

Community Sponsorship Ireland | Short Introduction

What is Community Sponsorship?

Community sponsorship is a new way to welcome refugees to Ireland; it is a unique collaboration between Government, UNHCR (the UN Refugee Agency), NGOs and civil society. Unlike Ireland's existing refugee resettlement programme, where the State provides integration services directly, Community sponsorship empowers members of the public who wish to become the face of welcome in their local community and to assume responsibility for providing a range of integration supports to a refugee family. This model of resettlement was pioneered in Canada in 1979 and has seen hugely positive outcomes since then, transforming the lives of both refugees and volunteers.

Community sponsorship is a big commitment, but it is a hugely rewarding one. To participate, like-minded members of the public must come together to form a group of five or more, partner with a Regional Support Organisation (RSO) who will provide training, advice and support, and lodge an application with the Department of Justice and Equality. Sponsors are asked to commit to providing financial and non-financial supports to a resettled family for eighteen months; and to source suitable housing for two years. Sponsorship groups also play a key role in introducing resettled families to State services, local amenities, educational and language resources and social and professional networks in the new community in which they have settled.

What is resettlement?

Resettlement is the process through which refugees who are outside their home country are facilitated to move to another country, such as Ireland, where they are granted long term residency. In order to be eligible for resettlement, refugees must be unable to return safely to their home country and either be at risk or have no prospects of integrating in the country where they are currently living. As the number of resettlement places needed far surpasses the number available, UNHCR prioritises cases for resettlement on the basis of need and vulnerability.

Who can be resettled to Ireland via Community Sponsorship Ireland?

The referral of refugees to Community Sponsorship Ireland will be made under existing procedures already in place for the government-managed resettlement programme.

Under these procedures, refugees must first be registered with UNHCR and then identified by them as refugees in need of resettlement. They may then be referred to the Irish Government who will interview them and take a final decision on whether or not a refugee is accepted on resettlement. Before making this decision, each candidate is the subject of a Garda security assessment, interview, and the checking of fingerprints against national and international databases.

Individuals selected for the Community Sponsorship Programme will also be asked if they agree to participate in the programme and to provide written consent to share basic information with sponsors. Pre-departure health screening is also carried out. At present, all refugees coming to Ireland under the resettlement programme have been living in either Lebanon or Jordan, the vast majority of whom are Syrian nationals. This may be subject to change in the future by agreement between UNHCR and the government.

Why should I become a sponsor?

Community-based sponsorship programs can build powerful bonds between sponsors and refugees; strengthen host communities; and foster positive attitudes towards refugees and resettlement. Sponsors often say it is the most meaningful thing they have ever done. Community Sponsorship Ireland is

a practical way for communities to play a role in responding to the global refugee crisis; it sends a powerful message that refugees are welcome here.

Who can form a Community Sponsorship Group?

Community Sponsorship is delivered by a core group of at least five people within a given community, otherwise known as a Community Sponsorship Group. Once formed, the Community Sponsorship Group will need to partner with a Regional Support Organisation (RSO) who will work with them to prepare and complete application forms, deliver training and guide them through the process one step at a time. Community Sponsorship Groups must meet the following criteria:

- ✓ All members of the group must be locally resident and resident in Ireland
- ✓ All members of the group must be over eighteen
- ✓ The group must align with a Regional Support Organisation (RSO)
- ✓ The group must complete and submit a detailed application form to the Department of Justice and Equality for approval; this includes a sponsorship undertaking whereby all members of the group commit to meet the obligations of the programme.

Useful skills and attributes for group members include:

- ✓ Finance – budgeting, accounting, etc.
- ✓ Experience with Child Safeguarding – e.g. Mandated Persons, Designated Liaison Persons
- ✓ Ability to act as, or access to, interpreters (e.g. Arabic to English)
- ✓ English language e.g. ESOL qualifications
- ✓ Experience as a health practitioner
- ✓ Local authority experience and/or contacts
- ✓ Links to organisations or groups specialising in supporting refugees or asylum seekers
- ✓ Ability to find employment or training opportunities
- ✓ Access to places of worship, cultural centres, refugee support groups

What is required of Community Sponsorship Groups to prepare for the arrival of refugees?

In advance of the family's arrival, Community Sponsorship Groups are asked to plan in detail for the provision of all necessary supports and to demonstrate their preparations through the submission of a settlement plan. RSOs can help with this and provide initial feedback once an initial draft is complete. In addition:

- ✓ All members must attend mandatory training
- ✓ All members must undergo Garda vetting
- ✓ The group must fundraise the required amount
- ✓ The group must source accommodation suitable for a family for 24 months
- ✓ All members must complete Tusla's *Introduction to Children First* e-learning module on Child Safeguarding; and all other mandated safeguarding training
- ✓ The group must draft a comprehensive Safeguarding Statement with support from the Designated Liaison Person in their Regional Support Organisation

I'd like to get involved. What should I do next?

If you're interested in getting involved in community sponsorship, you can contact your nearest Regional Support Organisation (RSO). For more information, application forms and a full list of RSOs, please visit the [integration.ie](https://www.integration.ie).