

GLOBAL REFUGEE SPONSORSHIP INITIATIVE SPECIAL EDITION

Due to the unprecedented times in which we find ourselves, the GRSI has brought together a special March/April edition of the monthly newsletter. This edition has special contributions from all the GRSI partners, highlighting their ongoing efforts during these times.

Jennifer Bond, GRSI Chair, University of Ottawa Refugee Hub

Greetings from my living room, where I am joining millions of others working from home.

As the University of Ottawa Refugee Hub team has transitioned to many new routines, we are acutely aware that millions of people – including many refugees, immigrants, and newcomers – are facing unprecedented and urgent challenges. We are proud of the incredible work each individual member of the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (GRSI) partnership is doing to identify and mitigate some of the most pressing needs.

We also remain committed to, and inspired by, our work with the GRSI. Fragile refugee protection systems will require broad community engagement in order to rebuild, and the objectives and principals that animate our work have become even more salient.

The GRSI has the privilege of operating in a vibrant ecosystem with many brilliant and committed stakeholders. We have benefited from significant collective wisdom over the past few weeks, and have learned from you about the importance of pursuing sponsorship-related work in three major streams: 1) preserve & respond; 2) prepare & rebuild; 3) innovate. We look forward to advancing together across all of these areas – in person when able; remotely until then.

At its core, community sponsorship is about connecting people and creating more open, compassionate, creative, and welcoming societies. It is about finding common purpose both within our existing communities and with our new neighbours, for mutual benefit. We have seen extraordinary examples of all of these things over the past few weeks – amidst the hardships and heartbreak, there have been so many signs of extraordinary solidarity.

These acts of community must both inspire our hearts and guide our next steps.

I am sending warmest wishes to each of you, your teams, and your families.

Catherine Scott, Director-General Refugee Affairs, Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on the work of Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada as we work to balance the safety and security of the Canadian population with the complex migration needs and humanitarian commitments of our country, even in the midst of crisis. One of the areas where we have kept up our momentum is in our support to the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative; Canada remains committed to expanding community refugee sponsorship and supporting those States and communities that are already developing or implementing programs. We are already seeing how sponsorship is proving highly resilient as a model for refugee support in this time of crisis.

Like community sponsors, IRCC is adapting by stepping up our communication with the refugee resettlement and settlement sectors across the country and moving to different virtual platforms to stay in touch. We also worked with our UK co-chair to hold a global GRSI States Network call on the 16th of April. The States Network is a forum for governments to engage and build capacity through exchange and support to each other during the crisis, with a view to preparing states to resume or ramp up sponsorship operations post-crisis.

Service delivery and sponsor engagement continues in Canada despite the COVID-19 crisis and we have heard from Canadian Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs) and settlement service providers about how they have adapted. For example, there are now weekly check-in calls to share information and resources. Some SAHs have also made use of video training to allow them to adapt to the current reality while continuing to provide support and services. Sponsors and settlement services have also shared practices such as creating documents with accurate COVID-19 information in multiple languages as well as documentation clearly and simply presenting information about applying for financial assistance during the crisis. The Department, for its part, has shown high levels of flexibility and understanding in our dealings with our community partners in recognition of their daily challenge to stay connected with their clients in an era of social distancing. In the rapidly-changing environment of the pandemic, we in the Canadian government have found our relationship with stakeholders of immense value as we draw upon their community experiences to understand local realities and create and adapt policy instruments to meet the challenges of COVID-19.

Refugee resettlement is all about giving hope to the many thousands who require that type of protection. I draw hope and inspiration in facing the current challenges of managing in the global pandemic by thinking of the resilience and strengths of refugees.

David Manicom, Special Advisor, UNHCR

COVID-19 is a health challenge, but also a humanitarian challenge without precedent. Can we advocate for community sponsorship of refugees, even now? Yes. It is impossible to predict which communities and states will come out of the COVID-19 period more rather than less willing to help the world's displaced. We should not assume less. Major media carry daily stories of resettled refugees turning to help quarantined neighbors, volunteering, using their not-formally-recognized training and skills to contribute and give back.

There is abundant evidence that physical distancing is spurring social-communing – in apartment blocks, neighbourhoods, civil society organizations, cities – and vivid displays of social solidarity and volunteerism. The blossoming global ecosystem of community sponsorship nurtured by the GRSI partnership is an example of a network-of-networks proving its worth during the crisis. UNHCR supports recent initiatives to convene community groups, sponsors, NGOs, states and philanthropists on global ecosystem video-calls to maintain momentum and show solidarity, combined with pragmatic virtual global workshops on innovative practices to integrate newcomers during the shutdowns of COVID-19. This is a time to strengthen the understanding that none of us are safe unless all of us are safe. We cannot beat this pandemic by leaving people out.

We are particularly working, right now, to deepen the engagement of more UNHCR staff in the work of community sponsorship. It is good to see how many of our colleagues are joining community organisations and state representatives on the weekly virtual workshops.

The social and economic costs for displaced people are severe. The *complementarity* of humanitarian and broader social needs are being *forcefully* exposed by the COVID-19 crisis. It is the right time to broaden and deepen our partnership for the next phase.

Gregory Maniatis, Director International Migration Initiative, Open Society Foundations

The [Open Society Foundations](#) will give more than \$130 million to combat the ravages of COVID-19 around the globe, with a focus on providing immediate relief for vulnerable communities and pushing back against government encroachment on political freedoms. More details from the announcement are noted [here](#).

Open Society's commitment includes rapid response at the local level where many of our staff live and work – from Berlin to London, to Mexico City and Rio de Janeiro, to Amman and Cape Town. Half of Open Society's initial COVID-19 response will go toward the United States, which has so far suffered the largest number of confirmed deaths, and where systemic inequality will have profound global consequences in the years to come. As the virus spreads across continents, we will also focus our efforts

in the Global South, particularly in countries where weak institutions face both public health and economic disaster. Our funding centers on those who are most at-risk, including refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers; as well as informal, low-wage, and gig economy workers; disadvantaged groups such as the Roma in Europe; homeless people; frontline health workers and caregivers; and detained and incarcerated individuals.

This is a critical moment to build solidarity, particularly by helping empower refugees and immigrants – not only by highlighting many heroically serving as frontline responders during this pandemic but as essential members of our communities. Open Society will continue to work alongside our GRSI partners, to advocate on behalf of refugees and immigrants and to support community sponsorship programs. At a time when so many face extreme uncertainty and new challenges brought on by the current crisis, community sponsorship plays an important role in welcoming newcomers as they resettle to new communities around the world.

Lara Dauphinee, Director, The Giustra Foundation and Frank Giustra Founder

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, [The Giustra Foundation](#), one of the founding partners of GRSI, started working with the private sector and non-profits to establish emergency feeding programs that provide healthy meals to low-income women and children, vulnerable seniors, and others in need in our community. As of April 30, The Giustra Foundation has funded three feeding programs in Vancouver, which will deliver over 18,000 meals to children, families and seniors affected by the pandemic. Even in the midst of social distancing and isolation, community remains our biggest asset as we cope with the profound societal transformations that are taking place to respond to the pandemic.

These efforts didn't end in Canada – [Acceso](#), a social enterprise organization founded by Frank Giustra, continued these efforts by feeding refugees at the [Colombian/Venezuelan border](#), while navigating new challenges created by border closures. The Giustra Foundation joins its GRSI partners in reaffirming the importance of and our commitment to community sponsorship around the world. The values of compassion, welcoming, and support sponsorship embodies will enable us to emerge from these dark days stronger and more empathetic, caring societies.

GRSI Launches Resource Portal to Help Navigate Community Sponsorship through COVID-19



The GRSI hosted a series of virtual community sponsorship calls and workshops from the end of March. The GRSI has hosted two global convenings for organizations involved in community sponsorship with over 100 participants. There have also been a series of workshops to help the sponsorship community develop tools and strategies in key areas such as sponsor mobilization, sponsorship engagement and training. The workshops had over 60 participant from up to 9 countries. A Global Sponsor Summit was also held on May 6th to allow sponsors to discuss how COVID-19 has impacted sponsorship. The GRSI States Network held a meeting on April 16 where eight states got together to discuss community sponsorship moving forward. Check out the products from the workshops on the [GRSI website!](https://www.refugeesponsorship.org/)

Check out the GRSI COVID-19 Resource Portal for more information about GRSI activities, tools and resources during this challenging time

<https://covid19.refugeesponsorship.org/>

King’s College London named UK’s “Refugees Welcome Uni”

King’s College London is being recognized for its “contribution to understanding and responding to the global issue of forced displacement in order to realize the educational potential of refugees.” The Refugees Welcome accreditation scheme acknowledges universities that are committed to welcoming refugees. King’s College London offers a scholarship program specifically for refugees and delivers educational programs for forcibly displaced people in the Middle East. The university is also working to bring a family to the United Kingdom through the Community Sponsorship Scheme, helping to resettle a refugee student and their family in the UK. The university will provide all-round support to the family and a fully-funded undergraduate scholarship to the student.

Refugee Community Sponsorship in the Basque Country: A Successful Experience

In this [interview](#) Monika Hernando Porres, the director of the Victims and Human Rights Section of the Basque

Country regional government outlined how the Basque region established its community sponsorship pilot. The Basque Country government proposed a community sponsorship pilot as a way of including regional governments in the resettlement and integration process. Working with the UNHCR in Spain, Caritas and Fundación Ellacuría, which is part of the Jesuit Refugee Services, the Basque regional government was able to engage with people involved in community sponsorship from several countries and organizations in order to learn from their experiences. So far the pilot has welcomed five families in five municipalities, who have been in Spain for approximately one year. Both the Basque regional government and the central government in Spain are interested in expanding the program to receive more families in communities across the country.

Check out the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative on Twitter!

Follow [@theGRSI](#) on Twitter for more updates on [#communitysponsorship](#)

Peckham Sponsors Refugees re-launches to bring a second refugee family to safety

It has been a year since [Peckham Sponsors Refugees](#) (PSR) welcomed a Syrian family to the neighbourhood through the UK’s Community Sponsorship Scheme, and the group of more than 100 local volunteers is re-launching this spring looking to sponsor a new family. The group is also helping to change the hostile environment narrative around refugees, the founder of the group was recently awarded the Young Champion at the Community Sponsorship awards organized by Sponsor Refugees and the Imperial War Museum will display a leaflet by Peckham Sponsors Refugees as part of its upcoming “Refugees: Forced to Flee” exhibition.

What is GRSI?

The Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative is a partnership of five organizations – the Government of Canada, UNHCR, the Open Society Foundations, the Giustra 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](#)



Government of Canada

Gouvernement du Canada



THE GIUSTRA FOUNDATION

OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS