

Vitality & Engagement

Developing Communities

Newsletter

July 2021

Welcome to the **Vitality & Engagement – Developing Communities (VE Project) Newsletter**.

The VE Project is a three-year project co-funded by the European Union and implemented by Amnesty International Ireland, under the auspices of The Open Community (the national support organisation for Ireland's Community Sponsorship Programme), and The Portuguese Refugee Council (CPR).

In this issue you'll find:

- An overview of the VE Project;
- Community Sponsorship Case Studies from Ireland and Portugal;
- A summary of the first CSO Good Practice Conveying held in June
- Next steps for the VE Project



Overview of the VE Project

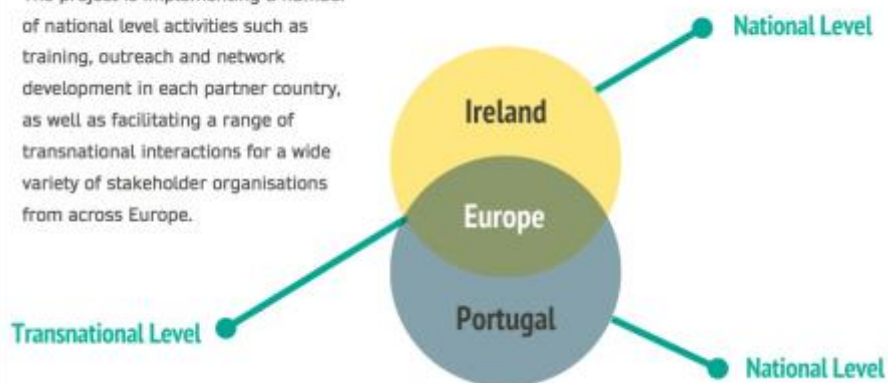
PARTNERS




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

PROJECT FOCUS

The project is implementing a number of national level activities such as training, outreach and network development in each partner country, as well as facilitating a range of transnational interactions for a wide variety of stakeholder organisations from across Europe.



PROJECT ACTIVITIES

-  **Transnational CSO Meeting**
The project hosts strategic CSO meetings which are designed to bring together key community sponsorship actors from across Europe to share leading models and support capacity building.
-  **Peer Sponsorship Group Network**
The project is developing a Peer Sponsorship Group Network which includes online forums and discussion boards as well as network meetings and events.
-  **Online Learning Platform**
An online learning platform is being developed that will host a comprehensive suite of online training materials for sponsorship groups.



Case Studies

Sponsors Perspective - Ireland



I got to visit Syria in 2009 and 2010. My visits opened me up to the beauty of Syria and its people, the ancient city of Damascus with its stunning Umayyad mosque, the Church of St Paul in Straight Street, the bazaars, coffee houses and most of all the warm and welcoming people.

I mean, who is my neighbour? It's often the person that we least expect. We join people at the time in their life that they need us to. I wrote up a list of about ten people I knew in the community.

I told them, this is the idea I had, and would you be interested in doing it? They all said yes, absolutely. The thing is, like most people, we had no agenda. We just wanted to help people.

We were delighted when we were told they were coming. They arrived on the 10th of December. We were in the minibus driving down from Dublin Airport, it was late at night, it was coming up to Christmas.

My role was to coordinate the group. To invite people to it, coordinate the meetings. And to introduce the idea to the wider community.

It was so wild and wet outside. They were shattered, exhausted. I could see in their eyes, like, what was going on? We had the fire going in the house waiting for them, there was food there, some of

the group waiting for them. When we arrived at the house, the father gave me his little girl in her child seat. She was asleep so I carried her in.

At that moment, looking down at her, I imagined her in twenty years' time - a grown woman, educated, confident. And me being able to tell her that I was there. I carried you into your first home here in Ireland. And to be able to tell her about the incredible courage of her parents that night, bringing them here, doing all of this for them.

We invited them down to the Christmas carol service. I gave them a little introduction and people gave them a big clap.

People were coming up and shaking hands, being very welcoming. It was a wonderful thing to see. They were refugees who had to flee their home, and here we were at Christmas welcoming this family.

It's a very humbling experience to think that you can actually help another human being really. With the war in Syria, seeing what's happening to the people. This was my way of reaching out and saying that I'm with you through this time.

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Education is very important - their English has hugely improved, and the children are eager to go to university, and we're helping them to step by step. Now, we're looking forward to the kids starting school, and seeing a really different level of integration.

I also want to bring them to Croke park, I want to show them a hurling match. When people visit from all over, one of the best things is watching them watching the hurling. It's fantastic to see their reaction. And I want to show them the real Ireland.

If I could imagine an Irish family having to go to Syria, then wouldn't it be wonderful to think the local Muslim leader in a little community somewhere, saying we're going to try and help them? When you turn things on their heads like that, you see that it's our common humanity that connects us.

Organisational Perspective - Portugal



The Guimarães Acolhe Consortium arises from the humanitarian imperative to join the global effort, given the worsening of the humanitarian crisis felt since 2015. In this sense, the Municipality of Guimarães, in the north of Portugal, organized itself and created the consortium Guimarães Acolhe in collaboration with its Social Network and the Portuguese Council for Refugees (CPR). The consortium has as a goal welcoming and integrating refugees by providing conditions of well-being and security.

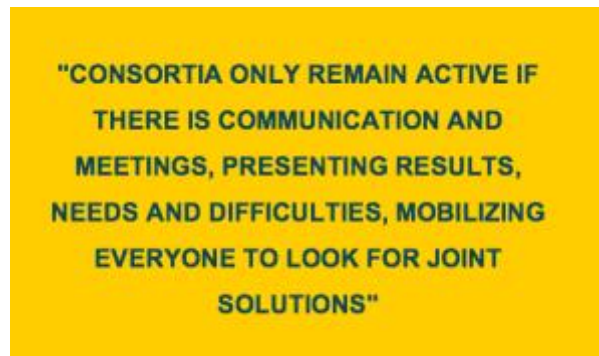
Guimarães Acolhe has a community base, integrating public and private entities, which remain involved and dedicated in all phases of the process.

The structured action for the integration of refugees begins long before they are received, with several actions such as needs assessment, the training of case workers and those involved and the assignment of multidisciplinary support and monitoring teams. The Consortium is also dedicated to carrying out transversal awareness and information actions.

The commitment and concerted effort on the part of all the institutions involved has allowed, so far, the reception and integration of 56 people, including 10 families, of different nationalities such as Eritreans, Sudanese, Syrians, Nigerians and others.

The success of Guimarães Acolhe action is not, however, immune to challenges inherent to inclusion, such as: lengthy legalization processes; the difficulty of accessing both the house and the labor market, this last one especially for women; the discrepancy between low incomes and very

high costs; or the difficulties in learning Portuguese which translates into impediments to communication and understanding. There are other needs, such as: expectations management, namely by case workers; the poor sustainability of the processes whose support program ends; as well as the lack of resources, both human and financial, which hampered a more focused support.



**"CONSORTIA ONLY REMAIN ACTIVE IF
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The Consortium aims to mitigate such issues, which strategies may involve the professionalization of the reception service, as well as that of Portuguese teachers, who up to now have been mostly temporary or voluntary; strengthen Portuguese teaching and access to translation services; boost training and empowerment projects, especially for women; increase health support; create more spaces and moments of social interaction and sharing; or work on management expectation.

The joint and common dedication of all entities of Guimarães Acolhe is the basis of the success of their work, in which communication, exchanges between teams and the commitment to the search for joint solutions, reinforce complementarity, leaving those involved with a great admiration and pride to be part of this Consortium that represents "the wealth of the common".

CSO Good Practice Convening

17th June 2021

The event marked the first of six convenings to be held over the duration of the Vitality & Engagement – Developing Communities (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.

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 Tito Matos from *CPR in Portugal*, Fiona Finn from *Nasc, the Migrant and Refugee Rights Centre in Ireland* and Kate Brown from *RESET in the UK*. Each speaker spoke of the differences and similarities between protocols and implementation strategies deployed by each respective country at their stage of development.

The event's fourth speaker was Guilio Di Blasi, from GRSI, who 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.



Shared Learnings For Continued Growth

The event finished with participant engagement in breakout room discussions, which sought to provide an in-depth networking and exchange of knowledge opportunity to leading CS actors.

The sessions focused on five identified key areas of functional requirements within CS scheme;

- ***Partnerships and CSO-State Relationships;***
- ***Pathway Management;***

- **Sponsor Recruitment & Support;**
- **Programme Growth & Mobilisation;**
- **Sponsorship Oversights,** and;
- **Quality Control & Training.**

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.

Next Steps for the VE Project

The second CSO Good Practice Convening will be held next quarter and will focus on Programme Growth and Mobilisation.

The Open Community, as Ireland's national support organisation for community sponsorship, has launched a new information [website](#) and [multilingual mobile app](#). In the coming months a new suite of online training resources, hosted via an interactive learning centre will also be launched.



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