Vitality & Engagement

Developing Communities

Summary

Community Sponsorship CSO Good Practice Convening

Thursday 17th June 2021

The event marked the first of six convenings to be held over the duration of the VE Project. The convening was attended by over 50 attendees from 11 EU Member States, who represent key community sponsorship (CS) actors at the forefront of the design and implementation of CS schemes across Europe.

Speaker Session Overview

The event sought to capture the experiences and challenges faced by schemes at three broad stages of development: pre-pilot, transitional/scaling, and embedded. To this end, the event's first three speakers included:

1. **Tito Matos, the Refugee Council (CPR):** Overview of current discussions to develop a CS scheme in Portugal – challenges faced and key considerations.

2. **Fiona Finn, Nasc, the Migrant and Refugee Rights Centre:** Origins of Ireland's CS Scheme and current state of play: challenges faced as the programme scales and the role of CSOs.

3. **Kate Brown, RESET UK:** Summary of the UK programme highlighting the model used and the continuing challenges faced.

The juxtaposition of CS schemes that this allowed, demonstrated both the differences and similarities between protocols and implementation strategies deployed by each respective scheme at their stage of development. Each speaker spoke to the challenges as well as the opportunities that exist moving forward, which are summaries as follows:.

Challenges

- The global pandemic has hugely impacted all stages of CS. Resettlement has been halted or slowed down in each country over the past 16 months which has meant the number of resettled refugee families has been lower than planned.
- This in turn has caused difficulties and frustration for families waiting to be resettled. Speakers highlighted the challenges involved in maintaining motivation and engagement levels of

- sponsorship groups who are waiting to host families in their communities. In some cases sponsor groups had been waiting for over a year.
- Finding suitable accommodation was raised as an ongoing and significant issue; in both Ireland and Portugal rent is very expensive and there is a lack of appropriate accommodation.
- CPR voiced concerns that language provision and other support services could potentially be difficult to engage as there are not always appropriate services in place - flagged as particularly evident in rural areas.
- As resettlement remains paused, and groups in the Irish programme continue to face uncertainties in respect to family arrivals, NASC indicated that it is difficult to recruit new groups.
- Refugee-led group engagement can be difficult when processes are heavily bureaucratic and time consuming; and this can further impact ensuring the voice of refugees are involved throughout all stages of CS scheme development and implementation.

Opportunities Moving Forward

- CS has the potential to change the narrative about refugees by raising awareness of refugee and migration issues both locally and nationally.
- CPR intimated that having greater refugee engagement in the process of CS scheme development is fundamentally important; to include refugees in the dispersal country as well as within the host country.
- Development of services that will support greater integration opportunities: employability programmes, university scholarships and training programmes.
- Identifying divergences in experience between urban and rural sponsorship was seen as an important emphasis moving forward.
- Peer learning and greater civil society ownership in CS scheme development will ensure greater continuity for sustainable growth.

Thematic Session Overview

The event also sought to provide an in-depth networking and exchange of knowledge opportunity to leading CS actors. This was facilitated through a thematic breakout room session that focused on five identified key areas of functional requirements within CS scheme design:

1. **Partnerships and CSO-State Relationships**
2. **Pathway Management**
3. **Sponsor Recruitment and Support**
4. **Program Growth and Mobilisation**
5. **Sponsorship oversights, quality control and training**

The event's fourth speaker, **Giulio Di Blasi, GRSI,** presented an overview of functional roles performed by CSOs within various CS Schemes. This offered examples of synergies between the areas of work being focused on by GRSI and those identified by the event's three other speakers, these include: greater mapping and engagement with local authorities, stronger input and empowerment from refugees and diaspora organisations, and an emphasis on wider engagement relating to accommodation and funding.

The breakout room discussions that followed offered the following feedback:

1. **Partnership and CSO State Relationships**
   - Communication between stakeholders can be challenging
   - Greater engagement needed through experience of working with refugees
2. **Pathway Management**
   - Greater matching and links with relevant and appropriate services
   - Identify links between CS and Family reunification
3. **Sponsor Recruitment and Support**
   - Better support regarding how CS works
   - Training in all areas from accommodation to culture
4. **Programme Growth and Mobilisation**
   - Greater understanding and engagement with local authorities
   - Resources and development of partnerships networks
   - Programme stories, evaluation and learning
5. **Sponsorship Oversight, Quality Control and Training**
   - Greater understanding regarding lead sponsor accountability
   - Training modules should be mandatory and tracked
     More inclusion of refugees and sponsors throughout all stages of CS (e.g. design, planning. Implementation)

If you would like to provide any additional feedback please do so via this **link**

Next Steps

Five subsequent convenings will focus on one identified functional area in turn to allow for a deeper exploration of each. The next convening, selected through feedback from the participants, will focus on Programme Growth and Mobilisation. The overall learnings from all 6 convenings will ultimately inform the VE project's final Guidebook. The next good practice convening will be held before the end of 2021.