

Vitality & Engagement

Developing Communities

Project Newsletter December 2023

PARTNERS



The VE Project is being implemented by Amnesty International Ireland and The Portuguese Refugee Council (CPR).

Amnesty International Ireland and The Refugee Council (CPR) Portugal are working in partnership to raise engagement and awareness of the Community Sponsorship (CS) initiative- locally, nationally and transnationally. The newsletter is here to share the voice of refugees, CS industry allies, highlight milestones and look to next steps for the VE programme.

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Co-funded by the European Union's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund

ComUnidade

THE OPEN
COMMUNITY



AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL

Vitality & Engagement

December 2023

Developing Communities

20



Civil Society Events
Hosted

84



Outreach Events
Hosted

1150



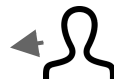
Community
Sponsorship Enquiries

404



Civil Society Event
Attendees

1227



Outreach Event
Attendees

1367



Social Media
Followers

24



Project Case
Studies

59



Allies Network
Partners Engaged
(Signed or committed to sign pledge)

14



Online Training
Modules Developed

854



Online Training
Users (Unique)

17



Resources Available

STUDY VISIT: KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

“HAVING THE OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN FROM OTHERS WHO MAY HAVE DIFFERENT (ALBEIT SIMILAR) EXPERIENCES...IS ONE OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAYS OF BRINGING ABOUT CHANGE.”



In September, The Open Community and CPR supported a study visit for Chaves Acolhe, who are the first community sponsorship group in Portugal, to meet sponsorship groups in Ireland. The visit is part of continuous knowledge exchange and feedback for sponsors under the VE project.

The Portuguese sponsorship group and CPR team met with members of the Cloughjordan Community Sponsorship Group in County Tipperary, and with the Baltinglass Community Sponsorship Group in County Wicklow, as well as with families and individuals who have resettled in each community.

The trip was carried out in partnership with Irish Regional Support Organisations, the Irish Red Cross and Doras, who are working with the sponsorship groups in their local areas.

The groups from each country shared experiences on recruiting group members, and on promotion, fundraising and outreach approaches within each of their communities.

The Portuguese visitors also had the opportunity to hear from members of Syrian families welcomed by the Irish groups, who spoke about their journey to Ireland and their experiences of resettling.

Matilde Neves, the Chaves Acolhe group coordinator, said that the visit was important in their point of view, to understand if their work

was in any way similar to what was being carried out in Ireland.

“Hearing the testimonies of the families being hosted through community sponsorship in the first person, was very important as we only had the reference of the family we are hosting. This made us realize that there are aspects common to all families, dispelling some of our doubts and fears,” she added.

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Barbara Oliveira, Program Manager with CPR said: “Having the opportunity to learn from others who may have different (albeit similar) experiences, and who may have thought about different solutions or maybe view an issue from a different perspective, is one of the most effective ways of bringing about change.”

“It can also be a way to bring a breath of fresh air into a team, encouraging the pursuit of new solutions that have been tried and tested in other contexts,” she added.



SALMAN FAMILY

“WE WERE VERY SCARED AT FIRST AND HAD NO EMOTIONAL STABILITY BUT THE CONTINUOUS SUPPORT GIVEN BY THE GROUP AND COMUNIDADE ALLOWED US TO FEEL VERY GOOD.”



The Salmans left Iraq more than 10 years ago, having stayed 9 years in Turkey, witing in limbo. The family of four, including a teenage boy and a little girl, have longed for the moment where they could finally have their home and rebuild their lives.

By the end of March 2023, they received the news that they would be the first sponsored family in Portugal. First, they were scared and wondering why were they the chosen ones to pioneer the program but after meeting the group and seeing all what they had done they were relieved and very happy.

When they arrived to their new home in the Northern city of Chaves, they were amazed with all the things that the sponsor group Chaves Acolhe had prepared: gifts for each; a full pantry; clothes and all the basics and a piece of art made by everyone involved in this journey.

The first weeks posed a challenge but this was eased by the support from the group and from all the local community. Their kindness and effort to make them feel welcome has made the Salmans feel they need to commit to their adaptation and to give back to the community.

Young boy Salman's birthday was just two weeks after their arrival and his class

mates prepared him a little surprise party with personalized gifts: a football and a shirt from the local football team. Football wasn't his favourite sport but after that he can't stop following the football stars and the whole family went to watch the local team play.

The children feel happy in school and the mother has already started working at a local hotel. Step by step they are feeling more and more confident and understanding Portuguese better.

“WE WAITED 9 YEARS FOR THIS... IT IS A LIFE TIME AND MANY DREAMS WERE LOST ON THE WAY BUT NOW WE FEEL SAFE AND HAPPY. WE KNOW THE PROGRAM WILL END BUT WE WANT TO CONTINUE BEING FRIENDS WITH THE GROUP AND BE PART OF THE FUTURE OF COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP.”

They now feel they are integrated at 70% but know they can do better so all can speak Portuguese and both parents can work, preferably in their own areas. They would like to go back to university and complete their degrees. The future is still very uncertain but with the help of the CS group everything will be easier.

STUDY VISIT: UNITED STATES, IRELAND AND PORTUGAL

BUILDING TRANSNATIONAL LEARNING AND FACILITATING MUTUAL EXCHANGE ON BEST PRACTICES IN SPONSORSHIP



In September 2023, Conselho Portugues Para Os Refugiados (CPR) and The Open Community* were hosted by U.S. counterparts IRIS (Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services) in Connecticut, for a study visit on U.S. sponsorship programmes, to facilitate greater transnational learning in the three countries.



Members of the Simsbury Welcoming Project, Connecticut and staff members of IRIS, The Open Community, and CPR, at a dinner and Q&A event to discuss sponsorship experiences as part of the study visit.

The Portuguese and Irish contingent met with four sponsorship groups in Connecticut and heard from IRIS staff members in New Haven, on the communication and mobilisation approaches being implemented on the ground by the organisation.

IRIS also facilitated meetings with U.S.

organisations Welcome Corp, HIAS, the Community Sponsorship Hub, Refugee Welcome Collective and Church World Service, who are delivering national and local sponsorship programmes, as well as training and resources for sponsors in the U.S.

Key areas discussed during the visit included recruitment and retention of sponsors, building and maintaining partnerships, training support, and approaches to recruiting and supporting lead sponsors to form groups.

There was also a chance to discuss plans for roll out of monitoring and evaluation in Ireland, the start of naming pathways for sponsorship in each country, and next steps for scaling and developing the programme further in all three contexts.

** The Open Community is the National Support Organisation for Community Sponsorship in Ireland. It is being incubated by Amnesty International Ireland, under the VE project.*

COMUNIDADE PARTNERS' NETWORK

“THIS [REFUGEE CRISIS] IS A VERY IMPORTANT QUESTION THAT AFFECTS THE WHOLE WORLD AND EVERYONE. EACH ONE OF US SHOULD CONTRIBUTE AND BE PART OF THE SOLUTION. THAT IS WHAT DRIVES US TO BE PART OF THIS NETWORK.”



The Partners' Network of ComUnidade is a national network of entities that promote community sponsorship and defend refugee's rights. Its development has been a goal since the beginning of the project, having had its debut by July 2022.

The Network is composed by associations, NGOs, companies, public and international entities, as well as many others. They share the commitment to increase the potential and implementation of community sponsorship in Portugal with an effort to promote this lasting solution across Portuguese society.

Partner's responsibilities are: to disseminate and promote community sponsorship among their departments and contacts; to support sponsor groups with specific knowledge or services; and to offer job and training opportunities to sponsored refugees.

ComUnidade promotes the development of the Network through the development of participatory meetings, gatherings and conferences that bring together key actors in the field of community sponsorship, as well as interested parties. Belonging to this Network has its perks, with partners taking part in the first national support network for refugee families and sponsors, being also able to enjoy specialized and personalized training. This allows for partners to develop more inclusive and cohesive teams, becoming entities more resilient and creative that are trained and aware of interculturality. Also, partners participate in dedicated events and

gatherings, allowing the growth of peer networks at national and international level. ComUnidade provides personalized support to each member, offering specific meeting and networking spaces like the Meetings of Civil Society Organizations for Community Sponsorship or International Conferences including key actors such as organisations, sponsors and sponsored refugees to share their experiences.

“THE BASE OF COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP IS THAT THE WHOLE COMMUNITY GETS INVOLVED SOMEHOW. THIS IS OUR CONTRIBUTION TO HELP THE PROGRAM, THE SPONSORS AND THE SPONSORED REFUGEES”

There is a continuous effort to try to include key stakeholders that can greatly contribute to the development of the CS program as well as to help and support sponsors in specific areas.

At the moment the Network is composed by 27 partners including relevant national and international organisations such as ACM, IOM or UNHCR; NGOs with expertise in fundraising and crowdfunding (PPL), Portuguese teaching (SPEAK) or community links (MEERU); universities; companies like Teleperformance and many others.