

# GLOBAL REFUGEE SPONSORSHIP INITIATIVE

## GRSI AT A GLANCE

### Ireland moves closer to establishing a community sponsorship program

A group of eight Irish government and civil society representatives were in Canada from February 11 to 15 to fine tune their country's plans to set up a community-based refugee sponsorship program in the coming months. The visit was a follow-up to GRSI's trip to Ireland last November (see [GRSI newsletter December 2017](#)).

Two GRSI partner organizations (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and the University of Ottawa Refugee Hub) organized the visit to Ottawa in coordination with Ireland's Department of Justice and Equality and Irish civil society.

The Irish delegation included key players in the world of refugee resettlement in Ireland: John Roycroft (Irish Refugee Protection Programme), Brian Merriman (Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service), Enda O'Neill (UNHCR Ireland), Eve Leonard (Irish Red Cross), Colm O'Gorman (Amnesty International Ireland), Fionna Finn (NASC - The Irish Immigrant Support Centre), Caoimhe Sheridan (Irish Refugee and Migrant Coalition) and Hassina Kiboua (Irish Refugee Council).

Designed as a 'Partnership and Policy Retreat' the five-day seminar gave participants the chance to flesh out the structure of a new community sponsorship scheme for Ireland and sort out their respective roles. Expert speakers on topics such as sponsorship mobilization, refugee selection, gender issues, employment, housing, and program evaluation provided valuable input to the sessions.

During the workshop on how to address the needs of privately sponsored refugee women, discussion focused on issues such as childcare, mental health, language learning, work skills, domestic violence, safety, women's rights, and culturally appropriate services.

Among the resource people was Russell Rook of the Good Faith Partnership in the United Kingdom, who provided a British perspective on the dos and don'ts of setting up a private sponsorship program. The program also included a roundtable and community dinner with a sponsorship group in the town of Almonte, site visits to local immigrant settlement agencies, and a dinner with IRCC Minister Ahmed Hussen on Parliament Hill.

### Community Sponsorship Around the World



- See a Need and Act on It: Working Group on Resettlement Meetings in Germany [👉](#)
- GRSI mentioned in the UNHCR's zero draft on Global Compact on Refugees (point 72) [👉](#)
- Germany announces plan to implement community sponsorship [👉](#)

The Irish team made excellent progress while in Canada in thinking through how a made in Ireland community-based system might work, and will meet again soon to discuss next steps. During their deliberations they will benefit from the presence of IRCC refugee expert Dennis Cole, who will be embedded in the Irish Justice Ministry for a few weeks to provide guidance and technical expertise.

"The Irish are off to a flying start", said Cole. "It was rewarding to watch government and civil society leaders working so intensively together to come up with creative solutions that fit Ireland's environment. We're really looking forward to helping the Irish bring this process to fruition in the coming months."



*Irish delegation during their visit with sponsorship groups in Almonte near Ottawa.*

### Learn More

- [Sponsoring LGBTQ+ Refugees through the Rainbow Refugee Society](#) [👉](#)
- [RSTP Fact Sheet - Sexual Harassment](#) [👉](#)

## A sponsoring organization that welcomes members of the LGBTQ community to Canada

Here is an excerpt from an [interview](#) with Lisa Hébert of [Capital Rainbow Refuge](#). The full interview can be found in the [Case Studies](#) section of the [GRSI Guidebook](#).



### How do sponsors of vulnerable groups work together with governments?

Most of our sponsorships are through a program called the Rainbow Resettlement Assistance Program (Rainbow RAP). We are honoured to have been the first group in Canada to have sponsored under the Rainbow RAP in 2011, when we welcomed a lesbian couple from South East Asia.

### What is the rainbow resettlement assistance program?

The Rainbow RAP provides some seed funding that represents a lump sum for settlement and three months of income support for the sponsored refugees. It encourages groups to engage in sponsorship because the fundraising obligations are a little less daunting. The program requires us to apply through a Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH), but does not impact the SAH's quota; in other words, doesn't reduce the SAH's ability to sponsor other cases. The Rainbow RAP allows us to sponsor from any visa post, which is very helpful as LGBTQ refugees do not present from the same war zones that tend to produce other refugees. The Rainbow RAP also provides some starter furniture and linens, which is appreciated.

### How is sponsorship of LGBTQ refugees different from sponsoring non-LGBTQ refugees?

LGBTQ refugees have more potential places of persecution: State, militarized groups or gangs, community, and their own family. When they have to run, they are often at great risk because the only countries they

can flee to also have persecutory laws, and they cannot seek support from their own ethnic communities because they could also harm them.

Because of the tremendous dangers and harm that we have witnessed from the community we have sponsored, we have adopted higher levels of confidentiality. We don't identify the newcomers by country, and instead leave it up to them. For people who have left everything behind, defining their own identity is the beginning of empowerment. We also don't even suggest media interviews or speaking engagements in the first year of arrival.

### What has been the best part of your sponsorship experience?

It is incredibly rewarding to help people build new lives. Their hope for the future is uplifting for everyone involved. That hope and sense of future is an incredible gift to the sponsorship group members, giving our lives renewed meaning and purpose. It is very meaningful to be part of a community of people who are linked by love and caring.

## What is GRSI?

**The Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative is a partnership of five organizations – the Government of Canada, UNHCR, Open Society Foundations, the Radcliffe Foundation and the University of Ottawa. It aims to help other countries set up their own community-based refugee sponsorship programs, strengthening local communities and improving the narrative on refugees in the process.**

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*“GRSI aims to share Canada's experience and support the adoption of similar models in other countries. The ultimate goal is to increase refugee protection by mobilizing the compassion that exists in communities around the world.”*  
- Jennifer Bond, University of Ottawa