

GLOBAL REFUGEE SPONSORSHIP INITIATIVE AT A GLANCE

A commitment to strengthening and supporting European community sponsorship

On Tuesday, April 27, the GRSI partnered with the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) and the European Commission to host a virtual event on tools and strategies that Europe can employ to strengthen community sponsorship. The full-day event, consisting of morning and afternoon sessions with topical breakout rooms and interventions from a sponsor and sponsored refugee, concluded with a high-level panel that included remarks from European Commissioner for Home Affairs Ylva Johansson; Canadian Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Marco Mendicino; Portuguese Secretary of State for Integration and Migration Cláudia Pereira; and the UNHCR Division of International Protection Director, Grainne O'Hara.



An audience of more than 170 participants listened to presentations delivered by an impressive 43 speakers hailing from organizations in government, including the Government of Valencia, German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, UK Home Office, Irish Refugee Protection Programme, and the Canadian Mission to the European Union; civil society, including the International Catholic Migration Commission, Fédération de l'Entraide Protestante, and Community of Sant'Egidio; NGOs, including Talent Beyond Boundaries, Nasc Ireland, and World University Services Canada; sponsor support

organizations, including Reset UK and the Canadian Refugee Sponsorship Training Program; academia, including the University of Birmingham and the University of Milan; think tanks, including the Migration Policy Institute; and philanthropy, including The Shapiro Foundation. Additionally, UNHCR, Caritas, and Amnesty International contributed speakers from their offices in Argentina, Belgium, Ireland, Italy, the Nordic and Baltic Countries, and Spain

For this edition of the GRSI Newsletter, the GRSI reached out to members of Ireland's sponsorship community for some reflections on sponsorship in the time of COVID-19.

GRSI in conversation with Nael Saoud from Nasc, the Irish Immigrant Support Centre
Have you noticed any common challenges faced by the sponsorship community?

Switching [to] the remote mode was the most common challenge sponsor groups faced, since most of our groups are elderly people and technology isn't their best friend.

Also, keeping the group spirit up wasn't easy for them as not all the group members knew each other, and with only the possibility of meeting over Zoom, that gap between the group [members] was still there.

How are you continuing engagement with the sponsorship community? Have you developed additional programming to help sponsors navigate the current COVID-19 context?

Engagement happens only over Zoom and phone calls, but we have added some additional pieces to our training, especially around communication methods like how to use some of the project management tools (Slack, for example).

Can you share any thoughts on innovations that have come about as a result of the COVID-19 context? Are there ones that you feel will be helpful post-COVID?

What surprised us is the fundraising process, usually (before COVID) a group needs around 4 to 6 months to raise the required funds following traditional ways (like coffee and cake fundraising, etc). But now the groups are more focused on social media which has been very successful. The last group we had managed to fundraise almost triple the required amount in a matter of two weeks, which was incredible. All our other groups have successfully managed all their funds in less than two months, so that's something [fundraising through social media] that will be carried on post-COVID.

Are there changes in how refugees are welcomed to the community due to COVID-19 given the restrictions?

There have been some changes following COVID restrictions; the families can no longer be welcomed at the airport, which has traditionally been really an important and touching moment for the group and the family. Plus, families have to self-isolate for 14 days before moving to their house. Meeting and integration between the family and the group afterwards is also limited and distanced.

Check out the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative on Twitter!
Follow @theGRSI on Twitter for more updates on #communitysponsorship

GRSI interview with sponsorship group in Ireland

The group is currently waiting to welcome a refugee to their community.

Are there any particular challenges that have required innovative responses in preparation for the newcomers' arrival? Have you developed new strategies to continue supporting the newcomers once they arrive?

After we sourced the house, there was a great time of togetherness: repairing bits and pieces, sourcing furniture required, etc. After this ended – and in fairness, the house was pretty well perfect – it felt like a bit of a slump as our family were still stuck in awful conditions and we knew we had the house ready and waiting for them. We put all the plans into place and are now just waiting and waiting....

How has your group stayed motivated during this time?

We have used the group WhatsApp to great effect. [WhatsApp] allows casual conversation rather than formal type emailing. I believe this has helped us stay motivated as a team, especially when nothing has been happening.

What kinds of supports are available to you? What tools have you found the most helpful? What tools would you like to see maintained in a post-COVID context?

We have found the support of Nasc invaluable. [Nasc assisted with] organising training online [and] putting us in touch with someone from Kinsale Group who has shared that group's actual experience of welcoming a family to Ireland. The online aspect post-COVID should not be left aside, as many more were able to come to online training [than would have previously when training was in-person].

Do you have any additional lessons learned or reflections to share?

It was felt that we had the house too early (in hindsight!) but in this area, we had no other option but to grab it when it became free. The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, and Youth giving us help with the rent is enormously appreciated as our funds had become dangerously low. Huge thanks to Fiona and Nael of Nasc for helping push this.

Humanitarian corridors in France: a new agreement is signed for the entry of 300 refugees

The French government, the Community of Sant'Egidio and Semaines sociales de France have renewed the humanitarian corridors project for the next two years. This will allow France to welcome 300 refugees from Iraq and Syria, currently in Lebanon.

This protocol follows the one signed in 2017, which has facilitated the arrival of 504 refugees to France.

First United Church raising funds to sponsor Syrian refugees, Canada

The First United Church is fundraising to help welcome a refugee family to Swift Current, Canada.

The First United Church welcomed a Syrian family in 2016, and are looking to help reunite the family with extended family members outside of Canada.

The church is looking to raise \$40,000 to help support the family in their first year in Canada. Reverend Annette Taylor says the previously sponsored family is very excited, though there is no firm timeline as to when the sponsors will be able to welcome the refugees to their community.

Cornish group hopes to raise big money to resettle Syrian family in Penzance, UK



Members of the [Penwith Welcomes Refugees group](#) are working to welcome a refugee family to Penzance, Cornwall. The sponsor group is made up of friends and acquaintances looking to replicate the successful efforts of groups in other neighbouring communities in Cornwall.

The group is planning to fundraise through a 4451km run, the distance between Aleppo, Syria and Penzance, UK. The group hopes to raise £9000 with this challenge, which is the minimum amount needed under the UK Community Sponsorship Scheme. The funds will go towards supporting the family after their arrival in the UK.

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, The Shapiro 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](#)