

Community Sponsorship Ireland Programme Review

15th November 2023



An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige
Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth



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1. Introduction



The Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP) was established by the Government Decision of September 2015 as a key part of Ireland's response to the global humanitarian migration crisis. Under this programme, the IRPP has seen the arrival of over 4,000 refugees through various resettlement pathways including Local Authority Resettlement Programme, Humanitarian Admissions from Afghanistan and Community Sponsorship Ireland. Community Sponsorship Ireland (CSI) was first piloted in 2018 under the IRPP as a complementary integration and resettlement stream to the traditional state-centred model. The unique feature of the programme is that it enables a willing population to engage locally by directly supporting a refugee family. The pilot phase concluded in 2019 and the programme entered implementation phase with applications accepted on an ongoing basis. The IRPP's future plans include launching an Open Call for Proposal in 2024 for another iteration of the programme.

Community sponsorship promotes inclusivity and provides holistic support for refugees. It also empowers volunteers to engage locally, assuming responsibility for providing a range of integration supports to an invited refugee family, in addition to a warm welcome into their new home and community.

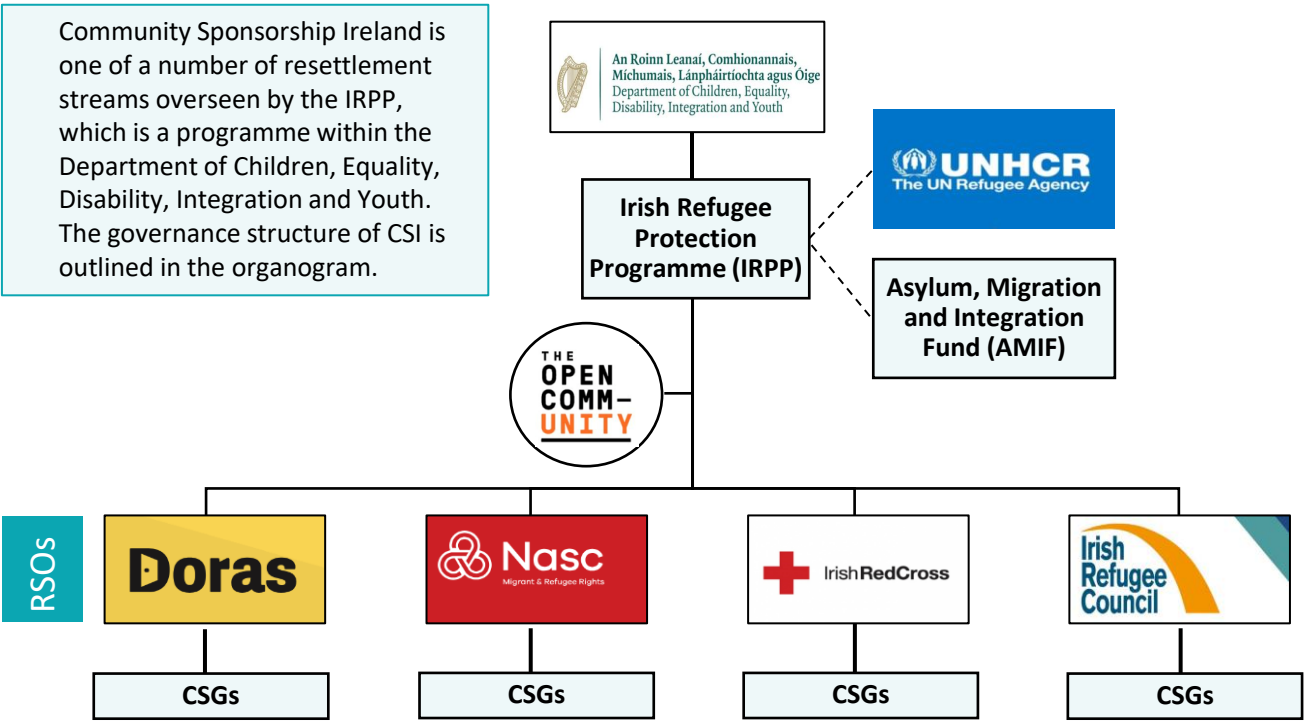
Recent years have been challenging for Community Sponsorship Ireland. COVID-19 was particularly challenging as volunteers were less likely to get involved with the programme due to concerns about health and safety, restrictions on gatherings, and the overall disruption caused by the pandemic. Furthermore, the Ukrainian crisis has garnered considerable attention and support, diverting focus and community resources away from Community Sponsorship Ireland. The Humanitarian Admissions from Afghanistan programme, where individuals or groups can sponsor a particular, known refugee in what is referred to as a 'named' scheme, introduced further challenges. Although this scheme has driven interest in the sponsorship concept, this interest has not flowed through to traditional sponsorship and has, in fact, directed resources away from CSI.

Cumulatively, these challenges have caused significant disruption across all aspects of the programme. CSI has faced increased competition for resources, including housing, Government resources (e.g., increased processing times), and volunteer resources. It has been difficult for the IRPP to plan strategically over this period of change. However, in recent months, a more stable environment has allowed stakeholders to regroup and look to the future.

In October 2023, the IRPP commissioned EY to assess and evaluate the current programme and determine if any significant changes are needed in preparation for the new iteration in 2024. To date, the programme has formed approximately 60 CSGs and welcomed nearly 40 families. The IRPP's ambition is to expand and scale Community Sponsorship Ireland and welcome more families into Ireland to meet the ongoing and potentially increasing demand. A target of resettling 25 families per year through CSI over the next four years is being proposed in this regard, with the goal of welcoming 100 families into Ireland through the programme by end of 2027.

It is anticipated that the findings of this review will create an opportunity for CSI programme partners to clarify their ambitions, identify opportunities to build on the work commenced in 2018, and act as a catalyst for change in the upcoming programme.

Organisational Structure and Governance



Roles of Community Sponsorship Programme Ireland

The **Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP)** oversees the Community Sponsorship Programme in Ireland. Its role includes coordinating the selection and resettlement of refugees, managing their protection needs, and facilitating collaboration with various stakeholders to ensure the successful implementation of community sponsorship initiatives. The IRPP commissioned this report.

The **UNHCR** provides guidance, expertise, and technical assistance in implementing the program and ensuring the protection of refugees. It also proposes families for selection consideration for CSI, based on criteria put forward by IRPP.

The **Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF)** is a European fund that aims to further boost national capacities and improve procedures for migration management. Since 2023, AMIF has partially funded the Regional Support Organisations through the provision of grants.

The Open Community is the National Support Organisation for CSI. The Open Community operates through three main strands: Promotion, which involves promoting and developing Community Sponsorship in Ireland; Support, as they provide a central hub of resources and guidance; and Mobilisation, where they engage individuals, communities, and organisations to support and welcome refugees. The Open Community is currently being incubated as a project within Amnesty International Ireland, but will be incorporated as an independent entity by the end of 2023.

The four **Regional Support Organisations (RSOs)** lead local promotion and provide support, guidance, and oversight to Community Sponsorship Groups (CSGs) throughout the sponsorship process. This includes assisting with training, offering ongoing support and coordination, and ensuring compliance with programme guidelines. They are funded through AMIF grants and are required to submit reporting to IRPP as a condition of these grants.

Community Sponsorship Groups (CSGs) support and assist sponsored refugee families throughout the resettlement process. This involves fundraising to fund accommodation and other requirements and providing practical support, guidance, resources, and integration assistance to help the families successfully settle into their new communities.

Regional Support Organisation Distribution

The numbered circles on the map indicate the respective base locations of the RSOs. It is important to note that in certain instances, the RSO office is geographically remote from the area(s) it serves.



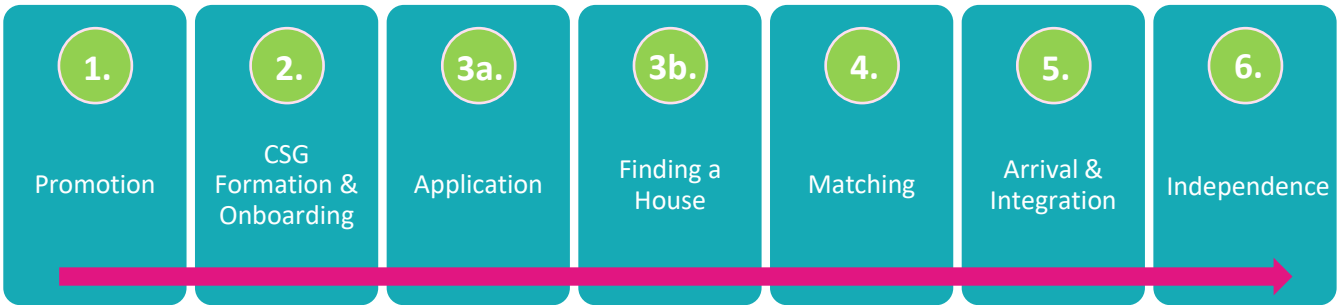
Regional Support Organisations

Four RSOs have responsibility for the delivery of their allocated duties in seven distinct operational areas as follows:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1 Irish Refugee Council
Area 1 (Dublin/Louth)
Area 7 (Leitrim /Sligo/Cavan/Donegal/
Monaghan) | 3 Doras
Area 3 (Limerick/Tipperary/Clare) |
| 2 Nasc, the Migrant and Refugee Rights Centre
Area 2 (Cork/Kerry)
Area 5 (Waterford /Wexford/ Kilkenny/ Carlow/
Laois) | 4 Irish Red Cross
Area 4
(Meath/Kildare/Wicklow/Westmeath/Offaly)
Area 6 (Galway/Mayo/Longford/Roscommon) |

Programme Overview

The CSI programme can be understood in terms of six key stages reflecting the journey from promotion of the programme, through to formation of a CSG, arrival of a family and their ultimate independence. This journey is illustrated in more detail below alongside a short summary of the activities involved in each of the stages. These stages have formed the main framework for the evaluation of the programme.



Summary of Stages

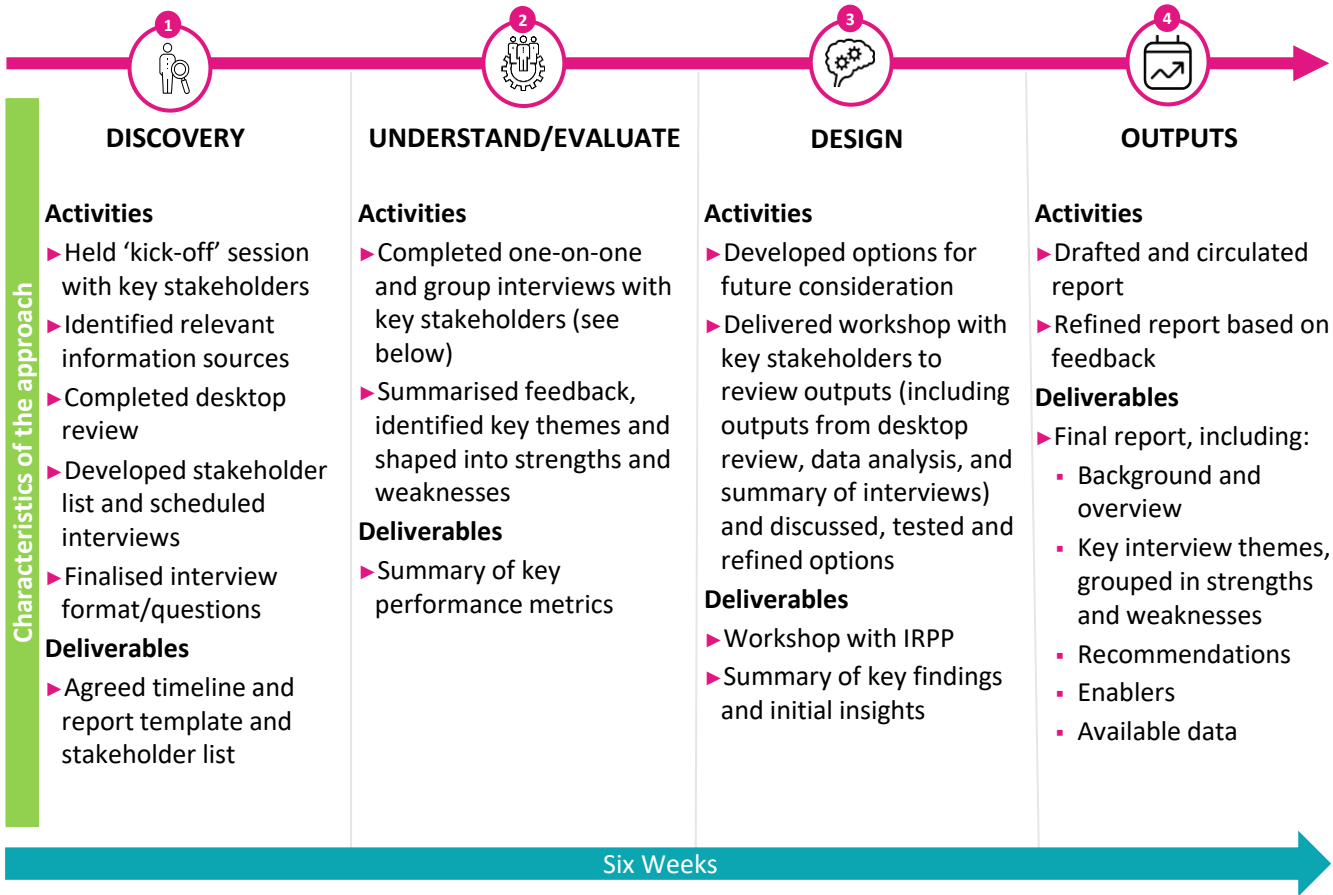
- 1. Promotion** of the CSI programme at a national, regional and local level through various media channels and local engagement forums.
- 2. CSG formation and onboarding** involves recruiting members, forming groups, and providing training and orientation.
- 3a. Application** spans the period required to completing the Community Sponsorship Application Form and Settlement Plan and all associated activities, with the exception of finding a house.
- 3b. Finding a house** involves identifying suitable housing accommodation available for two years for the sponsored refugee family within the local community. This is an activity within the application phase, but it has been included in an independent category because there was significant feedback related to this stage.
- 4. Matching** families in the Community Sponsorship Ireland programme involves the identification of refugee families suitable for CSI on selection missions and matching families to CSGs, based on housing, community resources, etc. Matching for CSI is ‘unnamed’; the CSG does not know which family they are sponsoring until their settlement plan is completed and a family matched to them.
- 5. Arrival and Integration** involves assisting sponsored refugee families in obtaining PPS numbers, providing comprehensive support for housing (HAP), language learning, education, and healthcare, and facilitating social integration through orientation, resettlement support, and community engagement.
- 6. Independence** involves empowering sponsored families to become self-reliant through the provision of essential life skills, employment support, training opportunities, and financial literacy guidance, and eventually transitioning families out of community sponsorship.

2. Approach



Approach

The focus of the review was to establish current strengths and weaknesses of the current programme to inform recommendations for the next programme’s procurement. To achieve this objective, a four-phase approach was deployed.



Interviewees

Interviews with key stakeholders in the CSI programme formed the primary input for this review. Interviews encompassed various key players, including RSOs, The Open Community, the UNHCR, and CSGs, with one CSG member sharing their first-hand refugee experience. Below is a list of the interviews conducted, categorised by organisation and location:


- RSO - Irish Red Cross – Area 4 and 6
- RSO - Irish Refugee Council – Area 1 and 7
- RSO - DORAS – Area 3
- RSO - NASC – Area 2 and 5
- NSO – The Open Community
- UNHCR
- Refugee Hub
- CSG Irish Red Cross, Co Dublin
- CSG Irish Refugee Council, Naas
- CSG Irish Refugee Council, Naas (former refugee)
- CSG DORAS, Cloughjordan, Tipperary
- CSG NASC, Cape Clear Island, Cork
- CSG NASC, Ovens, Cork



Themes Reviewed

The following themes were used as the basis for interviews. Together they encompass the key areas for examination as set out in the requirements document and the initial kick off meeting. During the engagement process with stakeholders, themes were explored along each aspect of the six stage journey mapped out in the introduction.

The table below summarises areas that were explored within each theme and the sources from which information was drawn.

Themes	Key Points	Sources of Information
 <div>Structure / Governance</div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effectiveness of NSO and RSOs in meeting targets Benefits of current or alternative structures e.g. regional, national or hybrid Relationships between organisations and partners Governance arrangements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desktop research Interviews Data: Number of families welcomed, by RSO and CSG
 <div>Community Support Groups</div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Barriers to formation Composition of the group How the application process could be improved Is support provided to CSGs adequate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desktop research Interviews Data: No. of CSGs, reasons for abandoning applications, effort to establish a CSG
 <div>Supporters</div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Possible new players (e.g., corporate) Alternative support models (e.g., international examples) Diversification Incentivisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desktop research Interviews
 <div>Visibility</div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public awareness Impact of the CSI brand Links with other refugee campaigns and place within overall ecosystem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desktop research Interviews
 <div>Future Focus</div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to grow Future humanitarian admissions (e.g. Afghans) Anticipated supply and demand Appropriateness of targets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desktop research Interviews

3. International examples



Community Sponsorship Initiatives Internationally

Below are summarised various international community sponsorship initiatives, including those in the UK, Canada, Australia, and Ireland. This comparative approach provides insights into the unique features and strengths of each programme.









Country	Refugee commitment	Structure	CSG makeup	Financial support available
Ireland	Proposed target of 100 refugee families over the next four years	Community Sponsorship Groups (CSGs) work with a Regional Support Organisation, in addition to resources available from the National Support Organisation, The Open Community	Minimum 5 to form a CSG Drawn from local communities, faith groups, businesses, neighbourhoods, charities	Currently CSG's in Ireland do not receive specific financial support or incentives from the Government
UK	No publicly announced target	Community sponsorship is overseen by the Home Office and administered by the charity "Reset".	5 recommended, but no minimum Must have a 'Lead Sponsor' who is a staff member of one of a number of charitable organisations	Integration loans, housing cost coverage, benefits/grants, and additional funding opportunities Amounts vary regionally
Canada	No publicly announced target	Constituent Groups (CGs) work with Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs) Many pathways for sponsorship - Community sponsorship groups in Canada can either privately sponsor refugees or participate in the Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR) programme.	Minimum 1 to form a CSG Private individuals, groups, or organisations.	Costs associated with resettlement, such as housing, healthcare, and basic needs. Grants or funding available with administrative expenses, language and skills training. Amounts vary regionally
Australia	Target of 1,500 refugees over the next four years	Programme overseen by Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia (CRSA), an independent charity. CRSA partners with the federal Government.	Minimum 5 to form a CSG	Funding for Initial Costs e.g. admin costs, housing setup, and essential supplies. Living Allowance & Access to Grants to help cover ongoing costs associated with the resettlement process. Amounts vary regionally

4. Current State












Strengths and Weaknesses

Key stakeholders involved in the CSI programme, including RSOs, CSGs, the UNHCR, and The Open Community (OC), provided valuable feedback and insights through interviews. This feedback has been analysed and categorised into strengths and weaknesses. Each of these strengths and weaknesses has been mapped to specific stages within the community sponsorship process and further classified by theme. The following section presents interview findings in detail:

Phase	Theme	Strength 	Weakness 
1. Promotion		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OC enables a coordinated, national approach to promotion Promotion has been a key focus of some RSOs with considerable energy invested in building CSGs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In some areas, unclear promotion roles for RSOs and OC has caused friction RSOs report it is difficult to find sufficient time to promote, particularly in regions where they are not based
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive CSG experiences can promote uptake through advocacy Naming drives awareness of sponsorship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A number of CSG members would be reluctant to recommend volunteering with CSI given the time commitments
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tapping into communities at a local level (e.g., church group, play group, university) most effectively drives promotion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Linking with supportive organisations is currently ad-hoc
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Radio campaigns have triggered interested parties to contact OC Use of state branding on promotional materials helps with traction and gives the scheme credibility Word-of-mouth is a key tool 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General lack of awareness of CSI in the community and Government Departments (e.g., Intreo offices) Programme is not as visible as other refugee streams Lack of visibility and clear strategy re promotion and relationship development has limited growth of the programme
2. Formation & Onboarding of CSG's		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CSGs report that early support from RSOs is very helpful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group formation is challenging when RSO does not have ties to a community (i.e., no CSGs formed in Area 7) OC reports warm leads they provide are not always actioned by RSOs Cairde Network has not delivered CSG groups to this point as hoped by IRPP
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CSGs have shown incredible commitment through formation and on-boarding Diverse CSG membership brings a range of expertise to the table, enhancing the programme's effectiveness – these are no 'one size fits all' for a group, but there are common factors that lead to success Strong CSG leadership linked to success CSGs have found strategically targeting specific skill/knowledge sets to be effective (e.g., post person, community garda, retired teacher) While the minimum CSG size is 5, generally CSGs form groups of 10+ people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group formation tends to be in response to areas where initial interest has been expressed, rather than strategically targeting areas with housing, previous sponsorship success, good community links, etc. This may account for a number of groups forming and then disbanding as the challenges of finding housing for example are encountered.

Phase	Theme	Strength	✓	Weakness	✗
2. Formation & Onboarding of CSG's		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where there are pre-existing relationships, e.g., church groups, university, etc, groups can require less support from RSOs to be established. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Development Companies were initially effective at forming CSGs, but didn't have specialist refugee knowledge and have dropped out of the programme 	
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial requirements for CSGs may need to be updated, e.g., CSGs report €10k not sufficient to cover housing, especially with HAP delays Inconsistent and non-targeted approaches to group formation may limit growth 	
3a. Application		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feedback on RSO and NSO training generally positive CSGs reported that support with the application and navigating local services was valuable. CSG members report The Open Community WhatsApp group has been extremely helpful; peer support group had mixed feedback, but has been improving as a result of OC oversight 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a disconnect regarding levels of support expected by CSGs from RSOs, particularly in the arrival and integration phase. Activities that the IRPP sees as core to the CSG (e.g., proactive management of social welfare applications) are perceived as overly burdensome by CSGs. CSGs report they are reliant on RSO support and ask for greater Government coordination. CSGs felt training did not cover some more difficult topics, like family violence, practical effects of trauma Lack of clarity on roles in training (RSO vs OC) has caused some friction CSGs generally consider IRPP as distant and do not fully understand their role Ireland approach quite 'bureaucratic' compared to some other countries, e.g. Canada, which has a high-trust model 	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feedback on settlement plans generally positive, particularly assigning of roles and list of requirements/activities to consider IRPP has worked to rationalise requirements of settlement plans to reduce burden on CSGs and speed up approvals 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CSGs report planning is difficult when they do not know the family make-up There seem to be inconsistencies between IRPP expectations and CSG understanding of requirements (e.g., one CSG reserved crèche places without knowing if there were young children in the family). It could not be determined if this had changed with new IRPP staff and an effort to simplify the settlement plan process. Data held by the OC indicates that 58 CSGs were formed and 34 families have arrived. This data is likely incomplete, but does suggest a high drop-out rate in the application phase. 	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cairde network has provided advice and advocacy for support groups Groups acquired financial support from local business 			

Phase	Theme	Strength✓	Weakness✗
3b. Finding a house			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HAP payment not attractive to landlords CSGs are concerned families will face homelessness if a rental arrangement breaks down and feel families should have a 'safety net' Some groups felt requirement for 2 year tenancy too restrictive and limited access to good accommodation available for shorter periods 'Own front door' requirement seen as too restrictive
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Although finding a house is extremely challenging, housing does generally arise from community connections (friend, church, post lady) Groups have developed creative approaches to housing (B&B, RSO as landlord, asking estate agent to join group) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CSGs need to pay rent to secure a house, often paying for months before a family arrives, which causes significant frustration and draining of resources
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Irish Red Cross is seeking housing commitment from Bishop's Conference, an example of an innovative approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no current housing strategy or approach to support effort to identify and secure housing
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CSGs report low levels of awareness of the programme from potential landlords CSI is not currently a priority in the Government's housing response
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing is a major barrier to scaling and is becoming increasingly challenging
4. Matching		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Matching has improved, and when matching is done correctly it makes it a much smoother experience for CSGs and families 'Naming' of Afghan refugees has generated interest and growth in the programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Layers between CSG and selection team may mean unique aspects of CSG may not be fully appreciated 'Naming' becomes easier when a programme scales – tricky when small numbers are easily identifiable Growth attributable to 'naming' of Afghan refugees has not flowed through to traditional resettlement based sponsorship
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Naming' beneficiaries fosters emotional connections between CSGs and the resettled families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CSGs felt contact with families was insufficient to enable planning There have been challenging situations for CSGs and families where robust selection criteria were not applied
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Naming' is a powerful motivator and can aid promotion and visibility of the programme 	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Naming' is known to drive scale Effective matching is critical to the success of the programme 	

Phase	Theme	Strength 	Weakness 
5. Arrival & Integration		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CSGs and RSOs say local relationships are key for family and CSG support and local connections (e.g. Intreo office) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delays in PPS number raised by all RSOs and CSGs as an issue CSGs and RSOs thought IRPP should be more proactive with addressing process and integration issues Lack of integration between Government Departments is a barrier
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CSGs find it extremely rewarding when their family arrives – ‘it was all worth it’ CSGs report significant community benefits of welcoming a refugee family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social welfare process is demoralising with delays, significant expense, time Can be challenging when expectations not met
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Links with public officials (local councillors, superintendent) extremely helpful in completing social welfare 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunities with Cairde Network and other organisations (e.g., GAA) not fully explored/realised (e.g., employment pathways)
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff in social welfare, schools, HSE, etc. have no knowledge of CSI so CSGs are required to do a lot of education
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CSGs identified this as the primary barrier to taking another family Difficult to scale when social welfare process requires significant RSO support
6. Independence		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CSGs report access to RSO support beyond the 18 months is valuable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing support of CSGs is limiting time RSOs are able to spend on promotion Plan to transition away from supports is often unclear
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When families are well selected, sponsorship leads to quicker independence CSGs shared examples of families developing their own community supports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CSGs keen to support their family, but not take another All CSGs said they would have reservations about recommending CSI volunteering to friends Some CSGs reported significant angst as their family faced homelessness at the end of 18 months
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community supporters have provided integration opportunities, e.g., GAA 	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thriving families increase visibility of CSI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families are understandably reluctant to share success stories, which could be powerful for promotion
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CSGs are keen to support family reunification and see this as key to their families achieving independence A number of CSG members offer informal mentoring and support to other CSGs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Selection is critical – some families face more challenges in achieving independence Many CSGs feel their capacity to volunteer is exhausted at this point No formal mechanism for ensuring ongoing engagement of CSG members, beyond group membership Limited refugee employment pathways, including for trained professionals (e.g., teacher)

5. Future State



A Focus on Programme Growth

Community Sponsorship Ireland provides a range of benefits to refugees, communities and the Government. While traditional resettlement and community sponsorship seek to achieve similar long-term outcomes, refugees who are settled through a sponsorship programme are known to integrate into their new culture more quickly.

The involvement of a broad range of community members in sponsorship, both through CSG membership and broader support, increases community awareness of refugee experiences. The contributions refugees can make to a community can create a more positive approach to refugees, which has a flow-on benefit to other resettlement programmes.

Community Sponsorship also increases capacity for refugee resettlement through volunteer hours, fundraising activities and the provision of accommodation that may not be available to the Government for traditional resettlement.

The IRPP has proposed a target of settling 25 refugee families in each of the next four years, selected from UNHCR selection missions. Achieving this target will require an increase in current performance of over 250%. While noting the unique challenges the programme faced in recent years, this target represents a goal of significant growth. Twenty-five families per year, if achieved, would make up a sizable proportion of the Government's likely refugee resettlement commitment and demonstrate the significant value of the programme.

Within this target there is a specific focus on the Syrian families in Jordan and Lebanon, currently accepted for community sponsorship, and who are waiting to come to Ireland. The IRPP is firmly committed to encouraging the creation of new CSGs to bring these families to new homes in Ireland.

In line with this growth target, the primary objective of the IRPP for Community Sponsorship Ireland over the next four years is to increase the number of CSGs.

Set out below are key opportunities identified through this review geared towards scaling the programme in the future. Specifically:

- 1) Focus on promotion – bringing clarity and energy to this key priority
- 2) Improve Efficiency and Effectiveness – clarifying roles, aligning skills with roles and learning from what works well and
- 3) Build the Ecosystem – bringing a strategic focus to building relationships

In addition, three enablers have been identified to support programme growth:

- 1) Structure,
- 2) Housing and
- 3) Improved data

Identifying the number of Community Sponsorship Groups required to achieve the proposed target

To meet the proposed target of 100 families resettled in the next four years, Community Sponsorship Ireland will need a steady pipeline of Community Sponsorship Groups. The IRPP recognises that not all potential groups will make it through each stage of the process and a number will drop out due to a range of reasons. According to The Open Community data, 58 CSGs have formed since the programme was launched and 34 have welcomed families. While seven groups are confirmed to have discontinued, the data is incomplete and it is expected that this number is higher. With an attrition rate of approximately 10-30%, the Community Sponsorship Ireland Programme is likely to require 110 to 130 groups applying to form in order to meet the proposed target.



Future Opportunities

To successfully scale Community Sponsorship Ireland, the following opportunities should be considered. These opportunities include prioritising promotional activities, improving system efficiency and effectiveness, and building the CSI ecosystem. These potential actions are focussed on enhancing awareness, enabling key stakeholders, and strengthening partnerships to effectively expand the reach and impact of the Community Sponsorship Ireland programme.

1. Focus on Promotion

1. National coordination, delivered locally

1a. A national promotion strategy, which delivers consistent messaging and strong branding across the programme, should be considered. This national message can be leveraged locally avoiding multiple independent regional strategies and effort.

1b. In addition, more national co-ordination in building working partnerships at a national level that can be leveraged locally is required. Examples set out below are potential partner groups who are national bodies with wider regional networks:

- GAA or other sporting bodies like IRFU, FAI etc.
- Irish Catholic Bishop's Conference
- Irish Property Owner's Association
- Garda National Community Policing Unit

National bodies will have established communication channels to their local members to ensure broad coverage of messaging. Local parties (e.g., priests, landlords, community garda, etc.) who want to get involved would be able to reach out to the support partners and when support partners or CSGs approach their local counterparts in these organisations, they are more likely to find a receptive audience.

N.B. The requirements set out above require a national body such as The Open Community or equivalent to take on these responsibilities to a greater degree than present.

2. Adopt more targeted approach to promotion

Ensure promotion is maximised through a targeted approach. Factors to consider include targeting:

- Particular demographics or economic groups
- Programme requirements such as housing (e.g., landlord campaign)
- Programme opportunities such as matched funding (e.g., corporate campaign) or CSG formation (e.g., diaspora communities)
- Priority regions (e.g., areas with historically high uptake, good support or available housing)
- Selection of opportunities that achieve wide reach (e.g., Ploughing Championships)

3. Provide state backing

Consistent use of the DCEDIY name and branding in promotional material strengthens legitimacy to the programme. In addition, establishing national-level relationships (point 1b), could enable better visibility of the State via the IRPP.

2. Improve Efficiency and Effectiveness

1. Better define partner roles and responsibilities

Regardless of the agreed operational and governance structures of CSI, clearly defined roles and responsibilities are critical to scaling the programme. Defined roles should reduce duplication of work and empower partners to specialise further in their areas of responsibility.

2. Align skillsets to role requirements

Better alignment of delivery staff (RSO or alternative) roles to the requirements of the contract. E.g. if one of the core requirements of a future provider is promotion, ensure there is a clear expectation that staff with promotion experience are appointed to roles. Other skills/knowledge that may be required include social welfare or training. The exact requirements of any role should be aligned to the expectations of that organisation, with clear role expectations tied to funding.

3. Share lessons learnt from CSGs

CSGs have built up a tremendous amount of expertise in approaches required for group development and finding housing. Through engagement with the peer support network, these lessons could be recorded and developed into guides to inform future CSGs. For example:

- Useful CSG skills and knowledge and where these might exist within communities (e.g., post worker, community garda, nurse)
- Creative approaches to housing (e.g., forging relationship with real estate agent, B&Bs, churches)

Shaping these recommendations into tools or guides (e.g., CSG membership 'template' with suggested skill and knowledge sets) can help CSGs form and work more effectively and efficiently.

4. Provide avenues to maintain skills

To ensure valuable skills are not lost to the CSI programme, a range of pathways could be developed for volunteers who have experience in community sponsorship, but are not willing or able to sponsor further families. These roles could include:

- CSG Mentor – providing mentorship to a designated CSG member(s)
- Ambassador – engaging in promotional activities

Formalising these pathways and agreeing expectations ensures volunteers are able to contribute their skills in ways they find manageable.

5. Focus on independence

Families achieving independence in Ireland is the ultimate goal of the community sponsorship process. While the development of long-term friendships between families and their sponsors is a natural and desirable outcome of the programme, programme resources (e.g., RSOs) must be redirected to new families to enable programme growth. To support CSGs to plan for the transition to independence, consideration should be given to the development of a robust planning process and guideline, which starts well in advance of transition and is supported by a documented plan that outlines the pathway to independence for both the family and CSG.

3. Build the Ecosystem

1. Develop strategic approach for Cairde Network

The Open Community has partnered with the Open Door Initiative to develop the Cairde Network. Developing a strategic approach to the Cairde Network – by identifying desired outcomes and developing targeted relationships with national organisations with a focus on specific tangible benefits could deliver greater value for CSI. Specifically, corporate partners could be leveraged to deliver:

- Matched funding (e.g., corporate partners)
- Promotional support – both through expertise developing campaigns and through providing access to their communities (e.g., corporate partners, GAA and other national sporting bodies)

- In-house development and support of CSGs (e.g., large corporations)
- Access to housing (e.g., Irish Catholic Bishop's Conference, Institute of Professional Auctioneers and Valuers)

2. Rebuild relationships with Local Development Companies (LDCs)

LDCs are embedded in communities and have demonstrated their ability to generate interest in refugee support in a way that is not possible by organisation's not local to an area. In addition, they have the understanding of and links into local services to support CSGs.

LDCs have been actively involved in the Ukrainian response and will have increased their ability to provide refugee support over the last two years.

Regardless of the future programme structure, the IRPP should consider reengaging with LDCs to drive growth of CSI.

3. Involve migrants from the diaspora community and refugees where possible

Lived experience is extremely powerful and valuable to the programme. CSGs could be encouraged to seek input from those with lived experience where possible. Not all individuals will have the time or resource to take on all aspects of the programme, but may act as a resource to the group and a support to families. In addition, people supported by community sponsorship will be able to share their experience through the proposed Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Framework, which is to commence in 2024. Families will be asked about their experience on regular intervals via the M&E Framework. A process could be developed to ensure that feedback is recorded, considered, and actioned where appropriate and that the families are aware of actions taken.

Additional Considerations

The following points were raised and discussed with the IRPP, but are unlikely to be reconciled in the 2024 procurement. They are recorded here for future consideration.

Consideration	Comments
Use of refugee 'naming' beyond the Afghan programme	All parties believe that naming would drive both interest and motivation for Community Sponsorship Groups. However, there is significant risk that initiatives such as the Afghan programme, where refugees are named, would overtake the core sponsorship programme and leave families identified by UNHCR refugees for CSI at a disadvantage. Naming is therefore at odds with the primary goal of the core programme. The IRPP is committed to supporting Afghan refugees through the CSI Programme and will continue to review its stance on naming when the programme is meeting its targets and the families who have been accepted for sponsorship have been housed in Ireland.
Making available an additional accommodation payment in line with the Ukrainian Accommodation Recognition Payment (ARP)	<p>Persons who provide accommodation to a person or people who arrived in Ireland under the EU Temporary Protection Directive are eligible for monthly payment of €800. N.B. this is in place of HAP payments. Individuals who avail of this accommodation arrangement are not eligible for HAP. While it is recognised that the level of HAP payment can make it challenging to find rent, provision of an additional accommodation payment could be construed as 'double-dipping'. In addition, a principle of community sponsorship is that families receive the same welfare supports available to the Irish public and providing a payment to volunteers would not be in keeping with the ethos of the programme.</p> <p>If a monthly payment were considered for CSI, it should be made clear to those expressing interest in providing accommodation that receipt of this payment would be in lieu of, and not in addition to, the payment of HAP. Further issues would need to be considered in relation to the means of making this payment available to CSGs (when would it be paid, to whom would payment be made, when would payment be discontinued etc.). This would have administrative, resource and governance implications.</p> <p>Consultations would need to take place with the Department of Social Protection and it is likely that any proposals in this area would need approval of Government before implementation to ensure no unintended consequences.</p>
Offering financial Support to Community Sponsorship Groups	<p>Review of equivalent schemes around the world demonstrate that a number of governments do provide financial support to CSG equivalents, for example through provision of housing costs, integration loans and administrative costs.</p> <p>Consideration could be made for similar support to CSGs in Ireland in specific areas of the scheme or a simple payment could be made to cover general costs. One suggestion made during the engagement was that the State could make a payment of €10,000 to cover housing and other sponsorship costs, in lieu of the requirement for CSGs to self-fund. Any costs arising in excess of this amount would have to be met by the CSG through fundraising as is provided for currently. The State could make these payments in two equal amounts at the point of approval of Settlement Plans, and again at the 12 month stage of the sponsorship period. Robust monitoring arrangements</p>

would need to be put in place in such an eventuality with additional responsibility placed on programme partners and CSGs in this regard.

It is noted that feedback from CSGs did not cite fundraising as one of the key constraints to their formation and success. Frustrations were more focussed on the time taken for HAP payments to come through, rapidly reducing financial support in the early months. As such any consideration of financial support would need to be clear as to how it would drive future growth.

Automatically providing PPS numbers to refugees on arrival

It is a requirement of the Government that persons applying for a PPS number do so in person at an Intreo office. Ukrainian refugees receive a PPS number on arrival as they are taken directly from the airport to an Intreo office. Currently, CSG members should be able to pre-book a PPS appointment for their family as soon as the arrival date is known. This expectation should be clearly communicated to CSGs to avoid delays.

Improvements to selection process

A robust selection process is key to successful integration. When selection has not been robust, families have required a very high degree of support from CSGs. The IRPP has responded to selection issues and now ensures:

- There are documented and agreed selection criteria
- A member of the IRPP support services (e.g., HSE) are present at selection missions
- Support services (e.g. HSE) attend selection missions to ensure suitable supports are available in Ireland

Feedback was that recent changes made by the IRPP were effective. The IRPP will continue to monitor selection and make further adjustments as required.

In addition to the above opportunities, which are focused on scaling Community Sponsorship Ireland, the following Enablers will ensure a strong platform for growth.

1. Structure

A key question posed by the IRPP has been, “What is the best structure to enable growth of the Community Sponsorship Programme?”. Based on outputs of the interviews, the following elements have been described as key to success:

- National coordination – a consistent approach in promotion, training, etc. is desirable and a national body that can develop relationships at scale
- Local relationships – feedback was consistent that local relationships were critical in the promotion and creation of groups and that CSGs valued local relationships and local knowledge (e.g., relationships with local Intreo office).

The following are suggested structures that incorporate the elements above:

1. Current model:

- Within this model, The Open Community is in a position to provide national coordination and this could be strengthened by more clearly defining the roles between the NSO and RSOs.
- The current model provides local relationships in some areas, however there is not a consistent local presence in all regions (e.g., Area 7).
- In mitigation of the gaps in regional provision it would be pragmatic for more focus to be placed in the regions where a local presence is possible to ensure the best Return on Investment (ROI).
- Naturally this does precipitate opportunities in other areas of the country not being fully exploited.

2. Regional/local partnership model:

- This model would maintain the existing NSO/RSO structure, with a requirement for a local partner in all areas. This would likely be achieved with the development of formal relationships formed between the RSOs and local groups such as the LDCs.
- For example, an RSO could partner with an LDC in Sligo, with the RSO providing specialist expertise and the local partner leveraging local relationships and knowledge.
- Such relationships may not be required in all areas, but would be a requirement in areas where the RSO was ‘gapped’ in local provision.
- This model achieves the key principles above, however it could lead to increased inconsistency. In this model, it would be critical to ensure the roles of each party were clearly defined and that each party had the right skills to deliver on expectations.

3. National model with local partners:

- This model would envisage the further development of the NSO into the primary organisation responsible for promotional strategy, training development and delivery and specialised support. In addition, they would be the central contact point for interested volunteers.
- It is likely such an organisation would also employ regional leads, who would establish and manage relationships with local partners as set out in model 2.
- Local partners, which could include LDCs or other local organisations, would be responsible for delivering local promotion plans, facilitating group development, supporting CSGs and building wider local relationships.
- This model would provide strong central control and increase consistency and efficiency, although it may reduce some flexibility in service provision.

These options are not exhaustive. It is suggested that the IRPP consider the above options and discuss with partners to determine the preferred future option.

2. Housing

Housing is a key barrier with CSGs usually taking more than six months to identify a suitable property with reports of this taking up to three years.

CSGs reported that finding accommodation was a significant constraint for groups. Housing is an issue nationally with pressures on housing increasing rather than improving.

The development of a community sponsorship housing strategy, incorporating the points below, could provide some degree of remediation to the housing challenge:

- Promotion targeted at identifying housing options, including reaching landlords and real-estate agencies
- Capturing 'lessons learnt' from CSGs to identify novel approaches to finding accommodation
- Consideration of broadening the 'own front door' requirement to include, for example, accommodation above a shop
- Investigating what organisations may have access to housing (e.g., religious groups, HSE, etc.) and determining if CSGs could access this housing
- Apply the national coordination / local delivery model by developing national relationships and asking organisations to communicate housing requirements to their memberships

3. Robust data

Data is currently inconsistent and unreliable. There is not agreement on data for key metrics, like the numbers of CSGs formed and families welcomed. A Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Framework is being developed to roll out in 2024, which is a positive development. This Framework will not only capture core KPIs, but also begin to evaluate the family's experience. To support the M&E Framework, the IRPP, in collaboration with its partners, could develop:

- Targets across all metrics, which can be used to manage performance
- Clear partner reporting requirements, documented and tied to funding
- A robust and consistent shared dataset, accessible by national and local partners
- Reporting that captures the refugee and CSG experience through quantitative and qualitative data
- A robust process for ensuring feedback is recorded, reviewed, actioned where appropriate, and that feedback providers are informed of outcome

6. Appendix



Description	Data (Source)	Further information
The number of CSGs that have been formed	58 (OC)	Tally of CSGs listed on OC database
The number of families welcomed by CSGs	34 (OC)	'Family Arrived' in OC database. OC flagged this data may be incomplete
CSGs which started the process but dropped out and why	7 (OC)	Reasons include: Helping Ukrainians instead, situational circumstances of members, lead member dropped out, problems securing accommodation. It is likely this data is incomplete as there is an unexplained gap between CSGs formed and families welcomed
Information on "Expressions of Interest" that do not result in the formation of a CSG.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peoples understanding of the commitment e.g. 3 year minimum timeframe (RSO x 2) • Hurdles of finding accommodation (RSO x 2) • Not wanting to take the lead to become primary sponsor (RSO x 2) • Involved in other local volunteer work that does not involve these commitments (RSO x 2) • Don't have the skill set or willingness to reach out to their network and mobilise a group. They are looking to join a group and be told what to do (RSO x 2) 	
Information on the typical amount of people or groups that are approached before a CSG is formed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some groups come ready-formed e.g. recent named Afghan CSGs (RSO x 2) • Other CSGs need to be supplemented so previous or ongoing expressions of interest with be directed by us to a burgeoning group who are seeking members (RSO x 2) • The CSG themselves may put a call out e.g. on social media for new members (RSO x 2) 	Groups needed a lot of 'hand holding' to be formed

CSGs involved in the interview process were asked to provide indicative timeframes for each of the activities listed below. Three CSGs responded and their responses are colour-coded below.

CSG 1

CSG 2

CSG 3

Description	Data (Source)	Further information
Between the initial expression of interest to the CSG being formed (months)	3 months 8 months 3-4 months	Depends on the motivation of the CSG. Can vary from a few weeks to months. If a leader expresses interest, they can form a group in a matter of days. Individuals, up to 10 months Between initial contact with Irish Red Cross and first regular meetings
Between the formation of a CSG and their welcoming of a family (months)	6 + months 12 months 2 years	As little as 3 months, up to 3 years (due to housing not being available or a really experienced and motivated leader pushing it through) From starting meetings to arrival of family Covid Intervened
Filling in forms and applications (approximate individual maximum, e.g., the member responsible for social welfare spent up to 6 hours per week on forms and applications at the busiest period)	10-14 hours per week at busiest time, 4 hours per week currently 8 hours per week at busiest time 6-8 hours per week at busiest time	Historically, there were issues and delays. These processes have greatly improved Making phone calls, form filling & presenting in person
Finding accommodation (months and average hours per week spent by the group actively looking)	10 hours per week 10 hours per week over 6 months 3-4 hours per week over 18 months	Can take up to 3 years



Description	Data (Source)	Further information
Fundraising (rough estimate of group's collective hours)	80 hours per week over 3 months (960 hours total) 100 hours total 100 hours total	2-6 months average Raising funds though initially daunting for CSGs has never been an impediment to welcoming a family
Waiting on response of forms (HAP, GNIB, etc.) (weeks)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Immigration - 2 weeks• Social welfare – 2 weeks• PPSN – 2-8 weeks• Medical card – 4-6 weeks• Housing list – 1 month• HAP – 4-5 weeks• Bank account – 1 month • HAP – 16 weeks• GNIB – 4 weeks	<p>All of these differ based on established connections e.g. with social welfare office, county councillor, chief superintendent, Intreo office to speed up the process</p> <p>The issue was not waiting for docs, but getting appointments. Long waiting times of 6 weeks+ At the time getting GNIB appointment was a nightmare. The online system for getting appointments wasn't fit for purpose. This might have changed</p>

