

Summary: ‘Outsourcing Hospitality: Power, Responsibility, and Inequality in Community Sponsorship’

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Outsourcing Hospitality: Power, Responsibility, and Inequality in Community Sponsorship

Executive Summary

- Under Community Sponsorship (CS) programmes, the responsibility for supporting resettled refugees, often including sourcing housing, lies with private actors.
- This article draws on data from a small-scale study in Ireland. Focus groups and interviews were conducted with members of sponsor groups, sponsored refugees, and people in professional roles connected to the programme.
- The authors argue that outsourcing responsibility for housing to sponsors might reinforce dependency on groups and place refugees in unequal and exploitative relationships with private landlords.
- The authors propose that the state should be responsible for sourcing housing in CS programmes, not sponsors.

Introduction

- This article aims to investigate the power and inequality dynamics in resettlement under Community Sponsorship (CS) and their implications on long-term outcomes for sponsored refugees.
- Scholarship on CS has grown significantly in the past decade, reflecting the presence of CS programmes in an increasing number of countries.
- The authors argue that the outsourcing of the responsibility for housing to CS groups creates a double disadvantage, by reinforcing power imbalances between sponsored people and both their sponsors and private landlords.

The Policy Context of Resettlement Under Community Sponsorship in Ireland

- Community Sponsorship Ireland (CSI) was established in 2018.
- Refugees admitted under CSI are selected through the same UNHCR process as those admitted under the Local Authority Resettlement Programme (LARP).
- By the end of 2023, 34 families had been resettled under CSI. At that time, there were plans to resettle 25 families per year from 2024 to 2027.
- The CSI is directed and monitored by a department of the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP). There is a National Support Organization for CSI, *The Open Community*, as well as four Regional Support Organizations, responsible for overseeing, training, and supporting sponsor groups.
- Sponsor groups must include at least five people. They must:
 - Pledge to provide support for eighteen months after the sponsored refugees arrive in Ireland.
 - Raise €10,000.
 - Source housing, usually within the Private Rental Sector (PRS), where the sponsored refugees can live for a minimum of two years.
- **Research has shown that housing is one of the main difficulties sponsors face.**

- Housing issues in Ireland are severe, with lengthy waitlists for social housing, demand in the PRS exceeding supply, and rents increasing by 100% from 2010 to 2023.
- **Issues of supply and affordability in the housing sector disproportionately affect migrants.**
- Sponsored refugees are eligible for state benefits, including Housing Assistance Payment (HAP), but **there are major inequalities between sponsored refugees receiving HAP and refugees hosted by local authorities.**
- HAP recipients...
 - Do not receive the same security of housing.
 - Can apply to transfer to local authority housing, but there is no publicly available information on this transfer list.
 - Pay the local authority the equivalent of what a local authority tenant would pay, which the government then pays to the landlords. Rents higher than the maximum can be authorised, but then tenants must pay their landlords the difference.
- Since CSI was introduced, there has been a surge in applicants seeking protection in Ireland, a large part of whom are from Ukraine.
 - With 109,566 arrivals from Ukraine between February 2022 and September 2024, accommodations were overwhelmed. Payment schemes to private individuals hosting Ukrainians were introduced, and makeshift accommodations were constructed, but many applicants were left without any accommodation.
- Rising anti-refugee activity has manifested in arson attacks against accommodation centres for international protection activists. **The authors call for better government action in combating the far-right wave and simultaneously addressing the housing crisis.**

Community Sponsorship through the Lenses of Hospitality and Humanitarian Reason

- The authors highlight Jacques Derrida's views:
 - Hospitality can affirm dominion. By accepting or refusing guests, the host takes an implicit position of ownership over the guests.
 - Hospitality is automatically inhospitable as hospitability cannot exist without control.
 - Even welcoming approaches to international protection position guests as "others."
- Different views on whether or not the "hospitality" that community sponsorship offers can be considered an example of unconditional hospitality are presented:
 - Krivenko, based on experience with the Canadian Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) programme, views sponsorship as a way of expanding sovereignty, while countering state sovereignty, and thus, opening doors for unconditional hospitality.
 - The authors believe a blind spot in Krivenko's paper is how power dynamics manifest within sponsorship arrangements.
 - Macklin, also based on experience with the Canadian PSR scheme, argues that sponsorship affirms, not challenges, the authority of the state, as the state has the power to accept or refuse individuals.
- Humanitarianism is often a logic applied to resettlement. According to Fassin, humanitarianism prioritises "affect" over analysis, removing structural contexts of suffering. Suffering being a prerequisite for assistance creates eligibility limits and increases the

likelihood that recipients may be expected to demonstrate deservingness and display gratitude.

- Reyes-Soto makes a distinction between “affective solidarity,” associated with humanitarianism and “decolonial solidarity,” which actively challenges structural inequalities.
- According to the authors, CS literature shows risks of paternalism and inappropriate expectations and assumptions on the part of sponsors.
- The authors argue that **sponsorship must be viewed in the broader context of power.**

Methods

- This paper draws on a small-scale qualitative study aimed at collecting perspectives on feedback mechanisms, monitoring, research, and consultation in CS.
- The research team involved the researchers who had been resettled through CSI. Their lived experience helped guide discussions and foster a sense of safety.
- Focus groups and interviews were conducted between June 2021 and May 2022 on Zoom.
- Recruitment was challenging due to the small scale of the programme, the quickly evolving international context, and the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Data from four people resettled under the programme (two male, two female, all Syrian nationals), five sponsors (all female), and five support personnel were used.
- Data analysis, assisted by NVivo12, drew on Braun and Clarke’s framework for thematic analysis. All transcripts were coded.
- A focus group was held to review findings with certain stakeholders. Data from this group was incorporated.

Analysis and Discussion

“...it’s there to be a family”

- Some sponsors and sponsored persons used the term “family” to describe their relationship.
- Sponsors were making conscious efforts to respect the dignity of resettled persons.
- Volunteers displayed some recognition of the inherent power imbalances.
- Support personnel were aware of difficulties associated with the altruistic nature of sponsorship, including “the sense of ownership,” the blurry line between concern and control, expectations of gratitude, and feelings of resentment. These were not discussed as frequent occurrences, but rather as risks.
- No refugees mentioned controlling or paternalistic behaviour. Two discussed expectations not being met.

“doing the job of the government”

- Sponsored persons in Ireland have refugee status, so they are entitled to the same rights as citizens. Access to these rights can be mediated by sponsors as their main points of contact.
- Sponsors’ tasks go beyond those of employees of LARP. They fundraise, source housing, befriend, and assist the refugees.
- The biggest stressor sponsors faced was issues with HAP.

- **Volunteer groups must show proof of sourced housing to host refugees, but an application for HAP can not be made until the sponsored person(s) arrive in Ireland, meaning that groups may pay rent out of pocket.**
- A support professional said this responsibility could lead to feelings of resentment.
- Points were raised surrounding access to interpretation, the increased comfort of raising sensitive issues to members of a similar background, and the importance of accessibility of information on the rights and entitlements of sponsored persons. Some participants also desired stronger oversight of volunteer groups.
- At the time of data collection, concern and complaint mechanisms were being formalised (with a process of raising issues to a designated member of the sponsor group, then escalated to RSO and IRPP if needed). There were no plans for an independent mechanism, and mixed views of its necessity.
- A peer support network created by sponsors provided a forum for mutual support, but no such network was in place for sponsored refugees.
- **While sponsors are given the responsibilities of the host state, they do not have the same resources, expertise, authority, or accountability mechanisms.**

“...it is an inequality”

- Canadian and UK literature shows that sponsors are disproportionately white, middle-class, older females, while sponsored persons often experience challenges related to refugee status, racialization, and economic status.
- A support professional flagged preconceptions about Muslim women among sponsors as a concern. Two female sponsored refugees highlighted fears of barriers to employment due to practicing hijab. One felt that the sponsors focused their support to encourage entering the labour market on the male ‘breadwinner,’ neglecting her aspirations.
- How class position is shaped by refugee status lacks sufficient attention in CS literature.
- Barriers to economic self-sufficiency for resettled persons include a lack of recognition of experience and credentials and a lack of access to higher education in Ireland (as three years’ residency is required for free tuition).

“will I spend my life paying more than what I can afford?”

- **People resettled under CSI report housing as the biggest inequality issue they face.** Therefore, the authors believe any discussion of the relationship between CS and social inequalities must centre housing.
- Concerns regarding the decision-making powers of sponsors on sourcing housing—which can have long-term impacts as the quality, location, and cost of housing can significantly impact quality of life and access to services—were mentioned.
- The outsourcing of finding housing places the sponsored in an unequal relationship with private landlords, who control the property, and, implicitly, their conduct and finances.
- Sponsored people found it unjust that peers resettled through LARP were accommodated in local authority housing, so had security of tenure and rent certainty.
- **Sponsored people were not informed about CSI’s approach to housing before arrival.**
- At the time of data collection, the average monthly rent in Ireland for new tenancies was €1460, far exceeding the limits set for HAP. One participant reported paying over €100

every week directly to their landlord, paying thousands more than those in local authority housing.

- Volunteer groups may not have the resources to source alternatives when original accommodations do not satisfy needs.
- As housing is only guaranteed for two years, refugees report not feeling “at home.” A support personnel described emerging concerns about long-term prospects.

Concluding Reflections

- In this paper, the interactions between relations within the Irish CS programme and broader structural inequities are explored.
- The authors agree with Derrida’s argument that the relations built by “hospitality” are inherently unequal.
- The authors believe outsourcing responsibility to private actors can jeopardise access to rights.
- The authors argue that placing the responsibility for housing on volunteers is especially problematic as it deepens dependency on sponsors and creates power imbalances between those sponsored and their landlords.
- Recommendations include:
 - Ensuring everyone admitted into the programme is informed about their rights and available services.
 - Removing the responsibility of sourcing housing from groups and placing it on the state, to reverse the increasing commodification of housing, and improve the socio-economic prospects of sponsored people.