

# GLOBAL REFUGEE SPONSORSHIP INITIATIVE

## GRSI AT A GLANCE

### Argentina embraces Community Refugee Sponsorship

A GRSI team visited Buenos Aires from March 6 to 9 to meet with government and civil society representatives involved in setting up a community refugee sponsorship program in Argentina.

Argentina is already well along the path to establishing a full-fledged sponsorship system. The country has welcomed over 300 Syrian refugees since it launched its Syria program in 2014. It is now building the structures it needs to make community sponsorship a permanent fixture in several provinces around the country.

As a GRSI partner, the UNHCR has played a vital role in this process since late 2015 by helping the government devise an action plan for consolidating community sponsorship. This involves raising awareness of how community sponsorship works in Argentina, identifying potential new partners in sponsorship, providing technical support to speed up referral and case management procedures, and working with the IOM to help implement a wide range of activities to facilitate integration once refugees have arrived. Funding from the Emerging Resettlement Country Mechanism has supported these efforts.




On March 8 (International Women's Day), the UNHCR and IOM teamed up with the Syria Program to organize a one-day workshop that brought together dozens of sponsors, refugees and civil society actors from all across the country. During a panel discussion GRSI delegates underscored the key components of a viable sponsorship program and pledged to continue efforts to support Argentina.

The day ended with the Festival for Women Refugees, a cultural event attended by over 1000 people. The Festival featured live performances by musicians, dancers, drummers, well-known DJs, and a Syrian mural maker, along with information booths and cuisine from around the world.

The GRSI delegation was led by Jean-Marc Gionet, Senior Director of Resettlement Operations at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). He was joined by Daniel Gonzales, a Program Officer at Open Society Foundations who knows the region well, and Kaylee Perez, a Spanish-speaking Resettlement and Settlement Associate with the Mennonite Central Committee of Canada. Louise Lavigne from IRCC's Refugee Affairs Branch acted as trip coordinator.

### Community Sponsorship Around the World



- News from Citizens UK 
- Más de 1000 personas se sumaron al ACNUR en el primer festival "Por las mujeres refugiadas" (Spanish) 
- Tweets from the Festival for Refugee Women (Spanish) one, two, three, four, and five 

In addition to participating in the workshop, the GRSI team met with Argentina's Chief of Cabinet of the Presidential Office and senior migration department officials to discuss the Syria program. They also held a roundtable with leaders of the key sponsorship groups and NGOs that are welcoming refugees in cities such as Buenos Aires, Rosario, Mendoza, and San Martin de los Andes.

"The energy and enthusiasm of the sponsors we met was amazing," said Lavigne. "I get the impression that the community sponsorship movement is setting down deep and lasting roots in Argentine society."

Next steps will focus on strengthening Argentina's sponsor network and creating opportunities for collaboration between government and civil society.



From left to right: Federico Agusti (Argentine migration department), Kaylee Perez, Daniel Gonzales, Louise Lavigne, Patrick Defoy (Canadian Embassy), Esteban Tomé Fuentes (Office of the Chief of the Cabinet of Ministers), Jean-Marc Gionet.

## All About Sponsorship Agreement Holders

Here is an excerpt from an **interview with Don Smith of the Anglican Diocese of Ottawa**. The full interview can be found in the **Case Studies** section of the **GRSI Guidebook**.



### WHAT IS A SPONSORSHIP AGREEMENT HOLDER?

A SAH is a corporation that has signed an agreement with the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada that allows it to sponsor refugees under the Private Sponsorship of Refugees program, the Visa Office-Referral program, the Blended Visa Office-Referral program, or the Joint Assistance Sponsorship program.

There are approximately 110 SAHs across Canada. The majority are faith-based or ethno-cultural corporations, although some are service-providing organizations (i.e. settlement agencies). Small SAHs sponsor refugees directly. Large SAHs partner with Constituent Groups and/or Co-Sponsors who do the work directly with the newcomers.

### HOW ARE SAHS STRUCTURED?

A SAH is a corporation incorporated under federal or provincial law. It is typically a not-for-profit, charitable agency managed by a Board of Directors. As a registered charity, its financial activities are governed by the Income Tax Act and Regulations. Large SAHs will have a small paid staff, small SAHs will be run by volunteers. Large SAHs will partner with Constituent Groups and/or Co-Sponsors to work directly with the newcomers. Small SAHs may work directly with the newcomers. Regardless of whether the SAH is large or small, it cannot relinquish or transfer its liability for the sponsorship to the Constituent Group and/or Co-Sponsor.

### WHAT ARE CONSTITUENT GROUPS AND HOW DOES THE SAH INTERACT WITH THEM?

A Constituent Group is either a group of individual Canadians or (an) individual Canadian(s) in conjunction with a corporation, unincorporated organization or association, which a SAH can authorize to sponsor refugees under its sponsorship agreement. Each SAH may determine the modalities of the authorization. For many faith-based SAHs, their Constituent Groups are their assemblies, parishes, or congregations.

### WHY ARE SO MANY SAHS FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS?

There is no requirement for a SAH to be faith-based. However, there are factors (described above) that promote faith-based organizations taking on the role of SAHs. An additional factor is historical. It was the Mennonite church, along with the Jewish Immigrant Aid Society, that signed the first Master Agreements for sponsorship with the Minister of Employment and Immigration Canada at the time of the Indochinese refugee crisis in 1979.

### WHAT IS THE BEST PART OF YOUR SPONSORSHIP EXPERIENCE?

The knowledge that we have given people, who had no possibility of a future in their country of origin or country of refuge, new lives in a safe and welcoming country.

## Learn More

- [Sponsorship Agreement Holders \(Refugee Sponsorship Training Program\)](#) ➔
- [History of PSR \(Aura\)](#) ➔

*“The Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative creates opportunities for citizens to engage with and participate in a humanitarian effort—for the benefit of refugees and for the benefit of the communities that they live in.”*

*- Gregory A. Maniatis, Director, International Migration Initiative, Open Society Foundations*

## 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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