

# GLOBAL REFUGEE SPONSORSHIP INITIATIVE

## GRSI AT A GLANCE

### Engaging Communities in the Netherlands

On June 19, the Embassy of Canada to the Netherlands organized a roundtable on refugee sponsorship and resettlement. The half-day meeting was held at the Social and Economic Council in The Hague, an influential think tank that advises the Dutch Government and Parliament on key socioeconomic issues. It was co-hosted by UNHCR Netherlands, the Advisory Council for Migration Affairs, and the Major Alliance, a philanthropic foundation led by former Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende.

The event was attended by some sixty experts in the field of refugee assistance, including representatives of civil society organizations, municipalities, universities and philanthropic foundations. Several officials from key government ministries, such as Social Affairs, Justice and Security, and Foreign Affairs were also in attendance.

GRSI was represented by Chris Gregory (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada) and Professor Sabine Lehr (Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria). Chris spoke about refugee sponsorship from a government perspective, while Sabine talked about the role of Canada's sponsorship community, particularly Sponsorship Agreement Holders.

John Roycroft from the Irish Department of Justice and Equality's Refugee Protection Programme and Jane Kennedy of the United Kingdom's Resettlement, Asylum Support and Integration Directorate were also on hand to provide an update on the sponsorship programs in their countries. The UK launched its [Community Sponsorship Scheme](#) in July 2016. Ireland plans to set up its own private sponsorship system later this year.

The roundtable gave participants the chance to share best practices in refugee resettlement and integration. Panel discussions focused on the 2030 migration outlook for the Netherlands, policy options for community-based refugee sponsorship based on different national models, and the various grassroots initiatives already underway in the Netherlands. Integration outcomes and the multiple benefits of community sponsorship were also explored.

The meeting demonstrated the growing interest in community sponsorship among Dutch civil society and government officials. As a result of the event, a number of municipalities have flagged their interest in exploring a community sponsorship program.

### Community Sponsorship around the World

First refugees arrive under new community sponsorship category (New Zealand)

Community Organisations to Support Sponsored Refugees Who Arrive in New Zealand

NZ works to double refugee quota as others close their borders

Caritas to lead refugee family resettlement network (NZ)

A town in Wales welcomes refugees from Syria

A Welsh Town shows Britain a new way to welcome refugees

Private groups in Wales start 'adopting' incoming refugees from war-torn countries

Syrian refugee families embrace new life in Britain

Canada's Resettlement Program Offers New Chance for Refugees

Fundraiser aims to bring more queer, trans Syrian refugees to Canada

French couple welcome LGBT activist from Mali

Primer Encuentro de llamantes y beneficiarias/os del Programa Siria (Argentina – SPANISH)



Gallit Dobner, Counsellor at the Canadian Embassy and one of the roundtable's organizers, was pleased with the results of the event: "The Netherlands has a long history of welcoming foreigners, and the Dutch have already built solid structures and mechanisms for integrating refugees into society. Community refugee sponsorship is a concept that could take root here."

### Sprechen Sie Deutsch?

**The GRSI newsletter is now in German!**  
Our monthly newsletter, as well as other products such as the GRSI guidebook, will soon be available in German on the GRSI website.

## Citizens UK representative tours Canada

Bekele Woyecha recently visited Canada to meet with refugee sponsorship groups across the country. His one-month tour (June 5 to July 3) took him to Toronto, Guelph, Windsor, Ottawa, Winnipeg, Calgary and Vancouver. *Citizens UK* is an NGO devoted to helping communities "act together for power, social justice and the common good". It has been one of the leading proponents of the United Kingdom's *Community Sponsorship Scheme*. Bekele's trip to Canada was funded by a travel fellowship from the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust.



### How did you become involved with Citizens UK?

My involvement with Citizens UK goes back to early 2008, when I attended their national residential training on Community Organising and Leadership. That was a turning point in my life. Prior to that, my campaigns were not that organised. I often took time to write about the human rights situation in my home country, Ethiopia, and issues related to asylum, immigration and the need for democracy in Africa. In March 2011, I joined Citizens UK as a Community Organiser. Ever since then I have been actively engaged in campaigns aimed at welcoming refugees.

### What is your role at Citizens UK?

I am a Senior Project Manager at *Sponsor Refugees*, which is a foundation Citizens UK set up in October 2017. It is at the heart of the promotion of community sponsorship in the United Kingdom. I am glad to be one of the founding members of this foundation. We are now preparing the 2018 Community Sponsorship Awards.

### How has the UK's Community Sponsorship Scheme evolved since its launch two years ago?

Although the Community Sponsorship Scheme was launched in July 2016, community groups working with Citizens UK had been calling for the introduction of Refugee Sponsorship long before that. Community groups across the country were keen to be part of the refugee resettlement and integration process. This [video](#) shows calls by senior community leaders for the introduction of refugee sponsorship in the UK. Following the launch of the program, there was a need to promote it and provide support when needed. Even long before the launch of *Sponsor Refugees*, we were promoting the scheme in different parts of the country, as we were convinced it would bring civil society into the heart of refugee welcome and integration. We are blessed to have the

foundation, which is now working with partners to see the scheme succeed. The scheme has so far brought in people from across the country, but there is still a lot to do to see it flourish. I believe the Home Office is also ready and trying its best to see the scheme succeed. One thing for sure, it takes us all to see the Community Sponsorship Scheme succeed and become a household name across the United Kingdom.

### Why did you decide to visit Canada? What have you learned?

When I was doing research about Canada's refugee sponsorship program, I thought of travelling and meeting folks who have done it practically. I love stories and I believe stories change people's hearts. Hearing stories from those who have done sponsorship is best. Hence, I travelled to Canada in July 2017 and spent a week both in Ottawa and Toronto meeting lots of people. I was inspired by the stories I heard, but I thought the time was short. Here is an [article](#) I wrote then on my trip.

Hence, I decided to apply for the Churchill Fellowship so that I could see Canada again. I was fortunate enough to be awarded this fellowship. My decision was to return to Canada, with which I am now in love. I visited four time zones in four weeks, travelling to Ontario, Manitoba, Alberta and British Columbia. Through the process I have learnt how big Canada is. I have also learnt how big-hearted Canadians are. I was especially keen to talk to businesses, universities and schools and learn from them why they are engaged in refugee sponsorship. I have started to write about my experiences on my [BLOG](#). Lots of heart-warming stories, be it in a big city like Toronto or a small town like Arborg in Manitoba.

### What advice would you give to civil society organizations interested in becoming sponsors?

By being sponsors, civil society leaders and organisations can be at the heart of refugee welcome and integration. What is needed is the will to do it. Are you angry about the refugee crisis? Community Sponsorship gives you the chance to resettle a family in your neighbourhood.

### What is GRSI?

The Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative is a partnership of five organizations – the Government of Canada, UNHCR, the 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.

[SUBSCRIBE](#)

[GRSI ONLINE](#)

[CONTACT US](#)