

# Breaking the barriers to participation in Community Sponsorship for refugee-led community organisations

Community Sponsorship is a programme through which communities support resettled refugee families over their first year in the UK to integrate into their local areas. Community Sponsors take on significant responsibility, including sourcing accommodation, supporting families to apply for Universal Credit, ensuring that families can access healthcare and education, and providing a source of local knowledge. Since 2016, more than 500 refugees<sup>1</sup> have been welcomed by more than 100 Community Sponsorship groups<sup>2</sup>.

The Refugee Council and Reset welcome the Government's commitment to expand the scale of Community Sponsorship as set out in the *New Plan for Immigration*. To grow Community Sponsorship, more people must be prepared to act as Community Sponsors. However, we know that there are barriers to participation in Community Sponsorship, and that these barriers affect some people more than others. It is notable, for example, that refugee-led community organisations (RCOs) have not participated widely in Community Sponsorship, despite expressing interest early in the programme.

In Refugee Week 2021 the Refugee Council and Reset held an event for RCOs to discuss the barriers they face to participating in Community Sponsorship and how they would improve the programme.

This briefing sets out the key barriers highlighted at that event and makes 5 recommendations to the Home Office to better enable RCOs to participate in Community Sponsorship, thereby increasing the overall scale of the programme.

## Barrier 1: The administrative burden of acting as a Lead Sponsor is too great for many small organisations

Each Community Sponsorship application must be supported by a Lead Sponsor. RCOs can participate in Community Sponsorship either by acting as a Lead Sponsor themselves, or by partnering with existing Lead Sponsors. We heard strongly that the Lead Sponsor role places too great an administrative burden on small organisations with small budgets, which characterizes many RCOs.

### Our recommendations:

**Review the role of the Lead Sponsor and explore hybrid models of Community Sponsorship**

<sup>1</sup> Immigration Statistics, year ending March 2021. Accessed: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-statistics-year-ending-march-2021/how-many-people-do-we-grant-asylum-or-protection-to>

<sup>2</sup> Reset's data

### *Review and clarify the role of the Lead Sponsor*

The Home Office should review the Sponsor Agreement in order to clarify and limit the role of the Lead Sponsor so that it is easier for trustees of RCOs to understand exactly what commitment they are making and what legal and financial risk they are undertaking. In particular, the limitless liability on the group for breach of contract identified in clause 12.1 should be reviewed and clarified. Organisations that are already acting as Lead Sponsors and which are not refugee-led have also asked for this clarification from the Home Office.

### *Explore hybrid models of Community Sponsorship*

The Home Office should work with Reset and the Refugee Council to explore the creation of a hybrid model of Community Sponsorship whereby a Community Sponsorship group can partner with a Local Authority or resettlement agency in particular situations, such as to meet the needs of a highly vulnerable family. This would increase the capacity of the Local Authority and/or resettlement agency to provide high quality integration support, while also lessening the administrative and safeguarding burden on the Community Sponsorship group. Any hybrid model must be an additional pathway for resettlement, complementing Community Sponsorship and mainstream resettlement.

## **Barrier 2: The fundraising target to sponsor a refugee family is too arbitrary**

Representatives from multiple RCOs emphasised that in order to meet the fundraising requirement of £9000 to sponsor a refugee family they would need to explain to trustees and donors exactly what those funds would cover. Currently, all groups must raise £9000 irrespective of the cost of living in their local area, and we heard that the arbitrariness of this target and the vagueness around exactly what must be covered by these funds would be a barrier to participation.

### **Our recommendation:**

#### **Devolve responsibility for setting fundraising targets for each Community Sponsorship group to Lead Sponsors**

The £9000 target should be replaced with a flexible approach based on the cost of living in different locations. Lead Sponsors should be able to set their own budget based on a Community Sponsorship group's location and the support that they intend to offer a family. Community Sponsorship groups will then have to fundraise in line with the target set by their Lead Sponsor.

## **Barrier 3: Lack of public awareness of Community Sponsorship**

Representatives of RCOs told us that the lack of general awareness of Community Sponsorship makes it harder to convince colleagues and trustees to participate in the programme.



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### **Our recommendation:**

**The Government must champion Community Sponsorship and resource awareness-raising in civil society**

The Government should promote Community Sponsorship and encourage its MPs to champion the programme by urging their constituents to set up Community Sponsorship groups and supporting those groups to gain consent from their Local Authorities. The Government should also allocate additional fundraising to civil society for awareness raising.

### **Barrier 4: Community Sponsorship does not allow people in the UK to sponsor their family members**

Sponsors are not able to specify who they would like to support through Community Sponsorship. While many RCOs support people of all backgrounds, there is a particular desire to be able to sponsor family members of those already in the UK through Community Sponsorship.

### **Our recommendation:**

**The Home Office must explore how refugees who have family connections in the UK can be welcomed to the UK and the role of Community Sponsorship within this process**

Working alongside other NGOs, Reset and the Refugee Council are ready to support the Home Office to explore how refugees with family connections in the UK could join their family members and be supported to integrate into their new communities.

### **Reset's commitments:**

Reset commits to undertake the following tasks to support the participation of RCOs in Community Sponsorship:

- To recruit more Lead Sponsors in order to facilitate partnerships between RCOs and charities with greater resources to decrease the administrative burden on RCOs undertaking Community Sponsorship
- To produce a clear and concise overview of the Lead Sponsor role that members of RCOs can give to their trustees to help them to quickly and easily understand the benefits and risks of acting as a Lead Sponsor

### **Refugee Council's commitments:**

The Refugee Council commits to working with Reset and others to undertake the following:

- To explore hybrid models of Community Sponsorship
- To explore how refugees with family connections in the UK could join their family members and be supported to integrate into their new communities