

Relational Support, Structural Constraints

Global Refugee
Sponsorship Initiative

Sponsorship and Refugee Integration

This meta-synthesis reviews recent evidence on sponsorship and refugee integration across six major domains: **social integration, employment, education, language, housing, and health**. Across the evidence, sponsorship is associated with important advantages in early reception, orientation, trust-building, social support, and practical navigation. However, outcomes are uneven and depend heavily on program design, local capacity, and wider systems of support.

162
sources
reviewed

Academic-style research
and evaluations focused
on sponsorship and
integration outcomes.

6 domains
reviewed



Social
Integration



Employment



Education



Language



Housing



Health

Core Takeaway

**Sponsorship can support integration,
but it cannot substitute for strong systems.**

Key Findings

1. Sponsorship's strongest contribution is relational.

Sponsorship can provide flexible, localized, and personalized support that helps refugees build trust, navigate services, form social connections, and feel welcomed during early settlement.

2. Integration outcomes are interconnected.

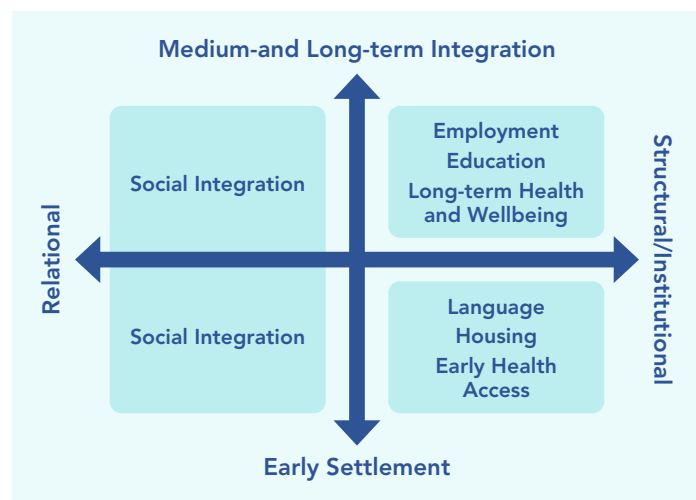
Social integration, employment, education, language, housing, and health do not operate in isolation. Progress in one area often depends on conditions in another.

3. Early support matters, but long-term outcomes are less certain.

Evidence is strongest on early reception, orientation, social support, and initial labour-market entry. Evidence on longer-term outcomes, causal effects, and subgroup variation remains thinner.

4. Structural barriers limit what sponsorship can achieve alone.

Language access, housing shortages, fragmented services, legal precarity, credential non-recognition, racism, disability-related exclusion, family separation, and weak long-term institutional support all shape integration outcomes.



WHAT THIS MEANS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Implications for Policy and Practice

Match relational support with institutional capacity.

Sponsorship works best when sponsor support is backed by strong public systems, accessible services, settlement infrastructure, and clear program design.

Invest in quality, not only participation.

The quality of sponsor relationships matters. Training, boundaries, role clarity, mediation, and support for refugee agency are essential.

Look beyond early outcomes.

Early employment, housing, or service access should not be treated as the full measure of integration. Long-term stability, dignity, skill-matching, belonging, health, and autonomy also matter.

Design for equity and variation.

Integration outcomes differ by gender, age, disability, family composition, legal status, geography, and prior experience. Program design and evaluation should account for this variation.

Limits of the Evidence



WHAT WE KNOW

- Sponsorship often improves early reception, trust, navigation, social support, and local connection.
- Sponsored refugees may experience stronger early labour-market entry in some contexts.
- Housing, language, and service access are foundational to wider integration.
- Program design, local capacity, and institutional support shape outcomes.



WHAT WE DO NOT YET KNOW WELL

- Whether sponsorship produces stronger long-term outcomes across models and countries.
- How outcomes vary across subgroups.
- How sponsorship affects refugees with disabilities and other groups facing accessibility barriers.
- How to isolate the effects of sponsorship from broader settlement and policy conditions.

Priorities for Future Research



Longitudinal evidence

Track integration outcomes over time.



Comparative evidence

Compare sponsorship models, policy settings, and national contexts.



Refugee-led evidence

Strengthen research designed with and by refugees.



Subgroup analysis

Better understand variation by gender, age, disability, legal status, family composition, and pathway type.



Mechanisms of impact

Ask not only whether sponsorship helps, but **for whom, under what conditions, through which mechanisms, and over what time horizon.**

Bottom line

Sponsorship can be a powerful contributor to refugee integration when relational support is matched by institutional capacity and sustained services. Its impact is real, but conditional.

For the full evidence base, methodology, and references, please see the complete GRSI MEL meta-study.