

SAFE PASSAGE

Private Sponsorship

What is private sponsorship?

Private sponsorship allows the involvement of private individuals in refugee resettlement. Sponsors become responsible for the reception of resettled refugees, providing financial support for a determined period of time, and other forms of support (especially logistical and emotional) which help refugees integrate into the host society.

How does it work in practice?

Private sponsorship transfers the responsibility for refugee resettlement from governmental to private actors. Though the decision on whether to allow a specific person or family to enter the country remains with the government, once refugees arrive in the country, sponsors 'take over' the integration support which is otherwise provided by the State. From finding adequate housing, to explaining how to access services, language training and assistance with finding employment, private sponsors become the point of reference for newly resettled refugees.

Does private sponsorship exist in Europe?

Yes, but to a very limited extent. In Germany, 15 out of 16 federal States have established private sponsorships agreements. Ireland and Switzerland opened this possibility for a brief period of time to allow family members to reunite with refugees already in the countries. The United Kingdom announced in 2016 a plan to allow citizens' participation in resettlement through private sponsorships agreements.

Who can be sponsored?

Depending on governments and specific cases, it could be refugees referred by UNHCR as in need of resettlement or it could also be people who are already known to the sponsors (for example, members of the extended family).

Why is it important?

Private sponsorship is a way for ordinary citizens to become directly involved with refugee resettlement and to provide a concrete contribution towards the solution of problems which are often presented as very removed from host societies. For European countries, making better use of private sponsorships could be a manner to capitalise on the huge public solidarity demonstrated by thousands of citizens during 2015 and 2016. It could also be a manner to create more public support for the creation or expansion of resettlement programmes.

In Canada, the first country to allow private sponsorship agreements, there is now a long-standing tradition of privately sponsoring refugees, which is believed to have contributed to a generally more welcoming society. Studies also demonstrate that privately sponsored refugees who can rely on a committed 'social capital' are able to integrate much faster into the host society.

Private sponsorship should not however relieve States of their responsibility for resettlement, and should always be complementary to governmental resettlement programmes.