

Relational Support, Structural Constraints

Sponsorship and Refugee Integration

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This review presents a meta-synthesis of evidence on sponsorship and refugee integration across major integration-related thematic domains of a) Social Integration, b) Employment, c) Education, d) Language, e) Housing, and f) Health. Across these domains, recent global evidence shows that sponsorship is associated with important advantages in reception, orientation, trust-building, social support, and, in some cases, earlier or improved access to employment, education, or healthcare. The evidence is drawn from 162 sources that met the core inclusion criteria, namely evaluation-oriented or academic-style research, including original empirical work, with substantive relevance to integration outcomes of sponsorship.

At the same time, the synthesis shows that outcomes are uneven across contexts and are shaped by wider institutional and structural conditions. The field recurrently frames sponsorship not as a self-sufficient solution, but as a model whose integration effects are conditional, variable, and mediated by program design, local capacity, and broader systems of support. Sponsorship gains are found to be constrained by wider barriers, including language access, housing instability, fragmented services, legal precarity, credential non-recognition, discrimination, family separation, and weak long-term institutional support.

The purpose of this review is twofold. First, it identifies the main patterns in the available evidence on integration-related outcomes associated with sponsorship. Second, it highlights the limits of the current evidence base and the implications for future research. The report's contribution lies not only in summarizing where positive outcomes and barriers are reported, but also in clarifying where evidence remains thin, mixed, or methodologically weak, particularly with respect to longer-term outcomes, subgroup variation, comparative analysis, and causal attribution.

The report is divided into thematic domains for the purposes of analysis and presentation, but these should not be read as separate or self-contained bodies of evidence. The literature consistently shows that integration-related outcomes are interconnected: individual domains often influence one another. Studies often foreground one domain while also addressing adjacent themes because of their substantive overlap. The structure adopted in this report is therefore heuristic rather than siloed: it brings one dimension of the wider integration landscape into focus at a time while maintaining an understanding of the whole. This also makes it possible to show how different domains are variously framed, operationalized, and evidenced across the literature.

Research Approach

The meta-synthesis began with a total set of 872 possible items for review. We used multiple inclusion criteria to narrow down the population into a strong, coherent set for our final sample. Our inclusion criteria are 1) recency (the last ten years), 2) literature type (focusing on academic-style research sources and evaluations), and 3) scoring the relevance of each item (direct application to or of sponsorship). As a result, we arrived at a final sample of 162 sources.

This review uses an iterative, computer-assisted synthesis approach that combines AI-supported analysis with human validation. ChatGPT was used to generate structured syntheses of full-text documents, capturing each study's focus, methodology, empirical evidence, findings related to integration outcomes, and research gaps. Researchers then reviewed and validated outputs against the original texts and made corrections where needed, regarding interpretation of the text, methodological classification, or substantive claims made in the text. Validated source summaries were subsequently analyzed and compared across the full set of studies to identify recurring themes, areas of convergence and divergence, and cross-study patterns. This approach was used to accelerate comparative synthesis while retaining human judgement, source verification, and final interpretive responsibility throughout.

Research Findings

Across the thematic domains, the evidence base is methodologically mixed, combining qualitative studies, quantitative analyses, mixed-method designs, or conceptual work. This provides breadth across domains, but also means that findings are uneven in depth and comparability, with stronger evidence in some themes than others and limited consistency in how integration outcomes are defined and measured.

A recurring strength of sponsorship across the domains is its ability to provide flexible, localized, and relational support that public systems alone may not deliver effectively. The literature reviewed in the report suggests that sponsorship can create early trust, social anchoring, and tailored forms of practical help, while also helping some refugees build connections to receiving communities and local institutions especially during early settlement.

Domains like orientation, access to services, social connection, local belonging, and, in some cases, language, education, employment, housing, or health-related outcomes largely benefit from these strengths, but effects in these areas are not uniform across all contexts or models. Similarly, medium- and longer-term effects are also less consistently evidenced and appear more contingent on wider structural conditions, including housing systems, labour markets, legal status, service infrastructure, and access to sustained institutional support.

Sponsorship is often limited by structural barriers such as language access, housing shortages, legal precarity, fragmented service delivery, credential non-recognition, racism, disability-related exclusion, and family separation. The review finds that sponsorship can make a meaningful contribution to refugee integration, but that its effects are strongest where relational support is matched by institutional capacity. While there is evidence on sponsorship alleviating such barriers, the evidence remains weak on the ability of sponsorship to transform some barriers at scale and over the long term.

Recommendations for Future Research

This review highlights several avenues of future research to address structural priorities and issues of scale. Integration-related outcomes and considerations are nuanced and not uniform across time or geography and thus opening opportunities for different approaches.

Future work could consider the benefits of exploring in-depth comparative geographical research. Prioritizing comparative research across sponsorship models, policy settings, and national contexts could elevate national profiles and explore geographically specific program outcomes. Alternatively, longitudinal studies may shed more light on different impacts and outcomes across time. Elevating longitudinal study designs that measure integration over time may assist in dynamic program design that responds to different needs at different points in time. A third avenue of future work may elevate the role of lived experiences and resulting varying experiences across subgroups (i.e., the role of age, gender, ability).

To conclude, recurrent gaps include limited long-term evidence, weak causal isolation of sponsorship effects, insufficient refugee-led evidence, under-research on disability and accessibility, thin evidence on government-community hybrid models, and uneven attention to gender, age, and subgroup differences. *Future work should not only ask whether sponsorship helps, but for whom, under what conditions, through which mechanisms, and over what time horizon.*

INTRODUCTION

The current state of knowledge suggests that sponsorship is impactful across many different domains in facilitating integration-related outcomes. However, with programs and evidence base expanding across countries, integration is not a singular or uniformly measured outcome. Contemporary evidence suggests cautious optimism about integration outcomes but is also clear that the evidence base has expanded faster than it has consolidated. Many sponsorship programs are still new or in pilot form,¹ the research base is still limited,² and much of the available evidence remains qualitative, localized, or focused on individual schemes rather than comparative analysis. European synthesis work further shows that there is still relatively little systematic research on sponsorship's impact at the local level, on refugees and host communities, or on the conditions under which different models produce the strongest outcomes.³

To address this challenge, this meta-synthesis brings this evidence together to help move the field beyond program-by-program description toward a clearer account of which integration outcomes are most consistently observed, where the evidence is strongest, where findings remain mixed, and which design features or contextual conditions appear to matter most. In a policy area that is still often developing by experimentation, a synthesis of existing evidence is essential if sponsorship is to move from promising innovation to durable, evidence-informed practice.⁴

Our report shows that findings across domains are uneven in depth and comparability. This can be understood in two related ways. First, some domains are better positioned to support firmer conclusions than others: employment and parts of the health literature are supported by relatively stronger quantitative or longitudinal evidence, whereas social integration is often richer in its treatment of mechanisms, relationships, and lived experience, but less generalizable across contexts. Housing and language provide important insights, particularly on early and process-related outcomes, but remain comparatively thin on longer-term evidence, while the education evidence is informative yet based on a relatively limited selection of studies.

1 Beirens & Ahad (2020, pp. 1-4).

2 International Catholic Migration Commission (2022, p. 27).

3 Share Network (2023D, pp. 2-3).

4 See Beirens & Ahad (2020, pp.2-5); International Catholic Migration Commission (2022, pp. 28-29).

Second, the domains do not conceptualize or measure integration in uniform ways. Social integration is often framed holistically through belonging, reciprocity, trust, and recognition; employment is more often assessed through job entry, earnings, and self-sufficiency; language is treated both as an outcome in its own right and as a gateway to other outcomes; housing is understood both as an integration outcome and as a precondition for wider integration; education combines academic progression with belonging and labour-market transition; and health spans healthcare access, unmet need, mental wellbeing, and food insecurity. Together, these differences strengthen the breadth of the review, but they also limit direct comparison across domains and reinforce the need for clearer and more consistent approaches to defining and measuring integration outcomes.

META-SYNTHESIS APPROACH

Filtering Sources for the Final Sample

This synthesis mobilized multiple inclusion criteria to filter a total population of 257 sources down to a final sample of 162 items for inclusion. Our inclusion criteria were:

- 1) Items previously coded in NVivo to integration-related themes
- 2) Items coded as academic-style research⁵ or evaluative assessments
- 3) Items published after 2015
- 4) Items that are relevant⁶

Clustering the Final Sample

We coded each source with several integration-related themes in NVivo from the previous phase of the project. For this current phase, we organized these integration-related themes into six main areas: social integration, employment, education, language, housing, and health. Each source in the final sample was then sorted into one area it primarily focused on (see Appendix for the full list of codes and number of sources).

Analyzing the Sample

Because of the size of this sample, this review uses an iterative, computer-assisted synthesis approach that combines AI-supported analysis with human validation. ChatGPT was used to generate structured syntheses of full-text documents, capturing each study's focus, methodology, empirical evidence, findings related to integration outcomes, and research gaps. Researchers then reviewed and validated outputs against the original texts and made corrections where needed, regarding interpretation of the text, methodological classification, or substantive claims made in the text. Validated source summaries were subsequently analyzed and compared across the full set of studies to identify recurring themes, areas of convergence and divergence, and cross-study patterns. This approach was used to accelerate comparative synthesis while retaining human judgement, source verification, and final interpretive responsibility throughout.

5 Academic-style research includes text that is published in scholarly journals or by academic publishers and presses, or written and presented by scholars at academic events, or an evidence-based document published as a report and with a clear methodology.

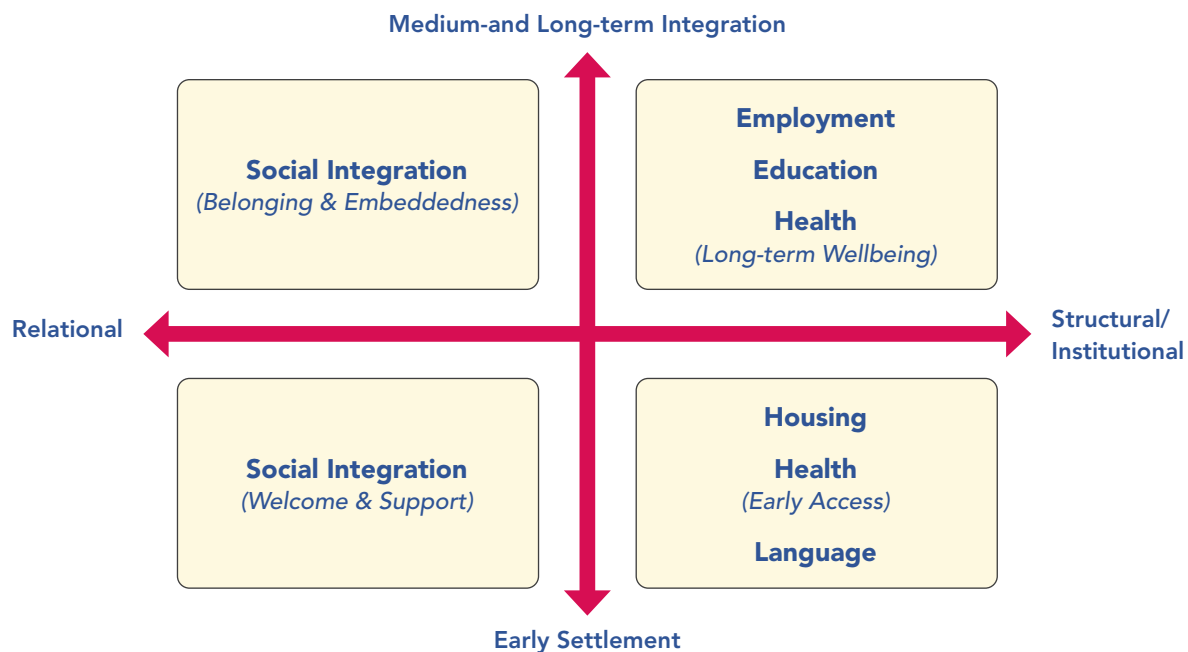
6 Sources were included based on an initial AI-assisted relevance screening process, followed by human verification, to ensure substantial relevance to integration outcomes.

Structuring Findings

The analytical field, and by extension our findings, are broad and interconnected. We observed a complex landscape of outcomes and impacts that were not uniform across domains or time. In addition, individual thematic domains such as housing, language, employment, health, education, and social integration often influence one another and are frequently examined together in the same study. This interconnectedness was difficult to parse for analysis, so we used a rough mental model to group the findings. The evidence we reviewed does not fall neatly into isolated categories, but the categories serve as heuristics or wayfinder.

We found shared analytic strands across two major dimensions: understanding thematic clusters through the lens of **relational or structural/institutional aspects**, as well as along a time-axis that spans from **early settlement to medium- and long-term integration**. *Relational outcomes* are shaped mainly through relationships, belonging, trust, and social support. *Structural aspects* are those shaped mainly through systems, services, material conditions, and institutions.

Based on this understanding, we map our priority areas into four major quadrants along two analytical axes: 1) social integration and its relational core spans time from early settlement to long-term integration, 2) the other five domains have relational aspects, but the structural components stood out, 3) language and employment highlight the temporal challenges of early settlement and long-term integration, respectively.



It is important to note that the reviewed evidence does not fall neatly into isolated categories. The quadrants serve as heuristics or mental mapping to help delineate complex interactions across themes.

We begin our analysis with social integration. This theme provides the broadest entry point into the evidence base: it captures the **relational core** of sponsorship, including sponsor–refugee relationships, social networks, belonging, and the ways sponsorship may reshape connections within receiving communities. The report then moves to employment, education, and language, which emerge across the literature as a closely connected cluster of integration dimensions that are often studied in relation to one another, since progress or barriers in one frequently shape outcomes in the others. The report then turns to housing and health, which function as foundational conditions that both enable and constrain integration across all other domains. Taken together, this sequence moves from the wider social and relational environment of sponsorship, through a strongly interconnected set of participation- and capability-related outcomes and the material, structural, and institutional conditions that support, sustain, or limit integration.

SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Overview

Based on our screening criteria, 90 texts were selected for their relevance, recency, and thematic focus.⁷ This selection captured a final set of 61 academic sources and 29 evaluations.⁸ Across this set of texts, social connections and networks, belonging, and community participation are at the centre of the “social integration” cluster. Many studies reviewed here examined the nature, quality, and impact of sponsor–refugee relationships, friendships with neighbours, wider community acceptance, social isolation, emotional support, host-community attitudes, and a sense of belonging.

Type and Quality of Empirical Evidence

The social integration evidence base is considerably large and increasingly international, but it is methodologically uneven. This includes 25 qualitative, 2 quantitative, 7 mixed-methods, and policy-historical analysis.

There are several relatively strong qualitative program evaluations with multi-stakeholder samples.⁹ These provide comparatively rich evidence on processes and integration domains. Some sources include larger administrative or monitoring components, especially government evaluations and large mixed-methods reports.¹⁰ There are also some relatively strong quantitative as well as longitudinal studies.¹¹

Qualitative studies, often based on localized or small samples, provide a rich understanding of lived experiences, context-specific dynamics, everyday operation of sponsorship, and power relations within sponsorship relationships. Many studies in the qualitative social integration cluster are multi-actor designs, meaning they combine refugee interviews with sponsors, settlement workers, professionals, or policy actors. Therefore, refugee perspective evidence exists in this cluster while sponsor- and stakeholder-centred work is also common.¹²

7 We performed four rounds of selection for inclusion criteria: 1) selected themes, 2) literature type, 3) recency, 4) relevancy.

8 Literature type identification is done through coding in Nvivo. State of Play sources were excluded.

9 Hassan & Phillimore (2020); Pereira et al. (2023A); Pereira et al. (2023B); Pereira et al. (2023C).

10 Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (2016A); Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (2021); Pairity (2023); Pairity (2024A); Pairity (2024B); HIAS (2023).

11 Including Hynie et al. (2019, pp. 36–47); Weima et al. (2023, pp. 2, 7, 13, 21–57); Hanley et al. (2018, pp. 123–145); Hanley et al. (2024, pp. 1–3, 17–20).

12 Haugen et al. (2020 p. 574); University of Nottingham (2023, p. 6, 58); Sabchev & Miellet (2025, pp. 171–185).

Refugee-led evidence is less common within evaluations which rely heavily on sponsor, coordinator, or policy stakeholder perspectives. Across the social integration cluster, refugee-centred evidence exists, but not consistently across all models. Canada dominates the evidence base, while the rest of the literature mainly looks at places such as the UK, Austria, Germany, Poland, and Europe. Overall, much of the literature remains qualitative, pilot-stage, local, or formative. Many evaluations cover only a small number of sites or participants. Several texts are policy reviews, conceptual pieces, rather than original empirical studies. Cross-national comparability is limited because programs differ in legal design, scale, funding, and target population. Some studies explicitly say more research is needed or that evidence is still limited.¹³

Main Findings

Social integration was most consistently constructed as a combination of meaningful interpersonal ties, access to supportive social networks, reciprocal and respectful relationships, belonging to local communities, and recognition as a full social actor. At the same time, social integration outcomes were measured through not only such relational aspects of integration but also structural aspects of integration, such as language access, housing affordability, stability and quality, access to services, including healthcare, and family reunification and separation.

Social Integration Measured through Relational Aspects

Relational aspects of integration were discussed through social networks and friendships, emotional support, trust, reciprocity, sense of belonging, and community acceptance.

Sponsorship improves early reception, navigation, social support and connection, trust-building, relationship-building, and provides opportunities for wider integration. We have found consistent evidence that community-supported settlement generally improves and adds clear value in early reception, navigation, practical support, social support and connection, friendship formation,¹⁴ and relationship-building that have been called a set of “second parents.”¹⁵ This pattern tracks the importance of social support in the domains of orientation, emotional support, access to local services, and social bridge-building. Typically, sponsored refugees are described as receiving warmer, more personalized, and more relational support compared to other models. A large group of studies in the social integration cluster associate sponsorship with faster or deeper social bridging, closer interpersonal ties, stronger feelings of welcome, and greater opportunities for belonging,¹⁶ and sponsorship helps refugees build ties beyond the sponsor group.¹⁷

Support provided by sponsors shapes integration outcomes uniquely and meaningfully.

The support provided by sponsor-supported models was considered more emotionally meaningful than that provided by standardized state-led models. Several qualitative studies found that trust, personhood, affirmation of pre-conflict identity, and reciprocal or emotionally

13 Beirens & Ahad (2020); Haugen (2019); D’Avino (2024).

14 Phillimore et al. (2025).

15 Pairity (2024A, p.19).

16 D’Avino (2024); D’Avino (2025); Ali et al. (2021); Hassan et al. (2024); Blain et al. (2020); Schmidtke (2018).

17 Hanley et al. (2018); D’Avino (2024); Drolet & Moorthi (2018); Hanley et al. (2024); Lacroix et al. (2015); Alraie et al. (2018); Phillimore et al. (2020); Pereira et al. (2023A); Share Network (2023A); Share Network (2023B); Pairity (2023); Pairity (2024A).

supportive ties shaped integration experiences in ways that narrow self-sufficiency measures could not capture.¹⁸ Studies showed that not only material help, but recognition, dignity, and emotional support mattered to improve integration outcomes. Several studies show that the emotional and moral quality of relationships matters deeply. Refugees integrate more successfully where they are recognized as full social actors, as parents, “breadwinners, and household decision-makers,”¹⁹ which helps preserve dignity and align expectations.²⁰ These studies broaden the meaning of social integration beyond participation, contact, self-sufficiency, adaptation, or network size to include recognition of personhood and dignity, refugees’ authority to act, emotional support, and the quality of social relations. Moreover, several studies showed that sponsorship frequently produces strong feelings of welcome and interpersonal safety, even where longer-term economic integration remains incomplete.²¹

Sponsorship can act as a host-community intervention. Although evidence is local and limited, some studies show that sponsorship can shape not only refugee integration but also the outlook, practices, and self-understandings of the receiving community. According to these studies, integration is not a one-way process, but sustained contact with refugees, and the work of organizing sponsorship, can change how local people interpret refugees, how local institutions behave, and how communities imagine themselves. The evidence for this is strongest in qualitative studies from the UK, Ireland, Italy, and Canada.²²

Social integration outcomes are uneven due to uneven sponsorship quality. Even though sponsorship more often produced frequent contact, trust, friendship-like ties, and emotionally supportive relationships, this was not the result in all cases.²³ Integration outcomes are highly variable across sponsor groups and local contexts. Many studies demonstrate that outcomes depend on sponsor training, expectations, boundaries, capacity, local networks, local services, and place-specific opportunities.²⁴

Social integration is constrained by paternalism, hierarchy, and weak boundaries. A second common pattern across the literature was that although supportive sponsorship relationships can be transformative and foster social integration, sponsorship can also undermine integration when sponsors act paternalistically, and when relationships become hierarchical, intrusive, and dependency oriented. A recurring finding across different contexts, including Canadian reflexive work, US co-sponsorship research, UK CSS, French, Belgian, and Irish evaluations, is that relationship quality, reciprocity, and respect for autonomy are central conditions for positive social integration.²⁵ When refugees are recognized as social actors with agency and competence, and not treated simply as objects of recipients of help, they integrate more successfully.

18 Kyriakides et al. (2020, pp. 200–209); Kyriakides et al. (2019A, pp. 280–295); D’Avino (2025, 924–925).

19 Kyriakides et al. (2019B, p. 29).

20 Kyriakides et al. (2020); Kyriakides et al. (2019A); D’Avino (2025); Iqbal et al. (2021); Heins & Unrau (2018).

21 Haugen (2019); Hassan & Phillimore (2020); Share Network (2023B); HIAS (2023); Pairity (2024A).

22 Reyes & Phillimore (2020); Phillimore (2020A); Alraie et al. (2018); Share Network (2023B); Share Network (2023C); Janzen et al. (2016).

23 D’Avino (2025, pp. 922–925); Ali et al. (2021, pp. 475–482); Hynie et al. (2019, pp. 41–47).

24 Haugen et al. (2020, pp. 565–574); Blain et al. (2020, pp. 228–238); Ilcan & Connolly (2021, pp. 21–22); Drolet & Moorthi (2018, pp. 109–116).

25 Haugen et al. (2020); Baraulina & Tissot (2025); Lim (2019); Blain et al. (2020); Scheibelhofer (2019); Good Gingrich & Enns (2019), Palmgren et al. (2025); Reyes et al. (2020); Share Network (2023A).

Social Integration Limited by Structural Barriers

Structural aspects were examined through language access, housing affordability, stability, and quality, access to services including healthcare, and family reunification and separation. Some studies advocate for a holistic integration model²⁶ that integrates both relational and structural aspects of integration.

Strength of sponsorship in social integration does not remove structural barriers and cannot substitute for institutional capacity. Despite the clear advantages of community-sponsored settlement with regard to integration, sponsorship did not remove structural barriers regarding language, employment, housing, or family reunification, and therefore, its advantages are constrained by structural barriers. Many refugees across schemes still struggled because English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision did not equip them with the practical English needed for everyday life and independence.²⁷ Despite best efforts, people “fall through the cracks.”²⁸ Sponsorship relationships may support labour-market navigation, but they cannot by themselves resolve structural barriers to dignified employment, including the devaluation or non-recognition of refugees’ prior occupational experience, making them “useless” in Canada.²⁹ Lack of official language skills limits employment, access to services, social ties, confidence, and moving on to independent housing. A common finding across UK, Canadian, German, Irish, European, and US studies was that language was a central bottleneck across multiple integration domains. Therefore, a lack of tailored language provision was a barrier to social integration as well.

Racism and structural exclusion constrained social inclusion and integration. Isolation, weak English skills, racism, hate crime, and lack of transport or services are shown to block deeper social inclusion, even where sponsor relationships are positive.³⁰ Similarly, support provided by sponsors, such as networking and navigation of labour or housing market, was not sufficient to overcome barriers, including longer-term affordability, suitability, and stability regarding housing or credential recognition, de-skilling, and lack of opportunities in local job markets.

Family separation or barriers against family reunification of refugees acted as a structural barrier limiting sponsorship success. Even where sponsors were providing consistent social and emotional support, family separation was undermining wellbeing, social integration, longer-term integration, employment planning, and overall settlement stability.³¹

26 Weima et al. (2023).

27 Phillimore et al. (2025, p. 10, 17).

28 Commission on the Integration of Refugees (2024, p. 10).

29 Good Gingrich & Enns (2019, p. 17).

30 Lam (2021); Commission on the Integration of Refugees (2024); Pereira et al. (2023A); Pereira et al. (2023C); Haugen et al. (2023); Phillimore (2020B); Reyes et al. (2020).

31 Morris et al. (2020, pp. 136–145); Ilcan & Connolly (2021, pp. 17–18, 20, 22).

Social integration outcomes are locally uneven. Place or local context is found to be an important variable for shaping social integration. Smaller or less diverse settings can foster social ties and promote stronger belonging, but they can also reduce access to jobs, social networks, and services. For instance, driving training is sparse, and some newcomers “failed many times,”³² despite the best efforts of their sponsors. The evidence here is positive overall, but mixed enough that it should not be generalized to all rural contexts.³³ Therefore, several studies demonstrate that social integration is shaped by city size, rurality, neighbourhood context, diversity, and local services and community infrastructure.³⁴ Moreover, some studies in the social integration cluster show that social integration outcomes are mediated by institutions, local governance, service availability, civil society infrastructure, and public discourse; therefore cannot be attributed to sponsorship relationships alone.³⁵

Our analysis supports cautious conclusions about some recurring patterns, especially around social support, language, and structural barriers. Our review shows that there is insufficient evidence across the literature to claim that one sponsorship model always “works better” across all integration domains.

32 Hassan & Phillimore (2020, p.15).

33 Haugen et al. (2020); Haugen et al. (2023); Reyes & Phillimore (2020); Pereira et al. (2023C).

34 Agrawal & Sangapala (2021); Hyndman (2022); Drolet & Moorthi (2018); Hassan et al. (2024); Ilcan & Connoy (2021); Broadhead & Turcatti (2024).

35 Silvius (2020A); Sabchev & Miellet (2025); Broadhead & Turcatti (2024); Schmidtke (2018); Nasri (2020); Coffin-Karin (2020).

EMPLOYMENT

Overview

Based on our screening criteria, 27 texts were selected for their relevance, recency, and thematic focus. This selection captured a final set of 24 academic sources and 3 evaluations. Employment is one of the primary measures of refugee integration, typically captured through job entry, earnings, and self-sufficiency. The dominant finding is that the sponsorship model shapes early labour-market outcomes³⁶.

Type and Quality of Empirical Evidence

There were diverse methods across the research, with the majority being quantitative. The sources consisted of 11 quantitative studies, 4 qualitative studies, 4 literature reviews, 3 mixed methods surveys, and 5 categorized as other (primarily case studies and policy commentary).

The strength of evidence is mostly moderately strong, particularly due to quantitative sources. These studies focused primarily on employment rates and earnings.³⁷ The evidence is weaker when the employment theme shifts to job quality, long-term career progression, empowerment, or the meaning of work. Those dimensions are present in qualitative and mixed-methods studies, but they are not measured as systematically across the full batch.³⁸ That means the evidence base supports stronger conclusions on employment access than on employment quality.³⁹

Main Findings

Employment is a central and well-evidenced area in this thematic meta-analysis, but the evidence points to two distinct stories: one about labour-market entry and early earnings, and another about whether such employment is stable, skill-matched, or adequate over time.⁴⁰

36 Li & Haan (2025A, pp. 13, 25); Kaida et al. (2022 pp. 220–223, 229–230); Picot et al. (2019, pp. 29–32); Watson & Lee (2020, pp. 5–8); Gure & Hou (2024, p. 18); Li & Haan (2025B, pp. 2–4).

37 Li & Haan (2025A, pp. 1–10, 13, 24–25); Picot et al. (2019, pp. 5–13, 28–32); Kaida et al. (2022 pp. 216–230).

38 Senthanar et al. (2020A, pp. 5–8, 18–20); Dauphin & Veronis (2024, pp. 22–24); Bridekirk et al. (2021, pp. 5–7).

39 Bridekirk et al. (2021, p. 7).

40 Bridekirk et al. (2021, pp. 5–7); Neginskiy (2022, pp. 8–9, 24–28).

Sponsorship is most consistently associated with stronger early labour-market entry and short-term employment outcomes. This is the strongest and most repeated empirical cluster across the 27 summaries. Across the Canadian comparative studies, the central employment pattern is that privately sponsored refugees (PSRs) tend to enter work earlier and earn more in the first years after arrival than government-assisted refugees (GARs), while Blended Visa Office-Refereed (BVORs) refugees often fall in between. This finding appears across descriptive, longitudinal, and administrative data work, making it the most robust conclusion in this cluster.⁴¹

Multiple Canadian administrative-data studies, sponsorship evaluation, and the Syrian resettlement case study link an “early labour market period advantage” to sponsor networks, personal support, and better labour-market navigation rather than refugee characteristics alone.⁴² One study is especially vivid on this point: BVOR refugees had “better short-term labour market outcomes than GARs” but still “lagged behind PSRs.”⁴³ Across different groups of newcomers, PSRs consistently outperform GARs in employment rate and earnings in the first years after arrival, with BVORs generally falling in between.⁴⁴ This pattern holds across the Canadian GAR and PSR comparative studies,⁴⁵ showing that first-year employment rates are around 50% for PSRs versus 10 to 12% for GARs across multiple studies.⁴⁶

What makes this cluster especially strong is that the same employment pattern appears in different types of evidence. It is present in administrative studies, descriptive syntheses, and mixed-method work. Even when studies differ in scale or design, they converge on the same employment story: sponsorship matters most at the beginning.

However, several studies in this cluster also suggest that the advantage is not fully explained by refugee characteristics, and that sponsor networks, personal support, and labour-market navigation assistance independently contribute to better outcomes.⁴⁷

Early employment advantages associated with sponsorship tend to narrow over time rather than persist unchanged. The second major employment cluster shows that the sponsorship advantage is strongest in the short term and often weakens over time. Across the longer-run Canadian literature, the early PSR advantage does not usually translate into an unlimited long-term employment lead.⁴⁸

Sources state explicitly that refugee earnings “converge to the federal skilled worker benchmark in about 15 years”⁴⁹ or find that PSR and GAR labour-market outcomes “converge over 15 years,” even though PSRs clearly start out ahead.⁵⁰ This is echoed in other texts, sometimes in different

41 See Jedwab (2018); Picot et al. (2019); Gure and Hou (2024); Li & Haan (2025A); Li & Haan (2025B); Kaida et al. (2022); Watson & Lee (2020).

42 Watson & Lee (2020, pp. 5–8, 12–13); Dauphin & Veronis (2024, pp. 21–24); Jedwab (2018, pp. 45–47).

43 Gure & Hou (2024, pp. 12–15).

44 Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC (2017, p. 1); Gure & Hou (2024, pp. 12–15); Li & Haan (2025A, pp. 13, 25).

45 Jedwab (2018, pp. 42–46); Picot et al. (2019 pp. 29–32).

46 Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC (2017, p. 1); Arjalies et al. (2020, p. 4).

47 Watson & Lee (2020, pp. 5–8); Dauphin & Veronis (2024, pp. 21–24).

48 Picot et al. (2019); Kaida et al. (2022); Watson & Lee (2020); Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC (2017); Boyd & Perron (2020).

49 Watson & Lee (2020, p. 1).

50 Kaida et al. (2022, pp. 222–223, 229–230).

terms: the programme-of-entry effect “largely fades over time,”⁵¹ which is demonstrated when the GAR–PSR earnings gap “narrows over time.”⁵²

Some important nuances in this cluster come from the historical treatment of Indochinese newcomers. Unlike the contemporary Canadian sponsorship literature, this paper does “not support the contemporary narrative”⁵³ of a general long-run private-sponsorship advantage. These caveats and considerations make the evidence base more historically grounded. It suggests that sponsorship effects are shaped by cohort, program design, and historical context, not just by the label “private” or “government.” In employment terms, then, the most defensible synthesis is this: sponsorship produces an early boost, but long-run employment outcomes are more mixed and often converge.

Sponsorship appears to support employment mainly through social capital, local guidance, sponsor networks, and practical navigation support. A third cluster groups studies that do not just show better employment outcomes but attempt to explain how sponsorship helps produce them. The central mechanism across these sources is social capital: sponsor ties, more personal support, bridging networks, local connections, and faster navigation of unfamiliar labour markets.⁵⁴

Sources identify “social capital” directly as a key mechanism and contrast sponsor support with the more formal and sometimes thinner support relationships available to GARs through service-provider organisations.⁵⁵ This mechanism can be sharpened further: BVOR sponsorship did not change whether refugees worked, but it improved the type of jobs they accessed, especially higher-skilled employment. In other words, sponsorship did not merely help refugees get a job; it could help them get a better-matched job⁵⁶ and provide “more diverse, intensive, enduring, and valued support,” and that this translated into better employment, stronger local networks, and stronger belonging to the city.⁵⁷

Focusing on the mechanisms of sponsorship was also linked to higher ESOL enrolment and stronger 180-day employment outcomes, especially for those facing greater barriers.⁵⁸ Adding a service dimension to the mechanism, “employment-related services” were associated with higher employment income, while language training alone showed weaker returns.⁵⁹

Taken together, this cluster suggests that sponsorship can generate bridging ties, job-search help, local employer contacts, more flexible accompaniment, and stronger employment-related service uptake.

51 Picot et al. (2019, pp. 30–32).

52 Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC (2017, pp. 1–2).

53 Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC (2017, p. 1).

54 Soehl & Van Haren (2023); Dauphin & Veronis (2024); Watson & Lee (2020); Linn (2022); Li & Haan (2025B).

55 Watson & Lee (2020, pp. 6–8).

56 Soehl & Van Haren (2023, pp. 2–10).

57 Dauphin & Veronis (2024, pp. 21–24).

58 Linn (2022, pp. 1, 19–20).

59 Li & Haan (2025B, pp. 10, 14–16).

Employment entry alone does not guarantee successful integration when work is low-quality, precarious, deskilled, or poorly matched. A fourth cluster shows that sponsorship may improve employment entry without guaranteeing good employment. This is where this domain becomes more complex and more nuanced. Several studies show that refugees may work quickly, but still end up in low-skill, low-status, feminized, precarious, or psychologically damaging jobs.⁶⁰ Women, highly educated refugees, and those with prior professional experience face risks of underemployment, low-skilled job channeling, and poor occupational match.⁶¹

The women-focused studies provide especially rich accounts. In *“Can Someone Help Me?”*, settlement agencies are described as not treating employment as an early priority, and support is said to be generic, pushing women toward “low-wage, low-skill, feminized work.”⁶² Similarly, evidence suggests that GAR women are shown to face the greatest employment barriers, while privately sponsored and BVOR women have more room to choose when and how to enter work.⁶³ Additionally, many women may enter the workforce and pursue business activity not because it represents an ideal employment outcome, but out of necessity, often in “feminized sectors” and under informal or constrained conditions.⁶⁴

When employment quality suffers, so does mental health. Qualitative evidence finds that more educated refugees were more likely to be employed, but often had lower “job appropriateness,” lower satisfaction, and poorer mental health. Income adequacy and job satisfaction mattered more than employment status alone.⁶⁵

When refugees are getting trapped in “survival jobs” rather than self-sustaining careers,⁶⁶ they can often experience “de-skilling” and struggle to access jobs that match their qualifications.⁶⁷ Arguably, this longevity problem does not just undermine wellbeing; in the Canadian case, it also often underuses refugees’ labour potential despite labour shortages, in part because the “right to work” does not resolve credential, gender, and discrimination barriers.⁶⁸

In sum, this cluster highlights that a rise in employment rates does not necessarily mean a strong integration outcome if the work is mismatched, exploitative, or harmful.

60 Senthana et al. (2020A); Senthana et al. (2020B); Senthana et al. (2021); Bridekirk et al. (2021); Neginskiy (2022); Garnier (2018); Ogoe & Wilkinson (2024).

61 Senthana et al. (2020A, pp. 8–10, 18); Bridekirk et al. (2021, pp. 4–6); Garnier (2018, pp. 126–129).

62 Senthana et al. (2020A, pp. 8–10, 18).

63 Senthana et al. (2020B, pp. 2, 19).

64 Senthana et al. (2021, pp. 5, 7, 10–11).

65 Bridekirk et al. (2021, pp. 4–7).

66 Neginskiy (2022, pp. 8–9, 28).

67 Garnier (2018, pp. 126–129).

68 Ogoe & Wilkinson (2024, pp. 349–357).

Employer-linked and alternative pathways show promise when they connect refugees to skill-matched work, but they still require strong settlement and intermediary support.

A fifth employment cluster includes evidence that moves beyond classic GAR/PSR/BVOR comparisons and examines employment-centred pathways such as employer sponsorship, career pathways, or labour-mobility models. These studies are fewer in number, but they open up a different empirical conversation: To what extent can refugee admission itself be more deliberately linked to labour-market matching?⁶⁹

Here we found evidence that employment-centred models prioritize labour-market entry, but that rapid entry is not enough unless refugees also secure “decent work,” autonomy, and opportunities matching their skills.⁷⁰ Similarly, Australia pilot evidence emphasizes that refugees are often treated as humanitarian entrants even when they are also highly skilled workers. Employer sponsorship is considered feasible, but only when strong intermediary support helps overcome documentation, licensing, and settlement barriers,⁷¹ building the case for genuine career pathways⁷² through workplace-based support, training, and conversation circles that support both employment and community integration, even if its evidence base is weak for formal evaluation.⁷³

This smaller cluster is less standardized than in the Canadian GAR/PSR literature. Still, it points toward a recurring employment theme: sponsorship seems strongest not when it merely gets refugees into work quickly, but when it can connect them to skill-matched, supported, and advancing forms of work.

69 Cortinovis & Fallone (2022); Higgins et al. (2023); Neginskiy (2022); Arjalies et al. (2020).

70 Cortinovis & Fallone (2022, pp. 4–7, 38, 41–43).

71 Higgins et al. (2023, pp. 11, 13).

72 Neginskiy (2022, pp. 24–28).

73 Arjalies et al. (2020 pp. 1, 4).

EDUCATION

Overview

Based on our screening criteria, 6 texts were selected for their relevance, recency, and thematic focus. This selection captured a final set of 5 academic sources and 1 evaluation. Refugee sponsorship through tertiary education is repeatedly linked to academic progress, later employment, and stronger belonging, especially when students receive layered support such as mentoring, language help, and community or peer networks. At the same time, the sources consistently show that education alone is not enough: language barriers, financial strain, legal precarity, documentation problems, and discrimination can all limit whether educational access leads to longer-term integration.

Type and Quality of Empirical Evidence

Our review identifies a useful mix of methods across the six texts, but the strength of evidence varies clearly by source type. The selection of texts includes one mixed-methods case study, one mixed-methods evaluation report, two interview-based qualitative studies, one literature and policy review, and one mixed evaluative/policy-analysis chapter.

The strongest evidence across selected texts comes from original empirical research. This includes the mixed-methods case study of Canada's Student Refugee Program (SRP), which used questionnaires, focus groups, and interviews to examine educational, social, and employment-related outcomes among beneficiaries and sponsors.⁷⁴ It also includes the mixed-methods UNICORE evaluation, which drew on document review, program data, interviews, questionnaires, and case studies to assess the Italian university-corridors model over 2019–2023.⁷⁵ These two sources offer the strongest direct empirical evidence.

Moderate evidence comes from a book chapter on the Italian experience, which combines policy analysis with interview and research material, drawing substantially on the 2023 UNICORE evaluation rather than presenting one clearly bounded, standalone study.⁷⁶ Another chapter on refugee access to tertiary education in Canada is valuable for framing the role of higher education in resettlement and for synthesizing existing scholarship and policy debates, but it does not generate original program-level empirical findings of its own.⁷⁷

74 McKee et al. (2019, pp. 75, 77–78).

75 Borraccetti & Veltri (2023, pp. 9, 14, 20–21).

76 Borraccetti et al. (2025, p. 193).

77 Ellis et al. (2021 p. 134).

Main Findings

Access to tertiary education is repeatedly presented as a structured pathway into wider integration, especially through academic progression, employment preparation, belonging, and community participation. Across the smaller cluster, education is the organizing pathway through which sponsorship is expected to produce wider integration effects. Italian evidence explicitly highlights a “higher education pathway” designed around admission, reception, inclusion, and, more recently, post-graduation options⁷⁸ or treats “tertiary education pathways” as the case through which sponsorship can lead to “successful integration pathways,” and presents the program goal as supporting the successful completion of a Master’s degree and transition to work.⁷⁹ The Canadian sources add that tertiary education is an “important element of resettlement” and is the defining feature of the SRP model. The evidence is strongest where education is paired with active support, including mentoring, peer networks, language help, and institutional coordination.⁸⁰

Educational access and continuity are framed as a mechanism for settlement, inclusion, and longer-term opportunity. Evidence repeatedly treats access to higher education as a safe, legal, and structured route that can widen opportunities otherwise blocked by displacement, allowing refugee students to “legally and safely access a third country to study and continue their education path.”⁸¹ The Canadian SRP material provides the strongest direct evidence here, showing a high degree of completion (94% of surveyed beneficiaries completed a degree, and 55% pursued further education), further study, job satisfaction, and strong reported belonging among participants.

Social support and institutional welcome lead to academic success. Empirical evidence consistently finds that education works best when access is paired with structured academic support. Layered sponsorship supports are linked to academic continuity, stronger belonging, and smoother adaptation into local communities and institutions.⁸² The Canadian texts emphasize youth-led peer sponsorship, bridging social capital, welcoming campuses, and opportunities to give back through volunteering and civic participation.⁸³ The Italian texts similarly stress the role of local networks, families, mentors, buddies, and university-community coordination in helping students feel welcomed, included, and able to persist in study.⁸⁴

78 Borraccetti & Veltri (2023).

79 Borraccetti et al. (2025).

80 McKee et al. (2019, pp. 75–76, 79–83); Borraccetti & Veltri (2023, pp. 7–8, 16).

81 Borraccetti & Veltri (2023); Borraccetti et al. (2025).

82 McKee et al. (2019, pp. 75–76, 79–83); Borraccetti & Veltri (2023, pp. 7–8, 16)

83 McKee et al. (2019, pp. 81–83); Ellis et al. (2021, pp. 138–141).

84 Borraccetti et al. (2025, pp. 199–200).

Structural barriers repeatedly shape educational and post-study outcomes. Language is the most consistent obstacle, especially in the Italian material, where insufficient Italian is described as a major barrier to social integration, administrative navigation, and effective job inclusion.⁸⁵ The Canadian texts also identify disrupted prior schooling, limited funding, credential recognition problems, discrimination, and weak academic support structures as key barriers to educational continuity and later mobility.⁸⁶

Legal and policy context strongly conditions how far education-based sponsorship can carry integration over time. This is where the Canadian and Italian models diverge most clearly. In Canada, the SRP is presented as more durable because permanent residence on arrival allows educational gains to connect more directly to long-term settlement and employment.⁸⁷ In Italy, the UNICORE pathway is more constrained by student visa status, uncertainty after graduation, and weak long-term follow-up, which means educational success does not necessarily translate into durable legal or economic integration.⁸⁸

85 Borraccetti et al. (2025, p. 202); Borraccetti & Veltri (2023, p. 7).

86 Ellis et al. (2021, pp. 136–138); McKee et al. (2019, pp. 79–80).

87 Ellis et al. (2021, pp. 139–140); Borraccetti et al. (2025, pp. 200–202).

88 Borraccetti & Veltri (2023, pp. 16, 29–31).

LANGUAGE

Overview

Based on our screening criteria, 7 texts were selected for their relevance, recency, and thematic focus. This selection captured a final set of 6 academic sources and 1 evaluation. Language acquisition is connected to language barriers. Evidence suggests that language is treated as both an outcome and a gateway to employment, service access, and social participation. Not only does language acquisition materially matter for labour market entry, work-related barriers, employability, internships or training, or work-related service needs, but it also serves as the social capital within social networks, enabling broader community connection. We thus find that language mobilization shapes and is shaped by other integration-related outcomes.

Type and Quality of Empirical Evidence

The evidence base of the language theme is mixed, strongest on early and mid-stage integration processes and weaker on long-term outcomes, causal claims, and systematic comparison of sponsorship models over time.

Studies in this cluster draw on a range of data sources and use both qualitative and quantitative methods, including surveys, interviews, focus groups, and administrative data. For instance, a Canadian evaluation study combines surveys, focus groups, administrative data, and national-scale comparison across streams, which makes it comparatively strong for early outcomes, though still limited to a short time horizon.⁸⁹ Another study with a large data set uses a large administrative dataset of 2,915 clients, though only among service users.⁹⁰ A study focusing on Alberta, Canada, provides rich qualitative comparative evidence across GAR, PSR, and BVOR in one city, but it is geographically limited and thinner for BVOR.⁹¹ Studies in Kelowna and Edinburgh offer rich insights into local contexts and lived experience. A UNHCR report on the VPRS in the UK provides strong empirical evidence as well but focuses on initial reception and early integration rather than long-term impact.⁹²

89 Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (2016B).

90 Nakhaie (2017).

91 Agrawal (2019, pp. 1–2, 5–6).

92 UNHCR (2017, pp. 5–7).

Main Findings

Language serves as a primary early-settlement barrier to wider integration.

Multiple texts identify language as one of the earliest and most persistent barriers, especially because it affects work, service access, and everyday functioning.⁹³

Specifically, the persistence of language barriers, especially for GARs, is directly linked to later employment access,⁹⁴ English learning is described as a paramount challenge across all three sponsorship streams, and limited practical language use is tied to both weak labour market integration and constrained social interaction.⁹⁵ Because of its vital yet challenging role, English-language provision is identified as one of the main areas needing improvement, and some studies treat English as essential to successful integration more broadly.⁹⁶

Taken together, this suggests that language is not just one integration domain among others, but often the hinge connecting employment, service use, and everyday participation.

Sponsorship outcomes and social networks shape and are shaped by language.

Language skills are socially embedded and are thus subject to refugees' social environment. Our review identified a cluster of texts that do not treat language only as classroom attainment, but as something accelerated or constrained by access to social ties, hosts, sponsors, or community groups.⁹⁷ For example, a pilot review reports that Welcome Groups made a significant contribution to improved language skills, suggesting that language development was supported through regular contact with Dutch community members rather than only formal instruction.⁹⁸ This regular contact appears significant, since some GAR respondents perceived PSRs as having more opportunities to mix with Canadians, and some explicitly linked that greater contact to better English.⁹⁹

Across this cluster, language learning appears less as an individual deficit and more as a socially embedded process, because sponsorship, religious institutions,¹⁰⁰ co-residence with sponsors¹⁰¹ and close interpersonal contact may create the everyday exposure that formal classes alone do not provide.

93 Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (2016B, pp. iv–v, 16–19); Agrawal (2019, pp. 1, 8–10); UNHCR (2017, p. 2, 20); Oliinyk & Oliinyk (2024, p. 1, 6).

94 Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (2016B, pp. 16–19).

95 Agrawal (2019, pp. 8–10).

96 UNHCR (2017, p. 2, 20).

97 Smith et al. (2020, pp. 4, 10–14); Agrawal (2019, pp. 7–8, 16); Derksen & Teixeira (2023, pp. 1, 12); Oliinyk & Oliinyk (2024, pp. 2–4).

98 Smith et al. (2020, p. 4).

99 Agrawal (2019, pp. 7–8).

100 Derksen & Teixeira (2023, p. 1).

101 Oliinyk & Oliinyk (2024, p. 3–4).

Language presents a service need and policy design problem.

Language serves as a hinge between access and integration, presenting unique process-related challenges. Our review identified a cluster of texts that frame language not only as an outcome but as a settlement-service need shaped by program design, access conditions, or institutional capacity.¹⁰² Texts evidence that language is one of the highest-priority service needs, especially among GARs and PSRs, and lower English proficiency is associated with greater overall service need.¹⁰³ Addressing language skills is difficult and includes more than just tailoring classes to differing skill levels:¹⁰⁴ GARs cited a lack of lower-level language classes and a lack of childminding spaces as reasons for not taking language training, indicating that program design constrained participation.¹⁰⁵ In response, one text recommends including childcare within English-language training, implying that language access depends on practical institutional supports, not only course availability.¹⁰⁶

This cluster shows that language barriers are often reproduced by service delivery conditions such as inadequate class levels, insufficient childcare, limited tailoring, and weak links between language training and other settlement needs, especially in the Canadian evidence.

102 Nakhaie (2017, pp. 1, 6–8); Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (2016B, pp. iv, 16–19); Agrawal (2019 p. 21); Derksen & Teixeira (2023, p. 12).

103 Nakhaie (2017, p. 6-8).

104 Agrawal (2019, p. 21).

105 Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (2016B, pp. 16-18).

106 Derksen & Teixeira (2023, p.12).

HOUSING

Overview

Based on our screening criteria, 13 texts were selected for their relevance, recency, and thematic focus. This selection captured a final set of 12 academic sources and 1 evaluation. Housing or accommodation stability is foundational to integration. It appears either as a direct outcome or as the condition enabling other outcomes. Secure housing is repeatedly presented not as a peripheral issue but as the basis for psychological safety, service access, planning, employment, and autonomy. Sources explicitly link housing to broader settlement or integration-related outcomes.

Type and Quality of Empirical Evidence

The empirical evidence base of this cluster is fairly mixed. The size, scope, and design of different studies impact the overall strength of evidence, which is varied and uneven.

The strongest empirical evidence comes from a small number of quantitative studies on private hosting in Germany¹⁰⁷ and on hospitableness in Slovakia.¹⁰⁸ These directly measure integration dimensions and test associations or quasi-causal effects. A second cluster of evidence comes from mixed-methodological sources which are broad and useful descriptively but are not tightly designed to isolate sponsorship effects from other resettlement factors.¹⁰⁹ Qualitative case studies¹¹⁰ and consultative studies add strong description and exploration of mechanisms, lived experience, and identifying barriers, but limited in scope and generalizability.

Taken together, the empirical approaches provide stronger evidence on housing, social, and psychosocial effects in the short term, and weaker evidence of long-term, comparative, and model-specific housing outcomes.

107 Herpell et al. (2024).

108 Altinay et al. (2023).

109 Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (2024); Schrooten et al. (2025).

110 Silvius (2020B); Smith et al. (2024).

Main Findings

Housing is repeatedly treated as the condition that makes other forms of integration possible. Housing arrangements can actively shape integration. The strongest shared pattern is that secure, stable housing underpins emotional safety, planning, service access, social connection, employment, and longer-term independence. This is one of the most consistent themes across selected texts and shows the interconnectedness of housing as a vital precondition for long-term integration.¹¹¹

Structurally, housing arrangements functioned as a site of guidance and everyday institutional mediation. Evidence from Germany suggests that private hosting positively impacted overall integration, specifically because privately hosted refugees received extensive direct help from hosts with welfare and residency applications, translation, medical access, school, childcare, and job or housing search.¹¹²

Socially, perceived hospitableness improved social inclusion and reduced loneliness among refugees hosted by locals, even though it did not produce equally clear gains in all psychological outcomes.¹¹³ The implication is that housing can matter as a relational setting: the quality of domestic interaction helps shape whether refugees feel included or isolated.

Housing is considered the basis of safety and settlement. Sources evidence that without secure housing, integration cannot stabilize. Housing is important for psychological wellbeing and emotional safety while helping to address distress and loneliness. Disruptions in housing, such as a family in Canada being “evicted”¹¹⁴ by their sponsor after about six months, produce dramatic ruptures and instability. Empirical evidence repeatedly shows stronger short-term effects on social, psychological, and practical integration outcomes that promote the necessary conditions of feeling safe.¹¹⁵ Here, perceived “hospitableness” and housing serve as a key function in facilitating social inclusion, reducing isolation, mobilizing social connections to generate wraparound support for refugees, and affecting overall mental wellbeing.

The same mechanism appears in UK evidence: respondents are described as living with too many “what ifs,” while “emotional safety”¹¹⁶ is tied to secure accommodation, knowing what will happen next, and being able to plan. Reports from the UK and Ireland show that housing insecurity undermines confidence, emotional steadiness, and the capacity to imagine a future because if people do not know where they will live next, “everything else goes out the window.”¹¹⁷

111 Silviu (2016); Merali (2018); Silviu (2020B); British Red Cross (2024); García-Vázquez et al. (2024); Smith et al. (2024); Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (2024); Schrooten et al. (2025).

112 Herpell et al. (2025, pp. 9-16).

113 Altinay et al. (2023, pp. 7-8).

114 Merali (2018, p. 342).

115 Altinay et al. (2023); Herpell et al. (2024); Herpell et al. (2025).

116 British Red Cross (2024, pp. 2-3).

117 Smith et al. (2024, p. 2190).

Here, we observe that private hosting or homestay models show strong evidence that hosting outperformed public housing on several dimensions¹¹⁸ through the advantage of hospitableness, increasing social inclusion, and reducing loneliness.¹¹⁹

Perceived success of housing is subject to multi-dimensional and often fragile host-refugee relationships. Recurring evidence complicates a universal positive view of sponsor- or host-based housing. The fragility of sponsor- and host-based housing came up repeatedly.

On the one hand, perceived beneficial social relationships show strong positive effects.¹²⁰ Private hosting and hospitable domestic arrangements are associated with stronger social inclusion, reduced loneliness, and better psychological and navigational outcomes, though not uniformly better outcomes in all domains.

On the other hand, several texts emphasize that such arrangements can be fragile, unequal, or difficult to sustain. Sponsor/host arrangements can also be the source of breakdown, erosion, precarity, and disappointment.¹²¹ Canadian evidence illustrates this clearly: sponsorship initially solved a family's housing problem, but once the relationship collapsed, the family lost housing entirely.¹²²

Sponsor- or host-based housing can fail, produce dependency, or expose refugees to exploitation, especially when safeguarding, monitoring, training, or state backstops are weak. Refugees may be housed, but they are not necessarily "at home."¹²³ Evidence and discussions suggest that community or private housing can generate specific vulnerabilities, particularly when formal monitoring is limited and outcomes depend heavily on interpersonal arrangements.

118 Herpell et al. (2024, pp.11-16).

119 Altinay et al. (2023, pp. 7-8).

120 Altinay et al. (2023); Herpell et al. (2024); Herpell et al. (2025); Bassoli & Luccioni (2023).

121 Merali (2018); British Red Cross (2024); García-Vázquez et al. (2024); Smith et al. (2024); Bassoli and Luccioni (2023).

122 Merali (2018, p. 342).

123 Smith et al. (2024, p. 2190).

HEALTH

Overview

Based on our screening criteria, 19 texts were selected for their relevance, recency, and thematic focus. All 19 texts were academic sources. Community-sponsorship with emphasis on relationships, trust, and social connection has the promise to provide personalized help from sponsors to improve the ability to navigate complex health systems for participants and to help positively shape the social determinants of health. However, early and ongoing health-access problems are highly consistent across the selected texts. The issues include healthcare access, use, and unmet healthcare needs. Several studies measured having a family doctor, seeing providers, health-system navigation, and unmet needs, especially among newly arrived Syrian refugees and across GAR/PSR comparisons.

Type and Quality of Empirical Evidence

Our research has identified a mix of quantitative, qualitative, and review/overview texts, but the strength of evidence varies substantially. The quality of evidence varies by the type of question being asked. Larger quantitative, longitudinal, and administrative-data studies provide stronger evidence for identifying measurable associations, subgroup differences, and changes over time, including in depression, unmet healthcare needs, perinatal outcomes, and food insecurity. Their strength lies in showing patterns across larger samples, although they are less able to explain the relational and contextual mechanisms through which sponsorship shapes integration.

Qualitative studies on food security, discrimination and microaggression, sponsorship relationships, and family separation provide evidence on lived experience, meaning-making, barriers, coping strategies, and the mechanisms through which integration outcomes emerge in specific contexts. These studies are strongest where they offer detailed accounts of how integration is shaped through relationships, service access, family structures, discrimination, or everyday settlement practices. The main limitation is uneven coverage across outcomes, small or localized samples in some studies, limited longitudinal qualitative evidence, and limited direct comparison across sponsorship models.

Main findings

Healthcare is an emerging substantial area of integration, but access remains incomplete, uneven,¹²⁴ and often frustrating. Our analysis identified studies that focus on first-year or early post-arrival health access, primary care, self-rated health, and unmet needs. This cluster consistently finds that refugees may have substantial contact with health services but still face high unmet needs, navigation barriers, cost barriers, and shortages.

In the Canadian context, GARs often appear more vulnerable than PSRs, especially early on. Our review showed evidence that PSRs reported more positive early health access or self-reported health outcomes than GARs¹²⁵ although later differences are partly mediated by employment and housing. Specifically, evidence mentions that PSRs were more likely to have a family doctor and reported better physical and mental health.¹²⁶

This cluster of studies shows the promise of early post-arrival health access, primary care, self-rated health, and meeting needs.¹²⁷ The evidence base consistently finds that refugees may have substantial contact with health services but still face high unmet need, navigation barriers, cost barriers, and shortages. GARs often appear more vulnerable than PSRs, especially early on. This highlights that access does suffice to improve outcomes. Especially Canadian evidence¹²⁸ shows that high contact with services does not eliminate unmet need due to other structural reasons.

Food security as a determinant of health and wellbeing is a small thematic cluster, but internally consistent, unlike mental health. Food insecurity presents material settlement conditions that shape refugee health.

Food insecurity is treated as both a direct health issue¹²⁹ and a marker of broader settlement strain.¹³⁰ Qualitative research explores the mechanisms of food insecurity, including income, transport, cultural food access, sponsorship, and networks, while quantitative approaches show statistically significant associations with poorer mental health.

PSR sponsors were described as helping with halal food access and logistical support, while some service providers raised concerns about weak accountability if sponsorship relationships break down.¹³¹ Taken together, this cluster presents food insecurity as both a material and a social integration issue.

124 Oda et al. (2017).

125 Oda et al. (2019).

126 Oda et al. (2019, pp. 3–4).

127 Oda et al. (2017); Oda et al. (2019); Tuck et al. (2019A); Sundareswaran et al. (2024).

128 Oda et al. (2019).

129 Vatanparast et al. (2020).

130 Zangiabadi et al. (2024).

131 Vatanparast et al. (2020, p. 10).

Healthcare is an emerging substantial area of integration, but access remains incomplete, uneven,¹³² and often frustrating. Over time, health-related issues experience a shift. Post-migration factors, such as social support, control, discrimination, family functioning, food insecurity, language, and housing, impact areas like mental wellbeing.¹³³ This includes empirical evidence of long-term aspects of mental health, depression, stress, stigma, and post-migration conditions.

Multiple texts identified a potential positive relationship between sponsorship, social support, and longer stay as year-2 predictors for health.¹³⁴

In the Canadian context, PSR can function as a partial reunification pathway and can subsequently improve emotional and practical support for some families, but only for a minority who can mobilize money and networks.¹³⁵ This points to the importance of considering who is able to access private sponsorship in the first place.

Evidence also shows that even where family/kin and/or social support networks exist, mental-health stigma or the risks of potential sponsorship breakdown¹³⁶ can still interfere with service uptake.¹³⁷

It is important to note that findings do not necessarily point to the same outcomes: one paper shows depression worsening over time,¹³⁸ another shows mental health improving over a year,¹³⁹ and one shows no simple PSR/GAR difference after adjustment.¹⁴⁰ But all of them point to the importance of the post-migration context of social dynamics and mental wellbeing.

Our analysis found that sponsorship and family/social ties matter for belonging, support, and mental wellbeing, but also that support for these social effects is uneven and can be undermined by stigma, state restrictions, or disruption of face-to-face contact.¹⁴¹ Family structure, separation, and family support (or its absence) are repeatedly associated with poorer wellbeing,¹⁴² while strong friend/family ties are associated with better adaptation and health.¹⁴³ The evidence is strongest qualitatively for family separation and more mixed quantitatively for specific sponsorship effects.¹⁴⁴

132 Oda et al. (2017).

133 Ahmad et al. (2020); Ali-Hassan et al. (2021); El-Bialy & Mulay (2020); Zangiabadi et al. (2024)

134 Ahmad et al. (2020).

135 Maghbouleh & Omar (2025, p. 13, 16).

136 Vatanparast et al. (2020, p. 10).

137 Tala-Jumbam (2024, pp. 31-32).

138 Ahmad et al. (2020).

139 Tuck et al. (2019B).

140 Zangiabadi et al. (2024).

141 Tala-Jumbam (2024); Maghbouleh & Omar (2025); Reyes & Phillimore (2021).

142 Maghbouleh & Omar (2025).

143 Tala-Jumbam (2024)

144 Tuck et al. (2019B).

Structural and policy conditions shape refugee health. Across this cluster, texts are less directly empirical, but together they identify the structural conditions that repeatedly surface in the empirical studies: poverty and racism,¹⁴⁵ differential selection/support pathways,¹⁴⁶ accessibility and disability,¹⁴⁷ IFHP/medicare inequality,¹⁴⁸ and administrative data blind spots.¹⁴⁹

Structural barriers like limited provider awareness,¹⁵⁰ disconnected settlement and disability service systems,¹⁵¹ fragmented or few services in small cities,¹⁵² and language barriers in remote healthcare¹⁵³ limit the impact of sponsorship on direct health outcomes. These very real and material set of conditions cannot remove persistent structural barriers. These issues extend the health focus beyond general care and mental health. It shows subgroup differences in perinatal outcomes¹⁵⁴ and highlights, for example, the major accessibility and service gaps facing refugees with disabilities.¹⁵⁵

145 Hynie & Samuel (2022).

146 Van Haren (2022).

147 McNally (2024).

148 Chen (2024).

149 Van Haren (2022).

150 Sundareswaran et al. (2024, pp. 6-7).

151 McNally (2024, pp. 199-200); Hynie & Samuel (2022, p. 181).

152 Sundareswaran et al. (2024, pp. 11-12).

153 Reyes & Phillimore (2021, pp. 9-10).

154 Ramadan et al. (2025).

155 McNally (2024).

CONCLUSION

The evidence reviewed here suggests cautious optimism about integration outcomes. Across program evaluations, sponsorship is commonly associated with stronger welcome, more personalized support, broader social connections, and improved access to education, health, housing, and local services. At the same time, longer-term integration remains uneven: language acquisition, employment, housing affordability, wellbeing, and transitions to autonomy continue to pose major challenges, and evaluations repeatedly note that good practice is not distributed evenly across sites or groups.

Across the different themes, our synthesis shows a consistent pattern: sponsorship most clearly improves early reception, navigation, belonging, and, in some cases, easier access to employment or services. At the same time, these gains remain conditional. The strongest overall conclusion is therefore not that one sponsorship model universally “works best,” but that sponsorship is most effective when it is embedded in wider systems of public support and accountability.

Our synthesis finds that sponsorship should be understood as a promising but conditional integration mechanism. Its clearest strengths lie in early relational support, social anchoring, localized belonging, and flexible practical assistance. Its clearest limitations arise when responsibility is shifted onto sponsors without sufficient public infrastructure, long-term planning, or protection against wider structural inequalities.

This report identified various gaps and future research areas across themes. For **social integration**, future research may want to move beyond early settlement and relationship formation to examine longer-term trajectories, compare sponsorship models and places more systematically, and pay closer attention to refugee-led evidence, subgroup variation, and the effects of sponsor training, boundaries, and sponsor–refugee relationship quality on integration outcomes.

For **employment**, the main gaps and future research priorities are to study job quality and occupational match alongside employment rates and earnings, strengthen analysis of language and credential-recognition barriers, develop more gender-responsive evidence, and use stronger designs that can separate sponsorship effects from selection effects.

For **education**, future work is encouraged to follow students beyond graduation, identify which combinations of support matter most at different stages, pay closer attention to language and

study-to-work transitions, and generate more subgroup-disaggregated evidence on how legal status, educational history, and other contextual factors shape outcomes.

For **language**, the evidence base would benefit from more research on medium- and long-term outcomes, stronger causal and cross-national comparison, and more focused attention to how age, youth, gender, and family dynamics shape language acquisition and use over time.

For **housing**, future research would benefit from examining harm, breakdowns, safeguards, and unequal power relations more directly, and building longer-term evidence on housing stability, affordability, and the durability of sponsor- or host-based arrangements.

For **health**, the field needs stronger longitudinal and comparative designs, more work on disability and accessibility, more direct analysis of how sponsorship mechanisms affect health outcomes, and more refugee-centred evidence in service-focused studies where administrative and provider perspectives often dominate.

Across integration outcomes, the most consistent future research needs are for longer-term, comparative, and more causally robust studies that can explain not only whether sponsorship helps, but also for whom, under what conditions, and through which mechanisms. **Prioritizing comparative research across sponsorship models, policy settings, and national contexts** may help provide a strong foundation for determining which program designs are most effective, for whom, and under what conditions. More comparative work is needed across private, community, blended, and hybrid sponsorship arrangements, as well as across different institutional environments.

Integration unfolds differently across varying subgroups. **Emphasizing mechanisms and variation**, rather than only documenting outcomes in aggregate could provide deeper insights into how sponsor capacity, matching processes, local service ecologies, institutional coordination, and program design shape outcomes. This also includes stronger attention to **heterogeneity within refugee populations**, including differences related to gender, age, disability, family composition, and migration pathway.

The review also points to the need for strengthening attention to lived experience.

We recommend expanding refugee-centred and refugee-informed research designs across all domains, but especially in employment, housing, health, and education, where lived experience can be obscured by system-level or functional indicators; in social integration and, to a lesser extent, language, future work would also benefit from paired attention to refugee and host-community perspectives, since outcomes in these domains are explicitly relational and co-produced. The analysis indicates that refugee voices are not equally foregrounded across the literature, despite the centrality of lived experience to understanding integration processes. Future research would therefore benefit from expanding participatory, qualitative, and mixed-method approaches that capture how sponsored refugees themselves understand support, autonomy, belonging, and longer-term integration. Relatedly, our analysis calls for **more explicit equity and research lenses** and designing studies so that refugees' own accounts help shape what counts as an outcome, how support is interpreted, and how integration is understood over time.

Prioritize longitudinal study designs that measure integration over time. Much of the evidence synthesized in the project is strongest on early settlement and short-term support, while longer-term outcomes remain less clearly documented. More research is needed to understand whether and how early sponsorship-related advantages are sustained, transformed, or lost across different stages of integration.

This review identified that mapping of integration definitions and measures across contexts is a useful area for future research. **Developing a systematic mapping of how different states and other actors define integration and measure its outcomes** could begin to close the gap between the wide variation in how integration is framed and measured across domains, countries, and sponsorship models, future research could consider systematically comparing who defines integration, which outcomes they prioritize, and how these choices shape evaluation and policy conclusions. Such a mapping would benefit from examining which outcomes are selected to measure integration, which indicators are prioritized, which time horizons are applied, and how these vary across policy settings, sponsorship models, and thematic domains.

To conclude, future opportunities include richer long-term evidence, stronger causal isolation of sponsorship effects, elevated refugee-led evidence, attention to disability and accessibility, richer evidence on BVOR and hybrid models, and attention to gender, age, and subgroup differences. *Future work should not only ask whether sponsorship helps, but for whom, under what conditions, through which mechanisms, and over what time horizon.*

APPENDIX:

CODES AND NUMBER OF SOURCES

THEME	ACADEMIC	EVALUATIVE	TOTAL
14 : Integrations and settlement	128	25	153
10 : Employment and jobs	70	14	84
18 : Social connections and networks	51	9	60
15 : Language	40	7	47
16 : Public attitudes	40	4	44
19 : Sponsor-refugee relationships	37	6	43
13 : Housing	34	7	41
20 : Wellbeing and mental health	40	1	41
9 : Education	30	9	39
1 : Access to services	32	4	36
2 : Agency of Refugees	20	4	24
12 : Healthcare	20	3	23
6 : Culture	14	0	14
8 : Discrimination	10	0	10
4 : Self-reliance and self-sufficiency	2	4	6
17 : Host community-refugee relationships	2	4	6
5 : Citizenship and status	5	0	5
11 : Food (in)security	4	1	5
3 : Resilience	3	0	3
7 : Food	3	0	3

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