

GLOBAL REFUGEE SPONSORSHIP INITIATIVE

GRSI AT A GLANCE

GRSI Goes to Spain

Spain has become the latest country in Europe to consider launching a community-based refugee sponsorship program. Spanish officials are talking with community leaders about the possibility of setting up a pilot project in the near future.

On November 27 and 28, GRSI delegates gathered with a broad range of government and community representatives in Madrid and La Rioja in meetings organized by UNHCR's Spain office.

GRSI leaders first met with senior officials from Spain's Foreign Affairs, Interior and Employment ministries to provide an orientation to community sponsorship, drawing from Canada's decades of experience with its Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program (PRSP). The delegation then gathered with thirty leaders from various civil society and religious groups in Madrid for a workshop exploring the power of community refugee sponsorship and how civil society and government can work together to create a program tailored to the local context.

The GRSI team also travelled to Logroño, capital of the northern Spanish province of La Rioja. Already a trailblazer in the field of refugee settlement, the region recently welcomed 150 newcomers by coordinating access to public and private resources. GRSI delegates met with over forty local leaders from regional government, civil society and the business community. They expressed enthusiastic support for building a refugee sponsorship program, emphasizing the province's strong tradition of social solidarity.

The GRSI delegation was led by Jennifer Bond (University of Ottawa Refugee Hub), Gregory Maniatis and Daniel Gonzalez (Open Society Foundations), Kate O'Malley and Francesca Friz-Prguda (UNHCR) and Chris Gregory and Caroline Guimond (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada).



GRSI delegates meet with regional and community officials at a workshop on community refugee sponsorship in La Rioja.

They were joined by two Spanish-speaking experts from Canadian civil society, Lucila Spigelblatt (Deputy Executive Director, **Catholic Centre for Immigrants Ottawa**) and Felisa Ponce (a York University MA student who previously worked at the **Refugee Sponsorship Training Program** in Toronto). Lucila and Felisa brought community sponsorship to life for Spanish colleagues by speaking about their own meaningful experiences as refugee sponsors.

In the coming months, GRSI will continue to liaise with Spanish stakeholders to build on the momentum of its successful visit and hold further discussions around community refugee sponsorship in Spain.

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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Lessons Learned by a Large Sponsoring Group

Here is an excerpt from an **interview** with Peter Showler, member of a sponsorship group in Smithers, British Columbia. The full interview can be found in the **Case Studies** section of the **GRSI Guidebook**.



What was it like sponsoring someone you did not know?

There was no problem sponsoring strangers. Most of our group had no experience with refugees, although several had cross-cultural experience. We formed close emotional attachments very quickly.

How was it that your sponsoring group grew to its size? What made you decide to have such a big sponsoring group?

The group grew organically. The original idea was to form a sponsorship group of 12-15 people to sponsor one family. We required a \$2,500 entry contribution. Within two weeks, we had more than 25 people asking to join. We considered starting separate groups; instead we decided to do multiple sponsorships with the same group. Within a month, we had 54 members. The remainder trickled in although we referred many to other groups. In my view, a group of 15 is a maximum number for one family, to share the work but also to establish a personal relationship with the family. Our model worked very well for multiple families.

What are some of the advantages of a large sponsoring group?

We had a variety of professional skills to deal with the extraordinary range of integration demands on a new family, and people were available to share tasks and transport. Small groups are often worn down after a few months; we had lots of reinforcements. It also allowed us to offer one-on-one language training sessions for specific family members and lots of people for social events.

The University of Ottawa is proud to be part of the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative. At a moment when mobility, integration and diversity are so important for all countries, we hope it will encourage the development of more community sponsorship programs around the world and, ultimately, help save more lives.

- Jacques Frémont, President and Vice-Chancellor, University of Ottawa

Community Sponsorship Around the World



- Syrian family gives back by helping Ottawa Food Bank [👉](#)
- Journalist refugee launches Canada's first Syrian newspaper [👉](#)
- Boost to government's flagship plan to resettle refugees as more communities step up to sponsor refugees [👉](#)
- The refugees who brought hope to a Scottish island [👉](#)
- ACNUR da la bienvenida a España al grupo de la Iniciativa Global sobre Patrocinio de Refugiados (SPANISH) [👉](#)
- Una delegación de Canadá visita España para enseñar su modelo de patrocinio privado de acogida de refugiados (SPANISH) [👉](#)

Learn More

- **Project 4000 - How Ottawa Welcomed Refugees from Vietnam and Southeast Asia** [👉](#)
- **Refugee Sponsorship Training Program Webinar on how to facilitate a successful sponsorship – Managing Expectations** [👉](#)