

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.