ie/children-first/children-first-e-learning-programme/>

⁶See further: <http://www.unhcr.org/5915bf114.pdf>

Settlement Plan

A detailed settlement plan is required as part of the application process and should fully consider all aspects of the support and needs of a family. Your Community Sponsorship Group should provide a timeline and a detailed support plan of how your group will deliver community sponsorship to the refugee family. It should set out who, when, how and where your settlement plan will be delivered.

Settlement Planning

Essential criteria

- A timeline and plan of action.
- A sufficiently detailed blueprint setting out how you will meet the needs of the family, both before and after their arrival.

Meeting the criteria

- Devise a timeline
 - » Set out a realistic timeline that illustrates when you will provide the requisite supports for the family both before and after their arrival. It is helpful to see these as stages, each being of a six-month duration.
 - » Using guidance documents, plan which supports should be provided immediately, and which supports should come later in the process.
- Ensure you include as much detail as possible in the action plan
 - » From the beginning it is crucial that you consider where the housing will be and the size of housing available. If you do not have a housing solution available at the time of submission of the settlement plan, it is essential that you set out clearly how you intend to secure it if your application is approved subject to housing.
 - » Consider the types of support needed by the family and detail who will provide these supports.
 - » Your plan will need to be robust, and supported by evidence of how and who will provide the supports. This should be supported by the names and addresses of the individuals and organisations concerned.
- Get support when required
 - » If you do not have the necessary skills and expertise within your group, source and identify additional support from organisations or other individuals who can provide this when required.
- Build in contingency plans
 - » Be prepared for things to go wrong and not according to plan.
 - » What alternate arrangements have you made in these circumstances?
- Ensure that your settlement plan contains the full list of requirements required by the programme. This includes
 - » Clear timeline
 - » Arrival plan
 - » Orientation – for both local community and family
 - » Proof of funds
 - » Suitable accommodation or a clear plan as to how it will be secured
 - » Language courses
 - » School places, a G.P. willing to accept new medical card patients, etc.
 - » Registration plan
 - » Access to employment services

Resources

- » Settlement plan template
- » Guidance for Sponsors – Settlement planning

If an application is approved, how is a match made between a sponsoring group and a refugee family?

You will be formally notified that a family has been matched to your Community Sponsorship Group and informed as soon as travel arrangements have been finalised so that you can plan for their arrival.

The Irish Government and UNHCR will have responsibility for selecting refugee families who are eligible and suitable for this programme. Consent will be obtained of the families themselves to voluntarily enter into the community sponsorship stream of resettlement. Those who do not wish to consent will be provided with resettlement support through the existing resettlement programme managed by the Government and Local Authorities.

A successful sponsorship application will be met with a quick turnaround by the Irish state to ensure the speedy arrival of the refugees into Ireland so as to take advantage of the community resources prepared. Where an application has been approved, subject to housing, the matching process may take place prior to housing being secured but the Community Sponsorship Group will be expected to provide further details and documentation as required so as to co-ordinate this process with the Department of Justice and Equality and to ensure that appropriate accommodation will be in place in time for the family's arrival.

A refugee family will be matched to the Community Sponsorship Group by the Department of Justice and Equality on the basis of criteria such as:

- The needs of the family (health, medical, educational, employment opportunities etc.)
- The proposed settlement plan set out by the community sponsorship group and how it may address and meet the needs of the refugee family.
- The size of accommodation available in that location to meet the size of the proposed family.

I'm interested in applying, what are the next steps?

If you would like to apply to become a sponsor under the Community Sponsorship Programme, the first thing to do is to find like-minded individuals who wish to apply with you and to contact a Regional Support Organisation near you to see if they are willing and have the capacity to support your group. For a full list of Regional Support Organisations see Appendix A.

What if something goes wrong? Dealing with relationship difficulties and breakdown.

Experience in other countries suggests that sponsorship breakdown is in fact a very rare occurrence however it must of course be acknowledged that in any community project of this sort difficulties may arise from time to time. In providing training and support, your Regional Support Organisation will do their best to prepare you for the challenges ahead and to help you prepare to deal appropriately with challenges when they arise. Ultimately, in the case of irreparable breakdown, the State will intervene and reassume responsibility for ensuring that the refugees are appropriately provided for. Before considering such an option however, first and foremost, all avenues must be exhausted in the community in seeking a resolution to the difficulties. If your group is experiencing difficulties your Regional Support Organisation will be available to you to offer guidance and support. Your Community Sponsorship Group will be expected at all times to make every effort in good faith to prevent a breakdown in the relationship. Where this cannot be prevented, you will be required to work with the RSO to seek a resolution, and enter into mediation where necessary or if requested to do so by either the RSO or the Department of Justice and Equality.

Appendix A

Approved Regional Support Organisations (RSOs) for the Community Sponsorship Ireland Pilot

Nasc, the Migrant and Refugee Rights Centre,
34 Paul Street,
Cork,
(021) 427 3594
<http://www.nascireland.org>

Irish Refugee Council
37 Killarney Street,
Dublin 1.
(01) 764 5854
<http://www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie>

Irish Red Cross,
The Mews,
25 Denzille Lane,
Dublin 2.
(01) 642 4600
<http://www.redcross.ie>

Avondhu Blackwater Partnership CLG,
The Old Mill,
Castletownroche,
Co. Cork
(022) 46580
<http://www.avondhublackwater.com>

Waterford LEADER Partnership,
Lismore Business Park,
Lismore,
Co. Waterford.
(058) 54646
<http://www.wlp.ie>

South and East Cork Area Development (SECAD),
Unit 1/2 Midleton Community Enterprise Centre,
Knockgriffin (Barrymore),
Midleton,
Co. Cork.
(021) 461 3432
<http://www.secad.ie>

Cork City Partnership,
Heron House,
Blackpool Retail Park,
Blackpool,
Cork.
(021) 430 2310
<http://www.corkcitypartnership.ie>

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