

GLOBAL REFUGEE SPONSORSHIP INITIATIVE AT A GLANCE

2022 Global Gathering for Sponsorship



Abigail Robinson, Advocate/Advisor on the Refugee and Migrants' Rights Team at Amnesty International and Colm O'Gorman, Global Director of Community Engagement at the University of Ottawa Refugee Hub, close the event.

© Eunjin Jeong – University of Ottawa Refugee Hub

Held in Madrid from November 30, 2022 to December 2, 2022, the 2022 Global Gathering for Sponsorship brought together over one hundred delegates from seventeen countries to discuss how to seize opportunities presented by developments over the past few years and stabilize and scale sponsorship. This was the first convening of global Sponsorship Champions since the last GRSI-organized event was held in Cork, Ireland in 2019.

This year, the GRSI partnered with Amnesty International to organize the largest and most geographically diverse gathering of global Sponsorship Champions to date. The event brought together civil society sponsorship stakeholders from national programmes, including sponsorship implementation organizations, policy experts, sponsors, and people with lived experience as refugees. Over

the course of two and a half days, delegates shared and explored common challenges, learnings, and innovations. The Gathering included plenary panels, discussion groups, and workshop presentations on a variety of sponsorship-related topics. Some key learnings included the acknowledgement that: large-scale mobilization is often possible in crisis contexts; innovative and flexible solutions can be created in response to crises; it is important to engage directly with people with lived experience as refugees; and individual identities and needs of refugees need to be considered in program development and implementation. Some key challenges identified included the lack of capacity – public and private – for crisis response and global housing challenges.

The gathering also focused on how the sponsorship community can continue to foster a movement which supports the inclusion, participation, and leadership of a diverse range of actors and audiences involved in refugee sponsorship. Participants also agreed on an exciting new approach to “skills sharing” across the global sponsorship movement. A skills share network, where actors can discuss common themes and challenges across sponsorship programs globally, will be created.

Are you a policymaker or civil society leader designing a refugee sponsorship program?

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Roundtable discussion on community sponsorship of refugees with Canadian Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs) and resettlement agencies hosted at the Australian High Commission in Ottawa

On December 13, 2022, the Australian High Commission in Ottawa hosted a roundtable discussion on the community sponsorship of refugees as part of Australian Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs Andrew Giles' visit to Canada. A key focus of Minister Giles' visit was to learn about Canada's long experience in the community sponsorship of refugees through the Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) program and Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR) program. Australia recently launched the Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot (CRISP), which has committed to settle up to 1,500 UNHCR-referred refugees to Australia by the end of June 2025.



Participants at the roundtable discussion on community sponsorship hosted at the Australian High Commission in Ottawa.

© Australian High Commission in Canada

The event brought together Canadian Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs), resettlement organizations, and representatives from the Government of Australia, the Government of Canada, the University of Ottawa Refugee Hub, and Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia (CRSA). The roundtable discussion focused on how to scale the community sponsorship model and best practices in engaging communities.

Participants from the Canadian civil society organizations identified sponsor recruitment

and retention as critical elements to ensure the sustainability of community sponsorship. Many participants also pointed to the importance of building networks and partnerships between organizations to offer support and share lessons learned. Participants also raised challenges related to the high cost of living and a lack of affordable housing, onerous and complicated processes, and funding.

The roundtable concluded with a discussion on what community sponsorship can bring to Australia, including promoting diversity and strengthening communities.

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Community Sponsorship: Hospitality and Welcoming Communities

November 6, 2022 marked six months since the arrival of a Syrian family in Vitoria-Gasteiz, the capital of the Basque region in Spain. The family arrived from Lebanon with several other families last May. All are part of the Auzolana II Community Sponsorship program, the Basque region community sponsorship program. It is one of three regional community sponsorship programs in Spain.



Nerea Aginako, technician of the Community Sponsorship Program in Alboan, and Ruba Hassan, cultural mediator and interpreter from Syria, have been working hand to support the family.

© Alboan

The family have successfully settled into life in Vitoria-Gasteiz. The father has found employment at a potato processing cooperative. To assist with his integration into the job, volunteers are helping him with his language development and vocabulary. The children are currently enrolled in school, and are making friends. The family is very happy with their new life in Spain.

Check out the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative on Twitter!

Follow @theGRSI on Twitter for more updates on #communitysponsorship

The Canadian barber's dream: refugee opens shop in Collingwood



Syrian barber Bilal Diyab gives his client a haircut.

© Collingwood Today

Bilal Diyab, a 23-year-old who has been in Canada for five years, has recently started his own barbershop in Collingwood, a town in Ontario, Canada.

Diyab and his family fled the war in Syria and moved to Lebanon. Diyab, who was raised in Lebanon, dropped out of school at 11 and began working with his father, a tiler. At the age of 14, Diyab began helping at the barbershop next door to his house, eventually offering free haircuts to homeless individuals in Lebanon.

In 2017, Diyab and his family were offered the opportunity to resettle in Canada through the Collingwood Syrian Sponsorship Community.

Diyab's first priority was obtaining his high school diploma and learning English. In 2022, just months after getting his Canadian citizenship, Diyab is the proud owner of Bilal the Barber, which has been busy since it opened its doors.

York volunteers raise funds to resettle Afghan family in city

Community sponsorship group "York Welcomes Refugees" is raising thousands of pounds to sponsor a family from Afghanistan in York, United Kingdom.

The group aimed to complete their "three-in-one" challenge, which involves volunteers living on a daily rationed diet, swimming the 21-mile width of the Channel and sleeping under a covering outdoors. Annie Medcalf from the group explained that the challenge is "highlighting the journey refugees take across the [English] Channel, the homelessness which affects them when they're here and the limited amount of food they can afford to eat".

The group aims to sponsor a family to York by spring 2023. They have raised £7,000 thus far.

What is the GRSI?

The Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative is a partnership of six 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.

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