

Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) – Barriers to involvement in Community Sponsorship Schemes

SUMMARY

This report explains how Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) have the potential to play a huge role in the delivery of Community Sponsorship Schemes (CSS) across the country. Led by people with lived experience of the asylum system and of integration pathways, RCOs have the experience of supporting vulnerable people within their communities, including refugees and people seeking asylum.

RCOs have the capacity and are often best placed to provide emotional support and to offer the opportunity for new refugees to build relationships and develop social connections. They support refugees to create bonding relationships with the host community and work to build relationships and dialogue with government agencies and institutions. These bridging connections and the creation of a welcoming environment are essential to achieve planned and positive refugee integration outcomes, alongside an effective and sustainable community-based integration and resettlement service delivery.

This report states that despite this potential, RCOs are not involved in community sponsorships as much as other civil society groups such as faith groups and other Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). Barriers to their involvement include a lack of information and awareness within RCOs about community sponsorship schemes, a lack of confidence in their expertise and issues related to finding suitable accommodation for refugees. A further challenge is related to the systemic difficulties in accessing resources and the inability to afford long term investments which result in their lack of capacity to meet some of the Home Office requirements, particularly the financial requirement and the consent from local authorities.

For Refugee Community organisations to increase their involvement in community sponsorship schemes, the report recommends a change in approach and development of engagement mechanisms tailored to the way RCOs work, the establishment of a sustainable financial investment to enable them to build their capacity, to facilitate peer learning support and to establish networks between existing community sponsors and RCO based prospective sponsors.

1. INTRODUCTION

Community sponsorship allows local communities, voluntary and community organisations and faith groups to be directly involved in welcoming and helping them to settle in the UK. Through this programme, local groups can apply to the Home Office to sponsor a refugee family and help them to integrate and rebuild their lives.

The Community sponsorship scheme enables community groups to directly welcome and support a refugee family. It also enables individuals from a particular community to form a group and work together to prepare for and welcome a refugee family to their local area.

Sponsors are responsible for refugee reception and integration. Once the refugee family arrives in UK, the community sponsors have the primary responsibility for supporting the refugee family through their first year in the UK to live independent lives, learn English, and access schools, welfare benefits, healthcare and employment and participate fully in the community.

Before the family arrival, community sponsorship groups will be working to source accommodation that will be available to the refugee family throughout their first 2 years in the UK, but they are not expected to cover the cost of renting the accommodation, as refugees will be able to claim housing benefit support. However, they need to raise £9,000 to cover the family's initial expenses and to ensure the family has sufficient funds to live on while their claim for benefits is being processed.

The Home Office's guidance on Community Sponsorship (first published in July 2016 and updated in December 2018) states: "Community Sponsorship is a way for local communities, civil society organisations, faith group and businesses, to be directly involved in helping refugees settle in the UK. Community sponsors provide emotional and practical support to empower resettled families to rebuild their lives and to become self-sufficient members of their new community¹.

Community sponsorship groups are required to meet a certain number of eligibility criteria including: right legal structures (registered charity or community interest Company); experience of working with vulnerable people, financial commitment, securing a property with its own front door, capacity to provide or facilitate access to ESOL and interpreting services, having a concise, clear and easy to understand safeguarding policy, having a resettlement plan and securing consent from your local authority. Since each community sponsorship group starts their sponsorship journey with a different level of experience, it is difficult to estimate how long it will take to complete the application process but the average time is estimated to be around 6months².

London is the region with the highest number of Community Sponsorship Groups and a large number of community groups have emerged in rural areas but the involvement of Refugee Community Organisations is not as it is expected. As organisations rooted in diaspora/refugee communities, the possibility of helping a

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/933956/An_inspection_of_UK_Refugee_Resettlement_Schemes.pdf

² www.csan.org.uk/community-sponsorship/

refugee family should be a compelling reason for RCOs to get involved in community sponsorship, alongside other motivations.

This research was commissioned by Reset to explore the involvement of RCOs in Community Sponsorship, to identify and explore barriers for involvement and to suggest measures to make the Community Sponsorship programme more inclusive to RCOs. The report recommends the next steps to be taken by Reset in involving RCOs in Community Sponsorship.

2. METHODOLOGY

Online survey of selected Refugee Community Organisations

The views of RCOs on the barriers to involvement in community sponsorship schemes were sampled via an online, Survey Monkey survey, based on a questionnaire prepared and agreed upon with Reset. The questionnaire was sent to a selection of RCOs based in different parts of the country.

RCO participants were selected for their experience of working with refugees and people seeking asylum, their geographical locations, their income threshold, or because they share key features with the majority of RCOs including defining their communities by nationality, language or geographical area, or serving specific community groups such as women or young people or focusing on a specific shared community need or interest.

Telephone conversations with selected Refugee Community Organisations

From the list of 36 RCO respondents to the survey above, we conducted follow up telephone interviews with 20 RCOs. The interviews were based on a questionnaire prepared in advance and based partly on the answers we received from the survey.

This report presents our findings with focus on the barriers to involvement identified through the survey conducted with RCO representatives, and using material collected from conversations with RCOs' leaders, we will summarise issues and concerns raised by RCOs. The report will share concerns amongst RCOs, in particular around their awareness and knowledge of the community sponsorship scheme, their motivations, ability to become community sponsors in their capacity as grassroots refugee-supporting organisations. Lastly, we will draw conclusions from our results and present recommendations as to how RCOs can be better supported to build their capacity to get involved with refugee resettlement through private sponsorship programmes.

3. ROLE OF RCOs IN REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT

RCOs are defined as organisations led mainly by people with lived experience of seeking asylum and of refugee integration and whose members include significant numbers of refugees, and whose services and activities are intended for refugees and people seeking asylum. RCOs may define their communities by nationality, language or geographical area, while others serve specific groups such as women or young people. Others focus on a specific need or service.

Like any community-based groups, RCOs represent a spectrum from newly formed organisations to long-established bodies with a history of serving refugees over many years. In large cities such as London and Birmingham, there may be several RCOs at

various stages of development – the most advanced perhaps already providing services like those provided by larger refugee supporting charities.

RCO priorities include enabling independence and engagement of refugees and people seeking asylum by focusing on key enablers such as building confidence and English language proficiency, access to information, civic participation and volunteering that can help refugees become more independent. RCOs adopt a holistic approach to address multiple needs and factors that contribute to successful integration, either through their own range of services or those provided by partner organisations.

More specifically, RCO services for community members include information and advice, supplementary education, mental health, social and recreational activities, volunteering, health and well-being, ESOL, employment, children and young people, family support, services for women, services for disabled people, civic participation and support for LGBT people. Some RCOs also work to influence policy, law and practice. Others deliver training and awareness raising for public services while others raise public awareness and carry out research into community needs.

One of the key features of RCOs is that many of them have considerable demands made on them by people seeking asylum, particularly those whose applications have been refused and who are excluded from most social security benefits.

In London, a recent research³ conducted by the London Refugee Advocacy forum on the primary needs of refugees and people seeking asylum, identified four main issues facing refugees including access to housing, employment, English language and health and mental health.

As small to middle size grass roots organisations, the majority of RCOs depend on donations, time and effort from volunteers, and fundraising activities. Once a need for more consistent services is established, RCOs may seek to raise funds to deliver the services but the majority remain usually underfunded and therefore they are understaffed and they lack the necessary financial and management skills to set up and run an effective, sustainable provision.

With small incomes and low asset bases, the majority of RCOs struggle to invest and to reach the necessary staffing levels or to find time for skills development and thus very few have dedicated fundraisers or adequate fundraising skills. This undoubtedly means that the majority of RCOs rely heavily on volunteers and these volunteers to be effective RCOs constantly need information, support and training.

Successive economic crises, government cuts and the impact of COVID-19 have disproportionately affected RCOs. While these events resulted in a higher demand for RCO services, the loss of funding resulted in the closure of many RCOs, and only those which demonstrated their adaptability and resilience survived.

Despite all these struggles, RCOs continue to play a crucial role in refugee integration, often being the first ‘port-of-call’ for refugees and people seeking asylum in need of help, advice and support. Many of them have demonstrated their resilience and adaptability, with research showing that the collective work of RCOs is estimated to be larger than the collective work of larger charities. The key features underpinning their success include partnership working, the holistic approach to

³ Going Full Circle: The primary needs and experiences of refugees and people seeking asylum living in London <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/information/resources/going-full-circle/>

dealing with multiple needs and the ability to facilitate successful integration either through their own range of services or those provided by partner organisations⁴.

4. KEY FINDINGS

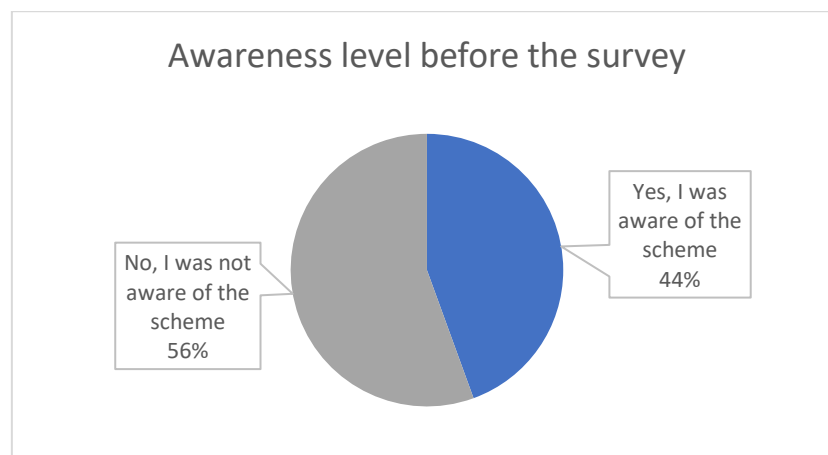
Barriers preventing RCOs from getting involved in community sponsorship scheme

- *Lack of Information and lack of awareness*

A key finding of this research is that the main barrier to the involvement of RCOs in Community Sponsorship schemes is the lack of awareness about such schemes. RCOs are not well informed about the Community Sponsorship schemes with the majority (57%) of RCOs surveyed responding that they were not aware of the community sponsorship schemes, the only information they had was from a small introduction within the survey questionnaire.

Level of awareness

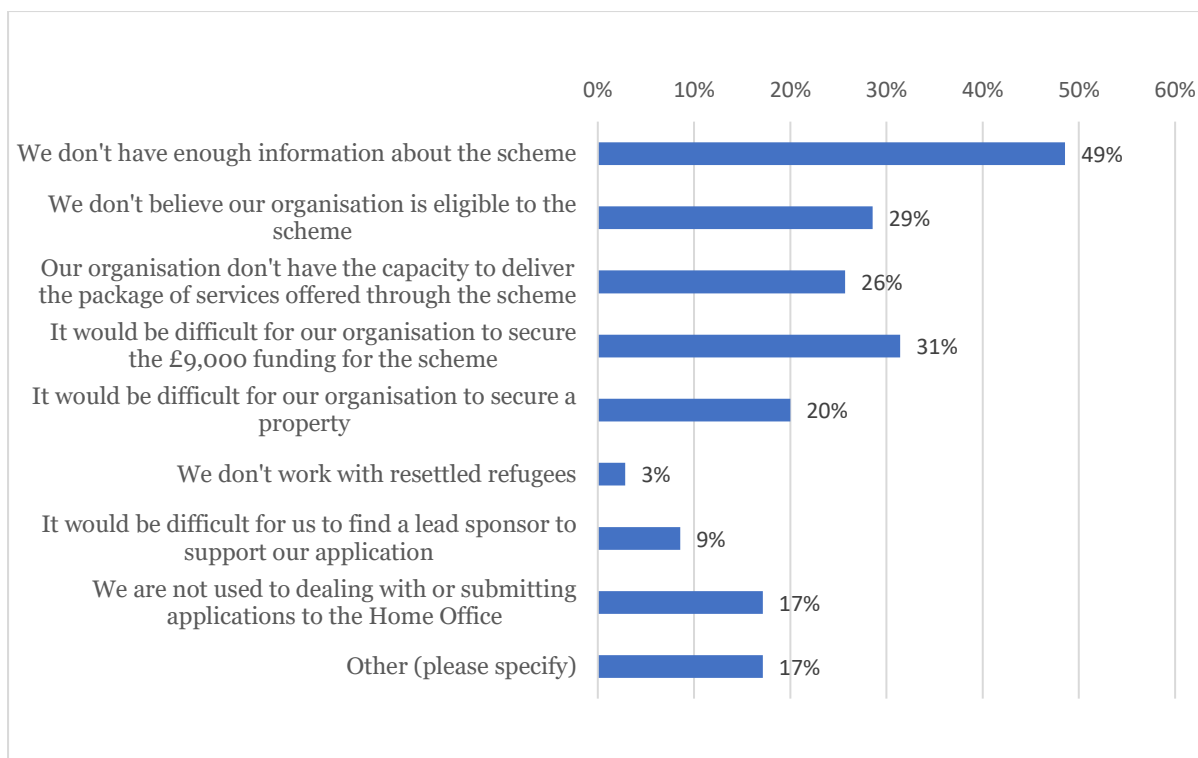
Question: Before reading the summary, provided above, were you aware of the Home Office Community Sponsorship scheme run by Reset to enable charities and community groups to welcome and support resettled families?



Although some RCOs had heard about the scheme, the amount of information they had was not enough for them to take a decision as to whether they will get involved or not. Of those who had heard about the scheme, 49% reported that not having enough information was one of the reasons why they did not apply.

Question: If you were aware of the scheme, what prevented your organisation from considering to apply for the scheme? Please tick all that are applicable?

⁴ A Bridge to Life in UK:



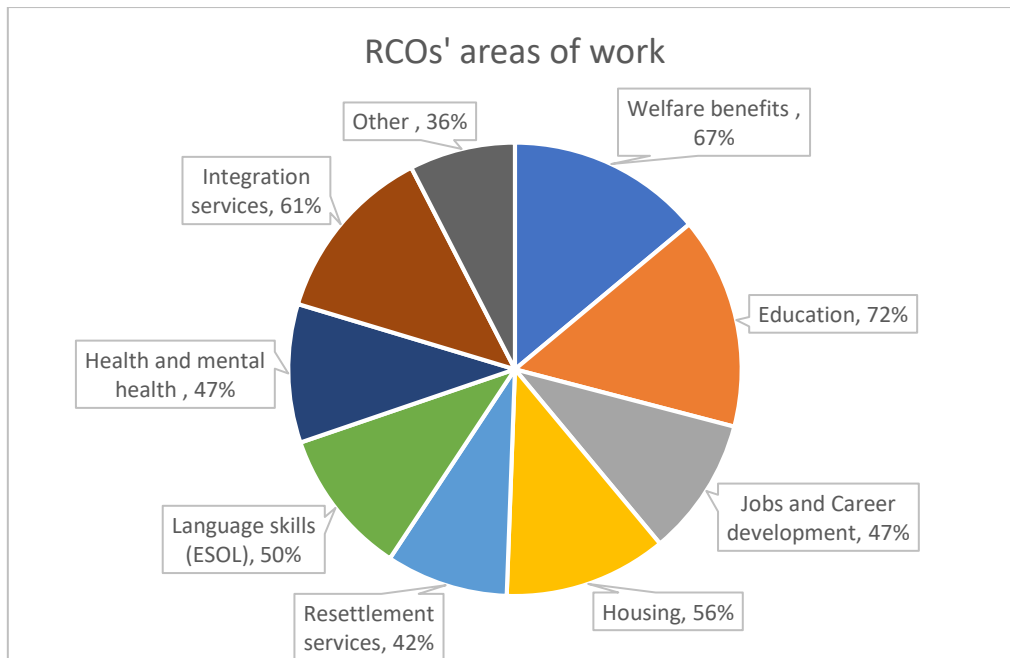
However, some RCOs are not new to community sponsorship schemes and this research found that there is high motivation in Afghan RCOs to welcome Afghan refugees and some Afghan RCOs have tried to do so. One Afghan RCO based in Walsall, West Midlands reported that they worked as community sponsors supported by a Lead sponsor and the relationship with the lead sponsor was facilitated by Refugee Action. Many other Afghan RCOs reported that they want to be involved and they welcome more information. The RCO who did it in Walsall is planning to do it again but this time they want to do it independently without help from a lead sponsor.

- *Capacity to deliver a resettlement service package and eligibility for community sponsorship*

Starting a community sponsorship scheme is a significant responsibility, community groups need to show that they have appropriate structure and relevant experience supporting vulnerable people. A research report published by the Refugee Council in October 2018 showed that RCOs provide services to refugees and people seeking asylum including information and advice, supplementary education, mental health, social and recreational activities, volunteering, health and well-being, ESOL, employment, children and young people, family support, services for women, services for disabled people, civic participation and support for LGBTI people⁵.

Our survey found that at the time of the research, RCOs were delivering services (for which they had funding or through volunteers) as presented in the graph below.

⁵ A bridge to life in UK: Refugee-led community organisations and their role in integration
https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/A_bridge_to_life_in_the_UK_Oct_2018.pdf

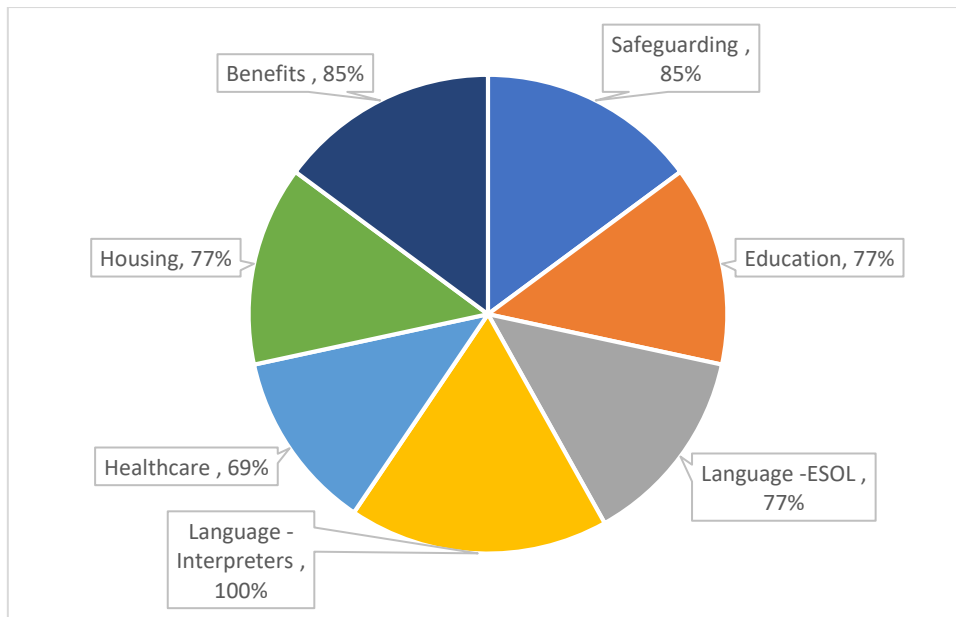


Graph 1

Though RCOs deliver services and collectively achieve a full range of integration outcomes, the majority of them are focused on delivering activities in line with their mission and objectives (education, health and mental health etc.); but in many cases they don't have individualised integration plans covering all areas of needs for resettled refugees to integrate. Only 42% of surveyed RCOs reported delivering a full package of resettlement services, while others rely on signposting to each other or to larger refugee charities or to agencies.

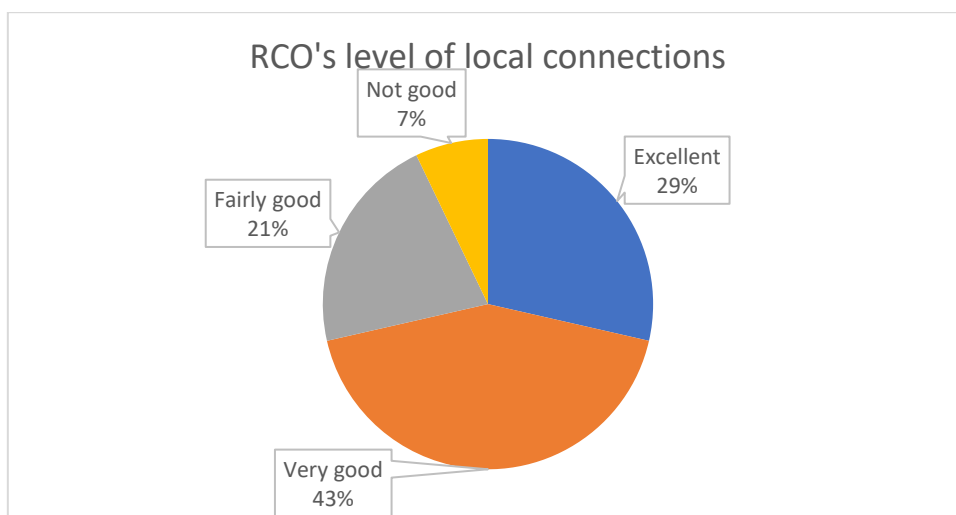
RCOs vary in size and the majority of them rely on volunteers some of whom can take on specialist roles such as community leader, project manager or designated safeguarding lead. However, for RCOs to be successful in undertaking community sponsorships, it is essential that they have the requisite knowledge and skills to meet their responsibilities as community sponsors.

We asked RCOs who said that they were interested in more information or considering to apply to be sponsors, whether they have staff or volunteers to take responsibilities of certain required areas such as housing, education, healthcare, welfare benefits, accessing employment and volunteering, ESOL and interpreters. RCOs responses are summarise in the graph below (graph 2).



Graph 2

Graph 2 shows that all respondents (100%) have the ability to deliver on language skills and provide interpreting services. For other areas of needs covered by a community sponsorship group, some RCOs will need to partner with other organisations, to train or to recruit new volunteers within or outside their community in order to have enough expertise and be able to deliver a package of required services to support the resettled family. This could be achieved through their local connections and working relationships with local authorities and agencies. RCOs are usually known to rely on local connections and our survey and conversation with RCOs confirmed it. We asked RCOs about the quality of their working relationships and connections with local authorities and agencies and their responses were excellent (29%), very good (43%), fairly good (21%) and only 7% said that their connections were not good.



Graph 3

Although many RCOs have the right legal structures (registered charity, company limited by guarantee, community interest company, CIO), and they provide appropriate services and/or can bring in external expertise to start community

sponsorships, this research has found that some RCOs don't believe that they have the capacity to meet the "experience" requirement. They shared that signing a binding agreement/contract with the Home office requires them to have a higher level of expertise and to build further capacity in terms of resources and sustainability of their services. Our survey results revealed that 29% of surveyed RCOs don't believe their organisation is eligible to the scheme and 26% said that their organisations don't have the capacity to deliver the package of services offered through the scheme.

In summary, although they know that they have the experience of working with vulnerable people owing to their mission as well as the nature of their work and their client group, and also the fact that they are led by people with lived experience; RCOs don't have confidence in their expertise and this is in part owing to uncertainty in terms of sustainability and to a high turnover of volunteers moving on and the constant need to train new volunteers.

RCOs need empowerment in certain areas to boost their confidence before they can put together an application for community sponsorship. Areas in which RCOs need empowerment and support include negotiation skills to develop partnerships, casework management, developing and delivering a resettlement plan, and recording and securing data. Due to the length of the commitment to support the new refugee family, they will also need support in fundraising and in developing their ability to retain skills or quickly train new volunteers should they need to fill any skill gaps.

Also, in many cases, in contrast with the Greater London area where the majority of RCOs are based and the dynamics in some communities have resulted in the formation of many RCOs serving one single community, and partnership working can be developed more easily; RCOs in rural areas may need support in building partnerships or in matching them with other potential community sponsors based in the same area.

▪ *Issue of getting Local authorities' consent*

According to the Home office guide on community sponsorship, one of the reasons why local authorities may object to a community sponsorship application is "where there are strong reasons to believe that a community sponsor is not suitable to undertake the resettlement of vulnerable adults and children"⁶. Sponsors are required to have prior knowledge and skills to meet their responsibilities and to work with individuals and families who may have experienced trauma or have other needs. While RCOs have experience of working with vulnerable refugees, some RCOs complain that they are perceived as appropriate sub-contractors but not seen as potential partners by local authorities and agencies. Besides, language barriers and an absence of information and unfamiliarity with the system has led local authorities and the mainstream organisations to view RCOs as being less capable of completing tasks⁷. As a result, some RCOs believe that it is challenging to convince the local authorities of their ability to take up responsibilities where quality requirements and performance level are expected to be very high.

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apply-for-full-community-sponsorship/community-sponsorship-guidance-for-prospective-sponsors>

⁷ <https://ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Working-Paper-01.pdf>

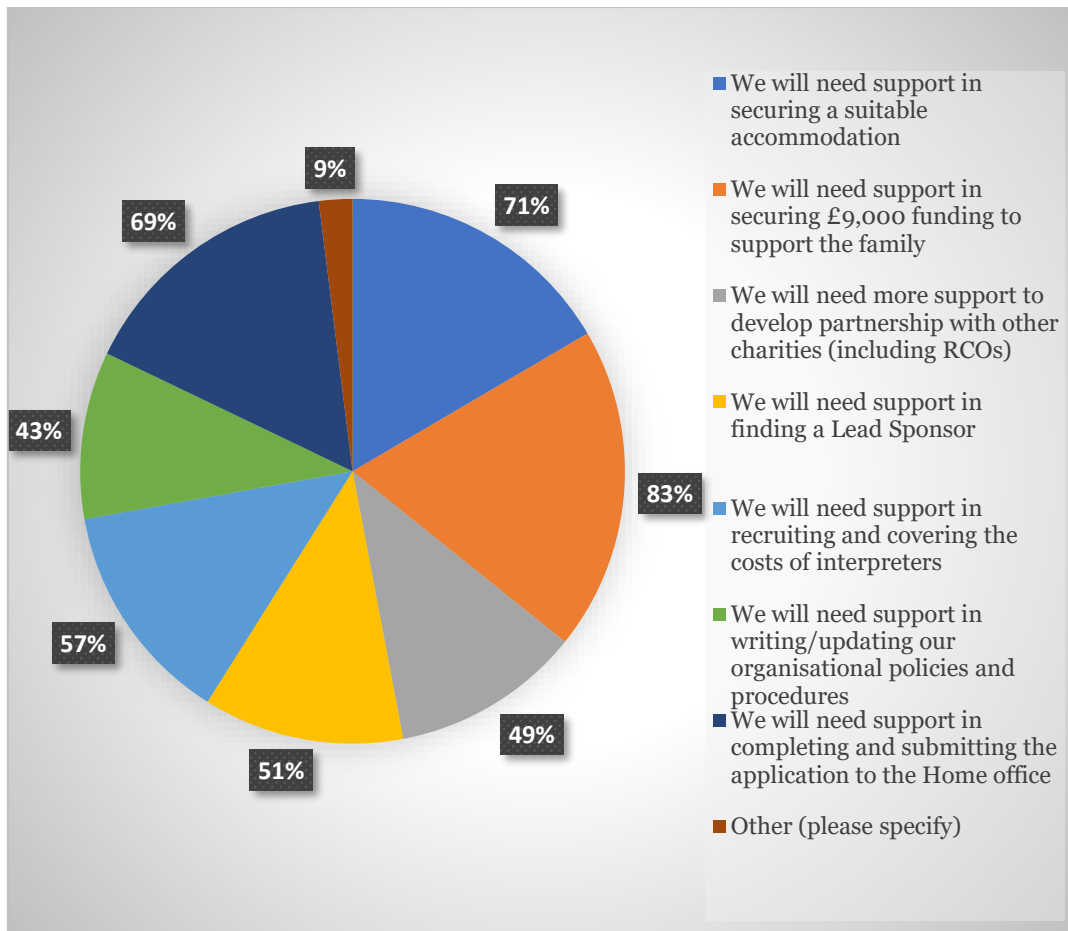
Furthermore, the majority of RCOs do not believe that their experience is sufficient to deal with complicated cases of trauma which require the interventions of specialists. One RCO said that *“people need to be careful. If different members of the refugee family have severe symptoms of psychological trauma, they need regular screening, regular appointments with GP for checks and there is a need for a variety of interventions to suit the needs of each member of the family. This will definitely require more resources and expertise that most of RCOs don’t have”*.

- *Funding issues and the lack of capacity to meet the financial requirement*

Community sponsorship is a community-led initiative and having your community behind the initiative may be one way of getting financial support. The most successful community sponsors are those who have the necessary resources and skills to use a mix of community appeals for charitable donations, fundraising activities and sponsorship from local businesses. Due to the challenges facing RCOs in raising funds for their activities and their historic lack of resources, lack of reserves, RCOs we talked to reported that they don’t have the capacity to meet the financial requirement. This funding issue was also identified through our survey.

83 percent of RCOs surveyed reported that they will need support in securing the £9,000 financial requirement. When we asked RCOs what kind of support they will need before they can start a community sponsorship application, advice and support in fundraising was among the highest scorer with 83% of respondents reporting this need, followed by support in securing a suitable accommodation with 71% of respondents reporting this as a need.

Question: If you need more support in order to get started with the scheme, what kind of support are you looking for? Please tick all that apply.



A small number of RCOs reported that despite the strong community support behind them, they have never tried to raise funds from community members before and they do not believe it could work. Those who have regular donations from their community reported that *“this is the only survival lifeline which keeps us going when other project funding ends until a new funding is secured”*⁸. The current uncertainty in the funding environment means that some RCOs have ringfenced funds from membership fees to fund their main activities. One RCO said that *“the only way we can use our unrestricted funding for community sponsorship is if we have assurance that we can successfully fundraise to replace it”*.

Another issue mentioned in this research which can have a significant impact on RCOs capacity to raise funds to sponsor a family, is the nature and focus of their work as an organisation. Although the general perception is that RCOs exist to support refugees and people seeking asylum, each RCO has its own mission and charitable objectives which define their areas of expertise (health, education, etc.). Other RCOs were set up to serve a single nationality (Somali, Iranian, etc.). These types of RCOs, particularly those who rely on grants from trusts and foundations, may find it difficult to fundraise for activities that fall outside the scope of their normal activities unless the funding is coming from a funding programme designed for community sponsorship.

⁸ Interview with an RCO

▪ *Accommodation issues– lack of capacity to meet the housing requirement*

The Home Office requirement is very clearly defined: “the sponsor must be able to show that they have secured an accommodation for up to two years, establish a relationship with the local police, and ensure that it meets the same standards as social housing”. Additionally, “your local authority needs to consent to the prospective community sponsorship arrangement in their area”⁹.

In July last year, the London Refugee Advocacy forum supported by the Refugee Council, published “Going in Full Circle: the primary needs and experiences of refugees and people seeking asylum living in London” a report on the needs of refugee communities in London¹⁰. The report identified housing as one of the main issues facing refugee communities. Although this research was limited to communities in Greater London area, there is a growing body of work which suggests that there is good reason to believe that housing issues are common to all refugee communities across the country, and these issues are exacerbated by the lack of affordable housing available in local areas¹¹.

Our survey found that another major barrier preventing RCOs from applying for community sponsorship was the issue of finding suitable accommodations. In fact, 17% of surveyed RCOs mentioned housing as the reason why they did not apply. Although this looks like a small proportion of the number of respondents, the issue around housing and its historic ramifications and impact on refugee integration constitute a big barrier for RCOs considering whether to apply for Community Sponsorship or not. It is also worth mentioning that 71% of RCOs surveyed said that they will need support to secure a suitable accommodation.

This issue was also confirmed through our interviews. One RCO commented that; “*we have good relationships with a recruitment agency and we can use it to connect the family for apprenticeships, but housing is our weakness*”. Other RCOs we talked to expressed their concerns about their capacity to meet the housing requirement, due not only to their lack of capacity to raise funds (£9,000) to meet the rent costs, but also due to the shortage of properties for rent in major cities and the uncertainty to find a property which meets the same standards as social housing as required by the Home Office. They argue that they are already dealing with existing clients facing housing related issues such as homelessness (particularly for new recognised refugees); unsuitable accommodation resulting in over crowdedness, and shortage of affordable properties which in many local areas result in long housing waiting lists and therefore RCOs are not sure whether Local Authorities will allow them to bring more refugees in their local areas.

Although studies often assert that resettled refugees benefit from a better experience in terms of initial accommodation (compared to former people seeking asylum) and they benefit from advice and care from their sponsors and support workers, the pathways to accommodation are similar (after the initial period) for both groups of refugees. Some RCOs are worried about welcoming a family which will end up being

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apply-for-full-community-sponsorship/community-sponsorship-guidance-for-prospective-sponsors>

¹⁰ Going Full Circle: The primary needs and experiences of refugees and people seeking asylum living in London <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/information/resources/going-full-circle/>

¹¹ The impact of housing on refugees: A research digest https://www.wypartnership.co.uk/application/files/5516/3639/6137/20232_-_the_impact_of_housing_on_refugees_FINAL.pdf

homeless after the 2-year contract. RCOs argue that since the selection of candidates for community sponsorships is not based on their employability or integration potential, it may take the refugee family more than 2 years to become independent, during which either the sponsors will be morally required to continue their support or suffer from guilt if they fail to do so.

- *Community Sponsorship is a “Big responsibility for sponsors”*

Some RCOs think that the Home Office policy on Community Sponsorship scheme puts the onus of responsibility on community sponsors rather than on Local Authorities or the Home Office. According to the Home Office policy, community sponsors are responsible for the financial costs including £200 upfront payments and the £9000 for the costs of housing as well as the provision of a wraparound service to facilitate integration in society. Some RCOs think that this is a big responsibility and suggest that the Home Office “*should do more than processing the application, for example by contributing to the £9,000 because this is one of the main huddles that prevent small charities from applying to the community sponsorship scheme.*”

Besides, RCOs think that if the Home office was offering the same level of financial support as they provide for the Homes for Ukraine, more charitable organisations could be encouraged to get involved in community sponsorship schemes. They argue that instead of making the community sponsor responsible for all the financial costs, the Home Office could do more by part-funding the scheme or finding alternative ways of funding it including through philanthropy. This would enable RCOs to fundraise only £4,500 instead of £9,000.

- *Community Sponsorship is a risk due to cost of living related issues*

Community sponsorships are seen by some RCOs as a big risk for small charities with limited resources like them. This is particularly concerning due to the impact of the cost of living affecting community members and resulting in the increased demand of support services and increased dependency of some clients on RCOs. It also affects the running costs of community related activities. One Afghan RCO we talked to reported that they were involved in an initiative similar to community sponsorship by helping an Afghan refugee to move out of a hotel accommodation and helped him to rent a property in what was considered to be a cheap area in Nottingham. They also helped him to get a small job. However, due to the sudden increase in the cost of living, he is struggling to make ends meet and the RCO that sponsored him is finding it hard to support him financially. As a result, the individual made multiple unsuccessful attempts to return to the hotel.

- *Issue linked to the differential treatment between resettled refugees and former people seeking asylum*

RCOs are concerned about the difference in treatment offered to resettled refugees and those refugees who claimed asylum in the UK. Whilst resettled refugees receive £200 at the airport by the sponsor group, followed by the volunteers’ support, newly recognised refugees in UK have twenty-eight days to be independent from the Home Office’s Asylum Support, which leaves the majority of them at risk of homelessness and destitution. Many of these former people seeking asylum end up depending on the support from RCOs and from friends and families. Some RCOs believe that the differential treatment through the denial of an up-front cash grant to refugees who claimed asylum in the UK depicts these people as less deserving than resettled

refugees including those who come through community sponsorships. The Home Office policy is considered by RCOs as double standard practice that makes it difficult for them to prioritise a refugee family which they don't know and which is not yet in UK, over a need they see in their community, facing a refugee they have met and which is resulting from what they call an unfair treatment from the Home Office. With limited resources, RCOs prefer to prioritise existing clients facing destitution over a prospective community sponsorship, not out of lack of interest but because of limited resources.

- *RCOs motivation for community sponsorships*

The factors that motivate RCOs to participate in community sponsorships differ from one RCO to another. While the majority of RCOs share the main motivation factor with other non-refugee sponsors namely the desire to provide practical support to more people in need of protection and to enable them to reach the UK, this research found that RCOs have other motivations which if possible would be compelling reasons for these RCOs to get involved in community sponsorships. These motivations include the possibility of reuniting refugees who are stranded in unsafe countries (like countries neighbouring Afghanistan) with their families in UK, the possibility to contribute to safe routes for more refugees to reach the UK without putting their lives in danger such as through channel crossing, and the possibility to welcome a refugee family already in UK. Some of these motivations can only be dispensed if community sponsors have the ability to name or nominate specific candidates for the resettlement. Unfortunately, the current government policy doesn't provide this option.

We asked RCOs if naming or nominating the refugee family to welcome was an option, how likely would they be to get involved in community sponsorships. The majority of RCOs (64%) said they are 'More likely', 22% said 'Likely' and 14% said 'Maybe'

One RCO said: *"Can we sponsor a family from Afghanistan that we know they are in danger in Pakistan? A man who is a doctor and his sister who is a teacher but cannot teach anymore. The surgeon was attacked, he sustained bad injuries and he is now disabled. They escaped and are stranded in Pakistan and they need help. If naming a candidate was an option we would start a sponsorship scheme and help them come to the UK"*.

With regard to the possibility to welcome a family already in UK, some RCOs particularly Afghan, said that they are happy to welcome a family from hotel accommodation. However, the majority of RCOs prefer to help a family who need to reach safety rather than a family who is already in UK. One RCO said *"those who are in hotels are safe here, I prefer to help those who are still in need of protection"*. Another RCOs said *"we want to reunite refugees where siblings live in different countries."*

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research has found that the majority of RCOs are not aware of the Community Sponsorship Scheme and those who are aware don't have enough information to be able to take a decision about their involvement.

Most of the interviewed RCOs show an interest and willingness to become community sponsors. However, they believe that they don't have the capacity to fulfil

some of the eligibility criteria and request to be supported in areas such as fundraising and finding suitable accommodation for newly arrived families.

The survey and the interviews identified other barriers pertaining to policy related concerns including the differential treatment between resettled refugees and former people seeking asylum and the difference between the Home Office investment in Home for Ukraine and their investment in Community Sponsorship Schemes.

This research found that for the involvement of RCOs in community sponsorship to reach its potential and add value to the resettlement of refugees, there is a need to strengthen the capacity of RCOs to deliver effective and sustainable services and the need to reduce the financial exposure of community sponsors. This would reduce the risks for any issues that could jeopardise the success of the resettlement initiatives by grass roots organisations like RCOs and remove the feeling among RCOs that putting the onus of refugee support only on community sponsors is a sign of an imminent withdrawal of the Home office from the responsibility of care for resettled refugees.

There is a necessity for Reset to work with the Home Office and encourage a review of the policy on community sponsorships in order to introduce the possibility for community sponsors to be involved the selection of candidates including an option to name or nominate potential candidates to be resettled through community sponsorships.

The majority of RCOs welcome more information and recognise the level of the challenge involved when becoming community sponsors. There is a need to support them and help them to build their capacity and improve their experience before they start an application to become community sponsors. This could be achieved through the provision of capacity building support and financial support, facilitating peer learning support, and establishing networks between existing community sponsors and RCO prospective sponsors.

There is also a need to develop and implement an awareness campaign to promote community sponsorship to RCOs and encourage them to get involved. The campaign could include inviting them to participate in relevant workshops, events, or meetings, preferably organised in partnership with stakeholders with extensive networks to which RCOs are members. This could also include information materials, stories and experiences, posted on platforms accessible to RCOs including social media and stakeholders' newsletters.

The research found that RCOs need to build their confidence in their capacity to deliver resettlement services before they start a community sponsorship application. This could be achieved by a delivery model that allow RCOs to deliver a proof of concept before committing to a full-fledged community sponsorship. It might be useful to develop a self-assessment tool to enable RCOs to assess their capacity, their level of expertise and resources, and to assess their ability to bring additional resources and how sustainable their sponsorship will be over a period of time. This will allow RCOs to identify their skills gaps and the level of expertise they are able to develop inhouse or to acquire through partnership development. The result of their assessment could be used by Principal Lead Sponsors when supporting potential sponsors to prepare for applying.

RCOs like to work with likeminded organisations that they trust. Cooperation, partnership and collaboration with other stakeholders has always been an important empowerment strategy for RCOs to get involved in new initiatives. Therefore,

encouraging regional-based refugee charities to apply and become Principal Lead sponsors and commission them to promote community sponsorship scheme, recruit sponsors, facilitate the matching exercise between RCOs and non-refugee volunteers or organisations; could boost the interest of RCOs to get involved in community sponsorships. Examples of regional refugee organisations which could be approached include: Wolverhampton's Refugee & Migrant Centre, The North of England Refugee Service (NERS), Manchester Refugee Support Network, Reading Refugee Support Group, Bristol Refugee Rights, some refugee forums based in London, City of Sanctuary UK and its branches across the country.

Finally, funding issues have been raised by RCO contributors to this research. We found that the issue has been raised before in previous reports¹². It is important to ensure that financial support (either via the Home Office or other funders) is offered to grassroots community sponsors to enable them to engage effectively and successfully with Community Sponsorship.

¹² <https://ukwelcomesrefugees.org/investing-in-the-future-of-community-sponsorship/>