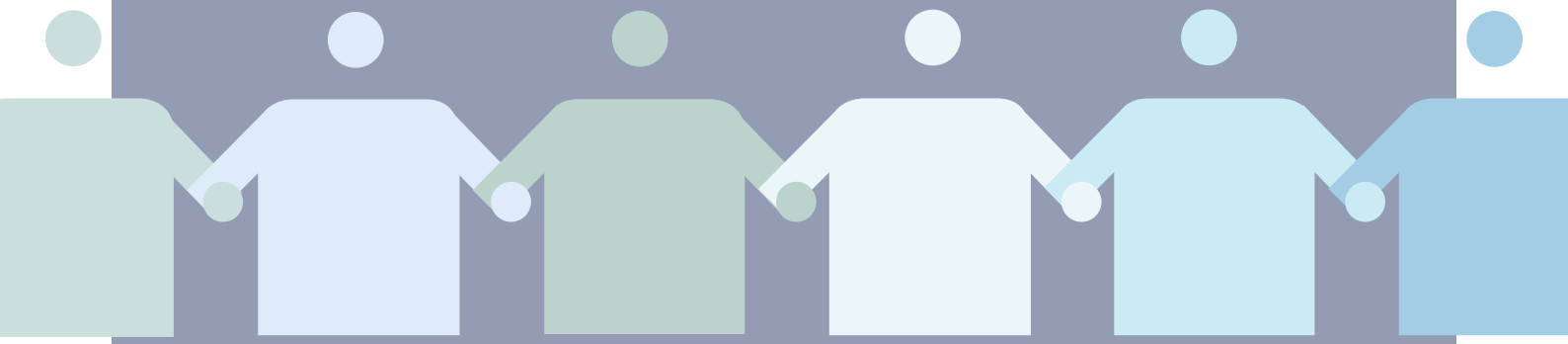
Equality Matters in Community Sponsorship

Considerations for obtaining feedback from stakeholders



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The opinions set out in this report are those of the authors.

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Foreword

In 2018 Nasc supported the very first official Community Sponsorship group in Dunshaughlin, Co Meath to welcome a Syrian refugee family to their community. Interviewed by Philip Bromwell for RTE in March 2019, Angham Younes described her experience of her new life in Ireland: “The love and the support of the community made us feel at home from the very beginning. We are never homesick. The town is amazing. It’s so small and cosy. It’s easy to make friends.”

This was the culmination of several years of work with the Irish Refugee Protection Programme to prove that a Community Sponsorship programme could, and would, work in Ireland. We believe that there is a strong willingness amongst communities in Ireland to welcome refugees and, that the power of that welcome can be transformational for both the refugee and the community in which they come to live.

This research foregrounds the experience of those who have been part of Community Sponsorship, either as a refugee or as a member of a community sponsorship group. Nasc believes that the voices of refugees should be at the centre of programmes concerning their integration and protection, and so when Nasc were approached by Dr Karen Smith about supporting this research, we were delighted to accept. It is heartening to see Angham and Zuhair who were the pioneers of the Community Sponsorship programme in 2018 be part of the research and conduct the focus groups. The research is far richer for their participation and they were able to provide a unique window into the experience of refugees who are part of our Community Sponsorship Programme.

In the years since 2018, we have been working closely with our fellow Regional Support Organisations (the Irish Refugee Council, Doras and the Irish Red Cross), the National Support Organisation (The Open Community) and the Irish Refugee Protection Programme to develop structures for the Community Sponsorship Programme. However the landscape in which Community Sponsorship operates has shifted dramatically with the State’s and the Irish community’s responses to the Afghan humanitarian crisis and to the war in Ukraine. Thousands of families across Ireland are now hosting refugees in their homes outside of the Community Sponsorship programme. This provides an opportune moment to reflect on the formality of the programme and the need to balance the informality inherent in a community sponsorship group of neighbours and friends coming together with oversight and accountability. This report, although limited to the Community Sponsorship Programme, raises important considerations particularly

in respect of equality issues and unequal power dynamics that are very relevant beyond the formal Community Sponsorship Programme.

The discussions on the need for information resources on rights and entitlements in their own language to be available to refugees was particularly fruitful. One of the Community Sponsorship Group volunteers noted how the lack of information reduced the autonomy of the refugees entering the Community Sponsorship programme.

“Like these are all adults who have lived full lives and have done very well to get this far. They don’t need us to mind them but that’s what’s happening because they haven’t got that clarity”.

The response to the Ukraine crisis provides an example of good practice of ensuring that information and forms were available in Ukrainian and Russian languages very shortly after arrivals in large numbers of beneficiaries of temporary protection. The Government webpage Ireland’s response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, provided a very useful overview of rights and entitlements for beneficiaries of temporary protection moving to Ireland at a time when information was changing rapidly. The availability of a central and official source of information was empowering for those fleeing Ukraine as well as the communities and groups in Ireland rapidly coming together to provide supports. A similar resource for arrivals through the Community Sponsorship Programme available in several languages would be helpful.

We’d hope that this report and the findings will inform and strengthen the Community Sponsorship programme and provide the platform for a reflective conversation on how we meet the needs of all Community Sponsorship stakeholders going forward.

Fiona Hurley, CEO Nasc, December 2022

Acknowledgements

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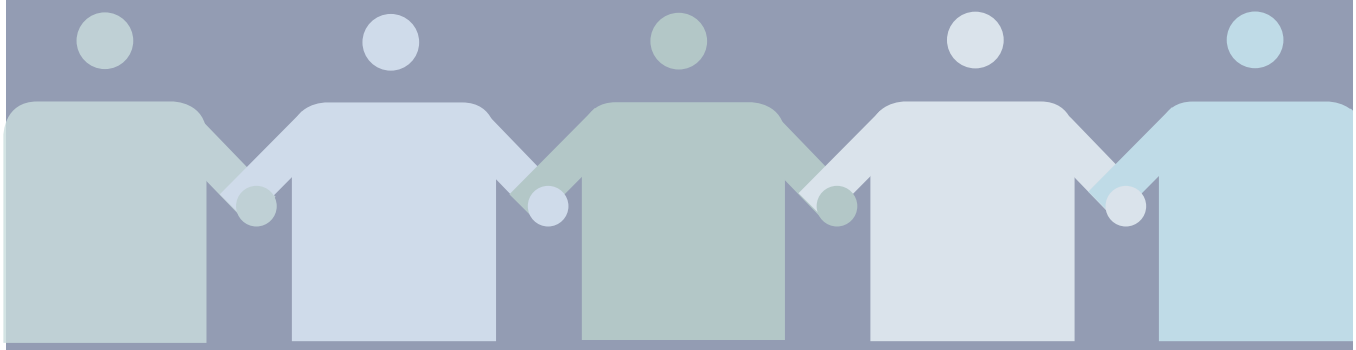
Glossary of Acronyms

AMIF	European Union Asylum, Migration and Integration fund
BVOR	Blended Visa Office Referral Sponsorship scheme (Canada)
CSI	Community Sponsorship Ireland
CRRF	Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework
CSP	Community / Private Sponsorship
DCEDIY	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
DP	Direct Provision
EROC	Emergency Reception and Orientation Centre
ETB	Educational Training Board
GAR	Government-assisted resettlement (Canada)
HAP	Housing Assistance Payment
HSE	Health Service Executive
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRPP	Irish Refugee Protection Programme
NGOs	Non-governmental organization
NSO	National support organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation
PSRP	Private Sponsorship of Refugees Programme (Canada)
RSOs	Regional support organisations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Executive Summary



Equality Matters in Community Sponsorship

CONSIDERATIONS FOR OBTAINING FEEDBACK FROM STAKEHOLDERS

This report addresses the various forms of equality issues to be taken into account in relation to resettlement under Community Sponsorship and provides some lessons and guidance on mechanisms through which these issues can be identified and addressed, with a particular focus on attending to the experiences and views of resettled persons.

The research study on which this report is based was a small-scale qualitative study. In total 20 people participated in the research, this included 6 persons admitted to Ireland under the Community Sponsorship programme, 5 members of volunteer Community Sponsorship groups (CSGs) and 8 persons employed in professional roles supporting the Community Sponsorship programme in Ireland.

The approach to conceptualising equality issues in the study was informed by the 'equality of condition' framework developed within the Equality Studies Centre in University College Dublin (Baker et al, 2009) and by analysis of the relevant literature on resettlement (including under community or private sponsorship) for international protection purposes. This analysis suggests that there are a number of different equality issues to be taken into consideration in relation to resettlement under Community Sponsorship. These include

- **Inequality on the basis of refugee/international protection/migration status**
- **Inequality arising from the intersection of refugee/international protection status with other equality grounds**
- **Programmatic inequality arising from differences in rights and entitlements between and within programmes of settlement support for persons with refugee/international protection status.**
- **Given that dispersal is a feature of resettlement under Community Sponsorship and of the mainstream resettlement programme, issues of spatial inequality are likely to arise.**

Findings

A knowledge gap was identified on the part of service-providers on whether persons resettled under Community Sponsorship in Ireland were experiencing racialised discrimination or harassment. Service providers reported incidences of racist attitudes in communities prior to the arrival of resettled persons. Some participants noted the complexities involved in identifying and challenging racism especially structural and 'subtle' forms. Expectations of gratitude/resentment of requests on part of those providing support could reflect 'subtle'

racism. Ensuring that resettled persons were informed of their rights and aware of how to report racist incidents was raised as an important issue. Participants identified various examples of unequal treatment of persons with refugee status, including challenges in opening bank accounts and difficulty obtaining driver's licenses. Residency requirements in respect of third level fees and recognition of prior qualifications were also raised as equality issues affecting persons with refugee status. It was noted that requests for supporting documentation for benefits such as Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) sometimes lacked sensitivity to the particular circumstances of persons of international protection background.

Participants identified particular challenges due to the intersection of refugee status, gender and religion – concerns were identified in relation to women who practice hijab in accessing employment. There was concern that members of CSGs might have preconceived ideas about women of Muslim faith – this was evidenced to a certain extent in findings from the focus group with CSG members

Participants of refugee background raised concerns about disparities between the mainstream resettlement programme and resettlement under Community Sponsorship. There was a lot of concern about housing precarity, and higher costs associated with Community Sponsorship in comparison to the housing model of the mainstream resettlement programme.

Disparities in relation to the extent and quality of support received by CSGS were evident in findings from focus groups with persons resettled under CSI. Geographical disparities were identified in how public and social services were organised and administered around the country and in relation to physical access to RSOs.

Within the existing literature on Community Sponsorship there is evidence of issues that can arise due to the unequal relationship between sponsor groups and the resettled persons supported. Participants professionally employed in support roles identified possible risks including risks of controlling or judgemental behaviour, as well as expectations of gratitude associated with risks of resentment or defensiveness in response to requests or raising of concerns by resettled persons.

CSG members raised concerns about the lack of oversight of work of CSGs in supporting resettled persons. Participants emphasised the importance of ensuring that resettled persons were fully informed of their rights and entitlements and were not entirely dependent on the sponsorship group for this information

Formalisation of procedures for making complaints and raising concerns was in train when data collection for the study was being conducted. There was general agreement on the need for a formal mechanism for resettled persons to make complaints, but mixed views

on whether this should be an independent mechanism. A need for clarity on the role and responsibilities of RSOs in managing issues which might arise between CSGs, and resettled persons was identified. In focus groups with resettled persons a preference for raising issues on a confidential basis – so as to avoid offending groups members was expressed.

Among participants employed in support or policy roles there was a consensus around the value of monitoring and evaluation for the purposes of accountability and policy learning. There was a strong appetite for evidence to inform programme review and development, in particular on the quality of support to CSGs from RSOs and the quality of support from CSGs to resettled persons. The value of longitudinal research was emphasised by some participants.

The importance of obtaining feedback from resettled persons on their views and experiences of the programme was emphasised by participants. There were concerns about practical and ethical barriers to obtaining data in particular around power imbalances and reticence about causing upset or offence.

Resettled persons who took part expressed willingness to share views and experiences with the aim of improving the programme/correcting mistakes. This underlines the importance of "closing the feedback loop", highlighted by some participants in professional roles.

The importance of adopting a holistic approach to measuring integration was emphasised in addition to attending to the subjective views of resettled persons on what constitutes successful integration. Given the small scale of the programme, particular challenges were identified in capturing the experiences and views of those disadvantaged on equality grounds

There was little by way of formal mechanisms for persons resettled under Community Sponsorship or members of CSGs to input views into policy development at the time data was collected. The findings point to the possible danger that without formal and transparent mechanisms for consultation only certain voices are heard and influence may be exerted in ways which are opaque and not necessarily aligned with strategic policy goals or conducive to empowerment of resettled persons.

There was some support for the idea of a peer network for resettled persons. The potential value included peer support, representation and advocacy but also as a channel for direct communication and support to resettled persons from RSOs (e.g. workshops on rights). There was also discussion of potential challenges, in particular the risk of 'elite capture' and related to this the challenges associated with meaningful inclusion of persons disadvantaged on equality grounds.

Recommendations

Enhancing rights

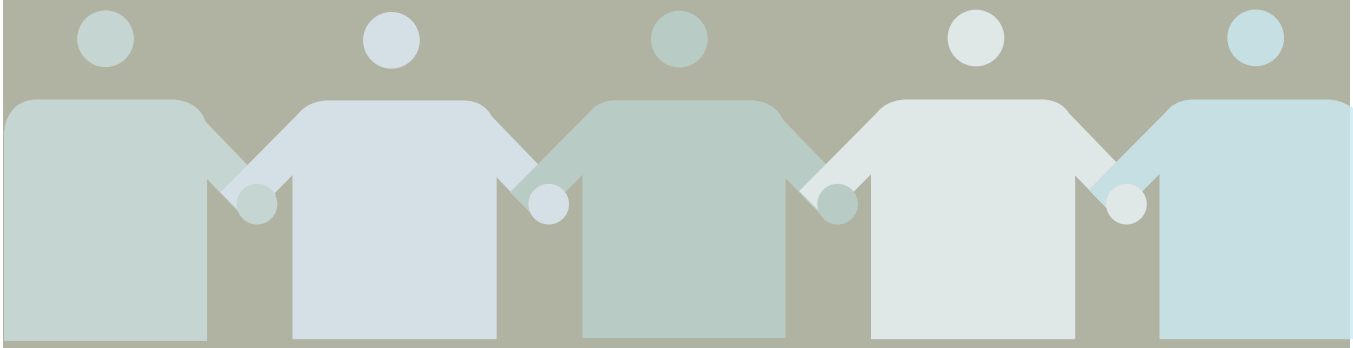
- **Ensure provision in native language and accessible format of a reference guide/ resource on rights and entitlements directly to refugee background stakeholders as soon as possible after arrival in Ireland.**
- **Ensure that accessible information on rights and entitlements in appropriate format is made available to children/young people; persons who are pre-literate in any language; persons with sensory impairments; persons with additional learning needs.**
- **Information on rights and entitlements provided to refugee background stakeholders should include clear information on how to raise issues/ concerns and make complaints within CSI and on how to recognise and report discrimination on racialised or other grounds.**
- **Development of a training module on rights and equality aimed at persons with international protection status should be considered.**
- **To ensure that refugee background stakeholders are facilitated to communicate effectively with members of CSGs and personnel in RSOs and other service providers, access to quality interpretation and intercultural support should be available as of right. Consideration should be given as to how to most effectively enhance, share, and coordinate provision of language and intercultural support across the two resettlement programmes.**
- **Regular 'check-ins' should be conducted with refugee background stakeholders, independently from the CSG, either by personnel employed in an RSO or another CSI stakeholder agency. We recommend that check-ins are conducted in the first language of the refugee background stakeholder and therefore consideration should be given to employment of personnel with requisite language skills who could carry out this function.**
- **Mechanisms for consultation with persons resettled under CSI should be developed in order to feed into policy development, review and reform.**
- **Support should be provided to establish a peer network for refugee background stakeholders (potentially across the mainstream and sponsorship programmes)**

- **Consideration should be given to the establishment of an independent body such as a dedicated Ombudsman or Commissioner responsible for promoting and safeguarding rights of persons with refugee status and international protection applicants.**

Feedback for the purposes of accountability and policy learning

- **Standardised reporting procedure for CSGs should be developed and implemented**
- **Provisions should be put in place for obtaining regular feedback from resettled persons through regular check-ins with RSO personnel or other appropriate persons as well as provision for feedback on anonymous basis**
- **There should be clear procedures for reporting and recording incidents within CSI of discriminatory treatment on racialised or other equality grounds**
- **Provision should be made for monitoring of experiences and outcomes for persons resettled under CSI during and after the programme period. Monitoring indicators should incorporate subjective views of refugee background stakeholders and take into account diverse needs, interests and challenges of persons disadvantaged on one or more equality grounds.**
- **Provision should be made for monitoring access to rights and entitlements across the various pathways for international protection in Ireland, in order to identify instances of programmatic inequality and address any disparities in provision.**
- **Monitoring and evaluation should take into account persons disadvantaged on one or more equality grounds. This could be achieved by disaggregating quantitative data according to key variables including gender, age, racialised identity, religion, gender and sexual identity, and disability status; and by actively seeking qualitative input from individuals disadvantaged on equality grounds.**

Background and Overview



Equality Matters in Community Sponsorship

CONSIDERATIONS FOR OBTAINING FEEDBACK FROM STAKEHOLDERS

Introduction

Ireland has recently established a Community Sponsorship programme to support *resettlement* of persons with refugee status. Resettlement involves "the selection and transfer of refugees from a State in which they have sought protection to a third State which has agreed to admit them - as refugees - with permanent resident status" (UNHCR, 2011). Community or Private Sponsorship (CSP) programmes rely heavily on voluntary initiative to provide support to persons with refugee status admitted to third countries. Depending on the model adopted, CSP programmes can operate as either a distinct – complementary - pathway for admission and support or as a mechanism for post-arrival support of persons admitted through existing resettlement pathways (Tan, 2021). The Irish programme conforms more closely to the latter model.

The supply of resettlement places is tiny relative to the scale of need globally and admission under resettlement programmes is targeted at the 'most vulnerable' among those in need of international protection (de Boer and Zieck, 2020; Garnier et al, 2018; Welfens and Bonjour, 2021). There is wide variation, but most states provide access to services to support the orientation and integration of those admitted under resettlement programmes. In Ireland this includes direct allocation of housing by local authorities and settlement support from dedicated resettlement support workers. Under Community Sponsorship Ireland volunteer members of Community Sponsorship Groups (CSGs) take responsibility for sourcing/ providing housing for the first two years and provide orientation and integration support for 18 months after arrival (Department of Justice and Equality 2019 cited in Tan, 2021).

Resettlement offers people who have been displaced by conflict, persecution or human rights abuses the possibility of rebuilding their lives in a safe and stable environment. Starting over in a new country brings its own challenges of course, it will likely necessitate learning a new language and deciphering cultural expectations, in addition to navigating administrative systems which might seem very alien. The challenges associated with resettlement can be exacerbated by policies and practices which intentionally or unintentionally serve to disempower or to discriminate against those of migrant or refugee background. Inequalities associated, for example, with gender or disability can bring additional problems as people adjust to life in a new country.

This report addresses equality issues likely to arise in relation to Community Sponsorship and offers some lessons and guidance on promoting accountability and safeguarding rights, with a particular focus on various mechanisms through which the views, experiences and issues arising for resettled persons and other stakeholders can be communicated and responded to. The research findings which inform this report are based on a small-scale

study carried out with stakeholders in Community Sponsorship Ireland – participants shared important insights on their experiences of the programme and offered valuable suggestions for enhancing structures and processes. While Community Sponsorship throws up some distinct considerations in respect of cross-cutting equality issues, programmatic inequality and unequal power dynamics, we believe that policy learning from the programme has at least some relevance for settlement support of persons admitted under all of the various pathways to international protection in Ireland.

Policy context of Community Sponsorship Ireland

Community/Private Sponsorship is a Canadian initiative, the earliest scheme was adopted there in the 1970s. There are two main schemes in operation in Canada today. The Private Sponsorship of Refugees Programme (PSR) can be understood as a complementary pathway for admission. Sponsors under PSR are obliged to assume full responsibility for the resettled persons they are supporting for the first year after arrival. The Canadian Blended Visa Office Referral Sponsorship scheme (BVOR) initiated in 2013 is a partnership model between the state and civil society/private actors (Hynie et al 2019). Community Sponsorship Ireland more closely resembles the BVOR scheme.

The recent upsurge of interest in Community Sponsorship internationally has taken place against the background of unprecedented levels of forced displacement. Growing numbers of conflict situations, the intensifying impact of the climate crisis and what might be termed a crisis in economic inequality underlie the steep rise in the numbers of displaced persons globally in the last decade and a half. Of particular significance in driving policy developments has been the devastation caused by the large-scale and protracted situation in Syria. In 2015 the increase in the numbers of people undertaking dangerous journeys to seek refuge in European countries served to focus international attention on the need for greater coordination and cooperation across countries in responding to what was framed as a 'refugee crisis'. In September 2016 the UN hosted the Summit on Refugees and Migrants. The Summit concluded with the adoption of the UN Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, aimed at a greater degree of 'burden-sharing' across the international community (Triggs and Wall, 2020). Following on from this, in July 2018 the UN adopted the Global Compact on Refugees (for critique of the Global Compact, see e.g. Chimni, 2018). Comprising the comprehensive refugee response framework (CRRF) agreed under the New York Declaration and a programme of action, a key objective of the Global Compact is to enhance access to 'durable solutions' (Triggs and Wall, 2020). In addition to 'voluntary repatriation' and 'local integration' in countries of first asylum, this includes 'third-country solutions', involving admission via resettlement and complementary

pathways to countries such as Ireland (UNHCR 2018).

At the 2016 Summit on Refugees and Migrants the Canadian government committed to assisting states interested in establishing Private Sponsorship programmes (Hyndman et al. 2017). In conjunction with the UNHCR and other partners, the Canadian government in December 2016 launched the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (GRSI) with a mission "to assist and inspire countries around the world to open new pathways for refugee protection". (Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative, 2020). The Global Compact on Refugees calls upon states to establish "private or community sponsorship programs that are additional to regular resettlement" (UNHCR 2018a:38). At European level a feasibility study was undertaken in 2018 under the auspices of the EU Commission (European Commission, Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, 2018). There is now a dedicated funding stream within the EU Asylum, Migration and Integration fund (AMIF) to support member state involvement in sponsorship initiatives for resettlement (Tan, 2021).

In the Irish context the government in 2015 committed to admitting 4000 persons under resettlement and relocation mechanisms established by the EU in response to the crisis. In September 2015 the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP) was established and a dedicated IRPP team within the Department of Justice has responsibility for administering resettlement operations. The Irish government subsequently committed to admitting a further 2900 persons under the programme between 2020 and 2023 (Department of Justice, 2020).

Following a pilot in 2018 which was independently evaluated (Finn, 2020), Community Sponsorship Ireland (CSI) was launched in 2019. The establishment of the Irish Community Sponsorship initiative was framed in terms of meeting existing commitments under the IRPP, although there have been indications from the Irish government that expansion of the programme in the future will involve admissions additional to government commitments (Tan, 2021). While overall responsibility for the programme rests with the IRPP, operational responsibility has been contracted to various organisations – mainly migrant NGOs – which successfully tendered to act as Regional Support Organisations (RSOs). A National Support Organisation (NSO) – Open Community - acts as a centralised hub for support and guidance. The structures for Community Sponsorship Ireland are separate from those for the mainstream resettlement programme although some of the organisations selected as RSOs are also contracted as 'implementing partners' on the mainstream programme.

The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, which halted resettlement activity globally for a large part of 2020, necessarily impacted the implementation of the programme. There have been further dramatic changes in the policy context subsequently. As noted above, the programme was launched against the background of unprecedently high rates of displacement. By 2019

there were almost twice as many displaced persons in the world than there had been in 2010 (UNHCR, 2020), with numbers continuing to increase (UNHCR, 2022). The most recent data indicates that there were 89.3 million displaced persons globally at the end of 2021, including 27.1 million with refugee status (UNHCR, 2022). In the years following the adoption of the Global Compact various countries had newly established resettlement programmes, however this has not resulted in substantially increased numbers of resettlement places. There were 57,500 people resettled in 2021, somewhat of a return to normal after the disruption of 2020, still much lower than the 63,696 resettled in 2019, a figure which represented less than 5 per cent of the total in need of resettlement places in that year (UNHCR, 2021; 2022).

The return to power of the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2021 and to a much greater extent the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 have led to further and significant increases in the number of displaced persons seeking protection in Europe. The response to the Ukrainian crisis at European level involved application of the provisions of Temporary Protection Directive for the first time since its adoption in 2001. Designed as a mechanism for responding to a "mass influx" of displaced persons, the Directive provides for "immediate and temporary protection" without the need to apply through formal application systems for international protection (European Commission, 2022). As of September 25th 2022, PPSNs had been allocated to 54,771 Ukrainian nationals who had arrived in Ireland since the Russian invasion in February (CSO, 2022). Efforts to accommodate and support new arrivals has relied heavily on support from civil society and grassroots actors, with members of the public called upon to pledge housing and other supports. These developments are taking place against the background of a long-standing housing crisis in Ireland, which has impacted particularly heavily on persons of international protection background (Ní Raghallaigh et al, 2016; Smith et al, 2020).

Community Sponsorship is a very new programme implemented at an incredibly challenging time. Informed by learning from the pilot programme, structures and processes are still being refined as the programme scales up. Numbers of persons admitted under the programme to date have been small and the scope for significant expansion is unclear, however the model of partnership between state, non-governmental organisations and private actors on which Community Sponsorship is based has been reflected in a less formalised way in the response to those displaced due to the situations in Afghanistan and Ukraine.

Research Aims and Objectives

As noted above, while resettlement offers the opportunity to establish a new life in a secure and stable context, there is plenty of evidence in the literature regarding how stressful the process can be, and on the various kinds of support required (in the Irish context see NÍ Raghallaigh et al, 2019 and IOM, 2021). There is also increasing attention within the literature on resettlement to issues of power and inequality, with recognition that the resettlement process can be disempowering for those admitted (see e.g., de Boer and Zieck, 2020; Garnier et al, 2018). It is increasingly accepted that planning, implementing, and monitoring and evaluation of resettlement programmes must attend to the views and lived experiences of those most directly involved and affected. Achieving this in a manner which is genuinely inclusive and sensitive to inequalities of power within and between various groups of stakeholders is a complex task. The small scale of refugee resettlement operations in Ireland, and of the Community Sponsorship scheme, in particular, creates potential for research fatigue and raises issues in relation to confidentiality. There are thus distinct practical and ethical challenges in obtaining the views and experiences of resettled persons and other stakeholders.

The aim of the study which informs this report was to examine these complexities and challenges with a view to developing guidance which could help inform how feedback is gathered from stakeholders, especially resettled persons. There was a particular focus on equality issues arising in the context of Community Sponsorship including the barriers to voice and participation which may arise for those disadvantaged on the basis of one or more equality grounds.

The key objectives of the study were to:

- explore eq**uality issues arising in relation to Community Sponsorship as an approach to resettlement of persons in need of International Protection**
- **identify lessons from the international literature on accountability, research, monitoring and evaluation in relation to refugee resettlement**
- **identify enablers and barriers in relation to 'voice' and participation of stakeholders into policy and practice in Community Sponsorship with a particular focus on differentiation across equality grounds**
- **examine ethical issues arising in relation to obtaining the views of stakeholders including but not limited to privacy and confidentiality**
- **explore stakeholder views and preferences in relation to feedback mechanisms and consultative fora**

Research Design

The study involved desk research as well as consultative research with various stakeholders involved in Community Sponsorship, including and most importantly persons resettled in Ireland under the Community Sponsorship programme.

Literature review

While by no means exhaustive, the review of the extant international and Irish literature relevant to resettlement for international protection, including under Community/Private Sponsorship programmes aimed to capture insights on equality issues in addition to research findings related to oversight, monitoring and consultation in the domain of resettlement and Community/Private Sponsorship for international protection.

Consultative research

Research was conducted with stakeholders involved in Community Sponsorship. While not a participatory study, the research was underpinned by participatory principles and the research team included two peer researchers who had been admitted to Ireland under the Community Sponsorship programme.

Ethical approval for the study was granted by University College Dublin HREC.

In total 20 people participated in the research. This included persons with refugee status admitted to Ireland under Community Sponsorship (n=6), who are referred to in the report as 'refugee background stakeholders'; members of Community Sponsorship Groups (CSGs) (n = 5), referred to as 'CSG stakeholders'; personnel employed in National and Regional Support Organisations (n = 7), referred to as 'programme stakeholders' and two further 'policy stakeholders', who have an extensive knowledge of CSI, although not directly working within the programme.

Data collection was carried out between June 2021 and May 2022. Focus groups and interviews were conducted with programme and policy stakeholders as well as members of CSGs and resettled persons. Due to the ongoing pandemic data collection was conducted remotely utilising the video-conferencing software Zoom.

Data was analysed thematically with the assistance of the qualitative software programme NVivo12 following the approach to Thematic Analysis set out by Braun and Clarke. Following familiarisation, transcripts of interviews/focus groups were coded, following which themes were identified, named and reviewed, before findings were written up.

Limitations

This was a small-scale exploratory study intended to identify issues for consideration. The data captures views and insights at a particular point in time. When data was collected the Community Sponsorship programme was in an early stage of development and structures and processes were being built and refined – some of the issues raised during data collection may no longer be relevant. Furthermore, as discussed above the policy context in which the programme is operating changed dramatically and unprecedently in the short time since it has been established. The period in which we were conducting this research was marked by a major increase in the numbers of displaced persons admitted to Ireland for protection and many of the stakeholders involved in professional roles in Community Sponsorship Ireland were heavily engaged in the response to increased need. Consequently, recruitment of participants – already challenging in the context of the small-scale of the programme and the impact of the pandemic – was particularly difficult. It was not possible to recruit government officials to take part in the study, although stakeholders from all of the other categories (NSO personnel; RSO personnel; volunteer members of CSGs and persons admitted under the programme) took part in the study.

Overview of report

The report is divided into six chapters. Following this introductory chapter, chapter 2 briefly sets out the conceptualisation of equality which informed the study. Chapter 3 sets out lessons obtained from the relevant literature. Chapters 4 and 5 present findings from the report in relation to equality issues arising in resettlement under Community Sponsorship and on issues relating to mechanisms for accountability, policy learning and participation. The final chapter provides a short overview of key findings and presents recommendations.

Equality and inequality in resettlement of persons with international protection status

Equality Matters in Community Sponsorship

CONSIDERATIONS FOR OBTAINING FEEDBACK FROM STAKEHOLDERS

This brief section outlines the approach to conceptualising equality issues which informed the study and how it applies to analysis of issues which might arise in the context of resettlement of persons with international protection status.

Conceptualising equality and inequality

Equality is a fundamental principle of human rights: the rights set out under international human rights instruments are intended to apply without discrimination on the basis of gender, race, class or other aspect of identity associated with disadvantage on equality grounds. Irish legislation recognises *nine* grounds for protection in relation to equality in employment and in provisions of goods and services: gender, marital status, family status, age disability, sexual orientation, race, religion, and membership of the Traveller community (IHREC, n.d.). An additional ground - "housing assistance" – is recognised in relation to provision of accommodation services only (ibid.). It is recognised that many individuals, including persons with refugee/international protection status, are likely to be disadvantaged on multiple equality grounds.

Equality and inequality are complex and contested concepts. While there might be relatively broad agreement that equality is a valuable principle and goal, there is no consensus on how to define and conceptualise equality and inequality (Baker et al, 2009). The approach to conceptualising equality issues in the study underpinning this report has been informed by the framework developed within the Equality Studies Centre in University College Dublin. This framework draws on a broad range of literature in the domains of egalitarian and social justice theory and research in setting out the distinctive attributes of *equality of condition* across five fundamental dimensions (Baker et al, 2009).

Equality of condition is not equivalent to absolute equality of outcome in that there is an acceptance of disparities, for example, in relation to possession of material resources as long as these do not impede the ability to make "real choices from real options" (ibid: 34). This emphasis on *real* options underlines the difference between *equality of condition* and *equality of opportunity*. Liberal equality of opportunity is premised on *fairness* in the unequal distribution of social goods which necessarily implies that some will be advantaged over others, albeit not due to arbitrary factors such as gender, race or social class (Baker et al, 2009). By contrast equality of condition comprises a commitment to reducing inequality to the greatest extent compatible with the freedom of all to pursue one's own version of the good life (ibid.). Where equality of opportunity seeks to eliminate barriers for individuals related to direct or indirect discrimination, equality of condition is concerned with more far-reaching *structural* reform, that is addressing the underlying social, cultural, political and

economic factors which lead to inequalities between social groups (ibid).

The five fundamental dimensions of inequality identified by Baker et al (2009) include power, respect and recognition, resources, working and learning and love, care and solidarity and the framework sets out what equality of condition would look like in respect of each of these dimensions.

Equality of condition in relation to **power** emphasises participation, which necessitates inclusive decision-making structures and processes at all levels of institutions and organisations. By contrast from a liberal egalitarian/equality of opportunity perspective equality of power is effectively limited to representation – equal rights to vote or stand for election.

Equality of condition goes beyond the principle of tolerance which underpins liberal egalitarianism in relation to **respect and recognition**. Importantly the "celebration" of diversity associated with equality of condition does not involve unquestioning acceptance of all aspects of cultural traditions – the necessity for critical reflection and respectful dialogue on the values, beliefs and practices of dominant and minority cultures is recognised (Baker et al, 2009). Also important in relation to this dimension are efforts to address inequalities of status related to achievement or occupational position (ibid.).

As noted above, equality of condition in relation to **resources** does not imply absolute equality. It should be understood as entailing a commitment to significantly narrowing the gap between those with the greatest and those with the least and ensuring that everyone has the resources required to flourish (ibid.).

In respect of **working and learning** the conception of equality of condition set out by Baker et al (2009) goes much further than equality of access or even participation. It implies that curricular content at all levels of education does not privilege the worldview of dominant groups and that pedagogical approaches meet the needs of all learners, while work is distributed to avoid placing disproportionate responsibility for unpleasant or difficult work on some and to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to engage in fulfilling and properly remunerated employment.

Finally, the dimension of **love, care and solidarity** encompasses affective and care relations. Equality of condition in this dimension implies that no one is disadvantaged in the formation and maintenance of affective bonds due to their membership of a particular social group, while the benefits and responsibilities of caring activities are distributed fairly, implying that care-work is valued appropriately, and that provisions are in place to facilitate and support those with caring responsibilities (ibid.).

Equality issues in resettlement

To think of inequality as structural is to recognise that it stems from stratified or hierarchical social relations with the result that the arrangements, norms and practices embedded in systems and organisations privilege the needs and interests of some groups over others (see Young, 2004). Racism can be understood in terms of a stratified set of social relations in which groups defined as White/European are positioned at the top of the 'racial hierarchy' (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). The most obvious and direct manifestations of racism take the form of *personal discrimination* (either intended or due to 'unconscious bias') and *hate*, encompassing hate speech or acts, including physical violence. Both reflect unfounded prejudice and/or resentment against members of groups perceived as 'other'. Racism cannot be viewed solely in terms of attitudes or actions but as a structural feature of societies, underpinning social relations at the macro, meso and micro levels with profound impacts on opportunities, life-chances and the distribution of 'goods' and 'bads' (ibid.).

Anti-refugee racism and anti-immigrant racism are increasingly recognised as distinct forms of racism. 'Hate' directed at persons of migrant/international protection background has unfortunately become increasingly prevalent and visible in recent decades, in part due to the influence of far-right extremism (Carvalho, 2013; Castelli Gattinara, 2018; Wren, 2001). Most states actively and intentionally discriminate against non-citizens in a number of important respects, particularly in relation to political rights and access to economic and social rights (for example through habitual residency conditions). More fundamentally, the extensive apparatus which most states have in place to delineate and secure borders can be viewed in terms of structural racism, especially as border policies in former colonising and settler-colonial states in the Global North tend to explicitly discriminate against nationals of states in the Global South (on related points see e.g., Hayter, 2007; Walia, 2020). Furthermore, explicitly discriminatory policies directly aimed at persons seeking international protection status are widely and increasingly deployed across Europe and elsewhere as part of efforts to deter "irregular" crossing of borders ((see e.g., Agyemang, 2016; Bamberg, 2018; de Boer and Zieck, 2020).

Persons of international protection background are also affected by unintentionally discriminatory laws, policies and procedures which can impact on access to employment, education and training, social protection or other services. These include failure to provide for linguistic, cultural or religious diversity in public service provision, weak enforcement of laws protecting against discrimination or exploitation in the workplace or in access to services, inadequate access to supports for acquiring the dominant host country language, lack of recognition of credentials from certain countries/regions; culturally-specific application forms for social benefits or demands for supporting documents which displaced

persons might have difficulty supplying (Michael, 2015; Ilcan and Connoy, 2021; Smith et al, 2020). "Failure to protect" against hate crimes can also be regarded as a form of structural discrimination against those of international protection and other migrant background (Singh et al, 2013).

Relative to others, persons with refugee/international protection status resettled in countries like Ireland could thus be regarded as disadvantaged on the basis of **group-based inequality** across all of the five dimensions identified by Baker et al (2009). For instance, on the dimension of power, resettled persons have equivalent rights to citizens, with the important exception, as with all categories of non-citizen, of political rights. Furthermore, exercise of autonomy rights may be impacted by aspects of resettlement programmes, including limited consultation or inadequate provision of interpretation supports. Inequalities can arise due to personal and/or structural discrimination against persons of refugee status, which potentially has a knock-on effect on economic opportunities and access to resources. In respect of love, care and solidarity restricted entitlements around family reunification can be viewed as a significant equality issue.

The **intersection** of international protection status with other axes of inequality such as religion, race, gender, sexuality or disability results in distinct forms of disadvantage which must be taken into account in policy, provision and practice. Discrimination experienced by Muslim women of international protection background and/or people of international protection background of African descent (see e.g., Hodson, 2020; Magan, 2020) are two widely referenced examples.

In considering the inequality issues for persons admitted under resettlement programmes and complementary mechanisms it is important to examine the issues associated with **programmatic inequality,** that is inequalities which arise directly or indirectly due to intended or unintended discriminatory effects of the policy mechanisms put in place**.** This can be looked at as occurring across programmes and in Ireland there are recognised disparities in the treatment of persons admitted under resettlement in comparison with those arriving independently to seek international protection (see Arnold et al, 2020) or through family reunification under the statutory mechanism for persons with international protection status (Smith et al, 2020). Looked at *within* programmes, inequality can arise due to lack of standardisation in provision of supports. It can also arise due to geographical disparities in availability of services, especially given that dispersal is a common feature of resettlement programmes – there is thus a strong connection between programmatic inequality and **spatial inequality.**

Concluding points

The approach to conceptualising equality/inequality in this report draws on the 'equality of condition' framework developed by Baker et al (2009). This involves recognition of the structural basis of inequality and attention to the multiple dimensions of inequality in particular power; resources; respect and recognition; love, care and solidarity; and working and learning.

Persons of international protection background are affected by various forms of inequality across a number of dimensions including group-based inequality on the basis of international protection status/background; the intersection of other axes of inequality with international protection status/background; programmatic inequality; and spatial inequality.

Lessons from the Literature

Equality Matters in Community Sponsorship

CONSIDERATIONS FOR OBTAINING FEEDBACK FROM STAKEHOLDERS

This chapter draws on the existing literature related to resettlement under Community Sponsorship and other pathways to explore insights in relation to the various equality issues to be taken into consideration. These are set out in Section 3.1 in respect of discrimination and disadvantage on the basis of International Protection background and intersection with other equality grounds; programmatic inequality; and unequal power dynamics within Community Sponsorship. Section 3.2 is concerned with identifying lessons for how issues can be identified, communicated and responded to within sponsorship-based resettlement programmes, drawing on findings from the relevant literature in relation to raising of concerns and complaints and on feedback for the purposes of monitoring, evaluation, research and consultation.

Equality issues in resettlement under Community Sponsorship: lessons from the literature

Discrimination and disadvantage on the basis of International Protection background and intersection with other equality grounds

There is a great deal of evidence in the literature to suggest increased prevalence of anti-refugee racist attitudes and behaviour in Europe, North America and Australia (Carvalho, 2013; Castelli Gattinara, 2018; Wren, 2001). This has coincided not just with a rise in influence of far-right groups, but with increasingly hostile state policies towards persons seeking international protection and more intense policing of external borders in addition to implementation of internal bordering practices (Lazaridis and Wadia, 2015; Krzyżanowski et al, 2020).

The impact of personal discrimination, racialised bullying/harassment and hate crimes on persons of International Protection background has been addressed in various studies. There have been found to be negative effects on the physical and mental health of children and adults (Hynie, 2018; Rousseau and Frounfelker, 2019; Rousseau and Gagnon, 2020); on educational outcomes for children and young people and on social integration and feelings of 'belonging' (Guo et al, 2019; Walker and Zuberi, 2020).

Labour market disadvantage has been found to be a particularly significant equality issue for persons of international protection background. While pre-arrival characteristics and experiences are important considerations (see Kaida et al, 2020a), there is evidence to suggest that structural and policy factors in countries of arrival must also be taken into account. For instance, a recent analysis of data from 20 European countries carried out by Fasani et al (2022) found a significant and persistent gap when comparing labour market

outcomes for migrants of refugee background to those for other migrants. Relative to other migrants with equivalent skills and experience, persons of refugee background had a 22 per cent greater likelihood of unemployment and if employed were more likely to be in lower quality jobs. A key explanatory factor identified in this study was the impact of dispersal policies, with outcomes for persons dispersed to regional locations significantly poorer over the longer-term than for persons with refugee status who had not been subject to dispersal. In the Irish context, until recently International Protection applicants were not permitted to engage in paid employment. O'Connell (2019) has found evidence that a "scarring effect" from time spent in Direct Provision is a significant factor in observed poorer labour market outcomes for persons of African migrant background in Ireland.

Evidence from the Canadian literature indicates that persons resettled under private sponsorship have better employment outcomes than government-resettled counterparts, that this advantage is evident up to 15 years post-resettlement and most evident for those with the least qualifications (Kaida et al, 2020a). Employment rates of those privately resettled in the short and longer term were comparable to – and for men higher than - economic migrants, however there was found to be a marked disparity in earnings between these two groups (ibid). In the United States, by contrast, analysis of outcomes of over 1 million of the 3 million persons resettled between 1987 and 2016 found that employment outcomes – participation and earnings – for resettled refugee persons surpassed those for other immigrants and that incomes and home ownership rates of resettled refugee persons were higher than for the US population generally (Kerwin, 2018). This study did not specifically address outcomes for privately sponsored refugees, although it should be noted that the mainstream resettlement programme in the US relies heavily on voluntary actors for provision of financial and integration support (ibid.).

Irish studies on resettlement under the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (Ní Raghallaigh et al, 2019; Ćatibušić et al 2019a; 2019b) have identified limited employment opportunities in regional towns as a concern although further research is required as labour market outcomes were not a major focus of these studies.

Housing is another equality issue which has particular relevance for resettled persons and for persons of international protection background more generally, who are affected in various ways by deficits in housing policies. Discrimination on the basis of migrant/international background (and intersection with other equality grounds such as race/nationality and/or receipt of housing/social protection benefits) has been found to be an issue impacting access to housing in Ireland and elsewhere (Brown et al, 2022; Lukes et al, 2019; Smith et al, 2020), including for persons admitted under Community Sponsorship programmes (Phillimore and Reyes, 2019). In the context of ill-functioning market-based housing systems, persons

with refugee status and other migrants can be scapegoated in public, political and media discourse, which can result in hostility to mainstream and sponsorship-based resettlement programmes at local level (Brown et al, 2022; Ní Raghallaigh et al, 2019; Alraie et al., 2019).

A large proportion of persons admitted under mainstream and Community Sponsorship resettlement programmes in Ireland and elsewhere since 2015 have been Syrian nationals, many of whom are adherents of the Muslim faith. Inequality and discrimination related to the intersection of anti-immigrant and anti-refugee racism with anti-Muslim racism in various country contexts is evidenced in a significant body of literature (see e.g., Gowayed, 2020; Grace et al 2021; Magan, 2020), including inequality and discrimination in relation to employment and access to housing. Furthermore, research evidence from various countries, including Ireland, points to the intersection of inequalities of gender, religion, race and international protection status in creating particular challenges for women and girls who practice hijab, who face discrimination in education, work and community settings (e.g., Bassel, 2012; Smith et al, 2020).

Programmatic inequality

As noted above, disparities in provision of resources and supports within and between programmes is another significant equality issue which can arise in relation to Community Sponsorship. Indeed, an argument frequently made for the establishment of Community Sponsorship programmes is that due to the more individualised and community-centred support provided, integration outcomes for those admitted under Private or Community Sponsorship pathways are more positive than for persons admitted under mainstream government resettlement programmes (Alraie et al. 2018: 16). As discussed further below, the evidence in relation to integration outcomes has until recently been drawn almost exclusively from the Canadian context where different models of Private/Community Sponsorship have been utilised in the more than four decades since the first schemes were established. Beyond the need to take into account divergence across various models it is important to recognise that the profile on arrival of those admitted to Canada under Private/Community Sponsorship has been found to differ considerably from those admitted under government resettlement programmes (Kaida et al. 2020a, Hynie et al. 2019). Nonetheless there would appear to be differences between the resources and supports available under the various pathways for international protection available in host countries which are likely to impact upon settlement and integration outcomes across a variety of dimensions.

Findings from qualitative studies suggest that persons resettled under Community Sponsorship are understandably sensitive to *within-programme* disparities due to varying

levels of support from sponsorship groups (Neuwirth and Clarke 1981; Beiser 2003). A particular issue of concern raised in the Canadian literature is financial support offered by different sponsorship groups. Agrawal (2019) divides sponsors in Canada into three distinct groups. A first group are well-funded, usually under the auspices of a faith-based sponsorship organisation, and generally exceed their formal commitments, for example by buying a car for the refugee family or extending the sponsorship duration beyond the stipulated twelve months. The second group are those who provide what is formally required and no more. Finally, a third group comprises those who fail to meet the support requirements of the programme. Other research from Canada suggests that those resettled under government-assisted programme are more likely to perceive their treatment as fair and consistent with the experiences of others on the programme than are those resettled under private sponsorship (Beiser et al. 1989, Silvius 2016).

Spatial inequality

In the context of resettlement of persons in need of international protection, programme inequality is closely connected with spatial inequality due to widespread use of dispersal policies aiming at "spreading responsibility" (Robinson, 2003a) for provision of supports and services across different administrative areas within countries. Dispersal is a long-established feature of quota-based programmes in many countries including Ireland (Robinson, 2003a; Schech, 2014; OECD, 2016). Mandatory dispersal policies for asylum seekers were introduced in a number of European countries, again including Ireland, from the 1990s. (Robinson, 2003a; 2003b). In 2015, dispersal policies were in operation for asylum seekers in 16 OECD states and for 'humanitarian migrants' (including refugees admitted under quota-based programmes) in 14 OECD states (OECD, 2016).

Writing in the Danish context, where mandatory dispersal was imposed in 1999, Larsen (2011) points to greater adjustment difficulties for refugees dispersed to locations where there were few people of refugee background, compared to those living near kin or friends. In Australia, where a dispersal policy has been in operation since the mid-2000s for programme refugees, Schech (2014) found that "*a critical mass* of refugees from the same or related ethnic backgrounds helps to consolidate … settlement" (2014: 612, emphasis added). In the Irish context research by Ní Raghallaigh et al (2019) suggests that the Irish approach of dispersal in small clusters could lead to feelings of isolation following resettlement. Geographical disparities in access to formal settlement supports is a recognised issue in the Irish context (Gilmartin and Dagg, 2018).

Schech (2014) writes that access to opportunities for work and study have been identified as important issues for persons dispersed to regional locations in Australia, who can be

restricted to poorly paid, menial employment, with evidence of secondary migration for work purposes (see also Curry et al, 2018). As noted above, Fasani et al (2022) found that dispersal policies were a factor in labour market outcomes, associated with inequality in access to quality employment over the longer-term, while Irish studies on resettlement under the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (Ní Raghalliagh et al, 2019; Ćatibušić et al 2019a; 2019b; IOM, 2021) point to the need for further research on employment opportunities and labour market support needs of persons admitted under resettlement.

In the case of Community Sponsorship, refugees are dispersed to the locations where sponsorship groups have been formed. In Canada private sponsorship is associated with a somewhat greater likelihood of resettlement in "gateway cities" with more employment opportunities than is the case for government-assisted resettlement but those resettled are much more likely than economic migrants to be located initially in smaller cities (Kaida et al 2020b). While secondary migration has been identified as an issue in the Canadian context (Simich et al 2002), recent research by Kaida et al (2020b) suggests that the majority of refugees remain in first-destination cities in the ten years after resettlement, with those resettled in smaller cities more likely to relocate (see also Hyndman 2011 and Okonny-Myers 2010, both cited in Schech, 2014). In the Irish context there is no provision under the mainstream programme for resettlement in Dublin city or county, however persons admitted under Community Sponsorship may be resettled in Dublin and thus potentially have greater access to economic opportunities, an issue for future research.

Unequal power dynamics between sponsors and resettled persons

As an approach to resettlement, Community Sponsorship relies on a partnership between the state and the private actors who take on the role of sponsors. While programmes vary across and within countries, support from sponsors can involve assistance with securing housing; orientation and settlement assistance; financial support; help with finding employment; in addition to social and emotional support (Kumin 2015; Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada 2016 cited in Lim, 2019). Sponsors thus assume a great deal of responsibility and there can be a high level of dependency of resettled persons on sponsors, particularly in the initial period after arrival.

The potential for problems to arise in the context of the unequal power dynamics brought into play is an important theme in the literature on Community Sponsorship which provides some interesting insights into issues which can arise. A number of authors, most notably Lim (2019), point to the hierarchical relations constituted through Community Sponsorship, which can allow sponsors to set the terms of resettlement and restrict the capacity of those

resettled to make their own choices (see also Beiser 2003, Beiser et al 1989, Gingrich and Enns 2019). Sponsors potentially have a great deal of influence over important aspects of resettled persons' lives including over "where to live, where their children ought to go to school, and even how they ought to spend their income" (Lim 2019: 302).

Feelings of appreciation and gratitude (e.g., Phillimore and Reyes 2019, Alraie et al. 2018, Agrawal 2019) can potentially limit resettled persons in asserting their own views and preferences or expressing dissatisfaction with support received from sponsors. While gratitude expressed by those sponsored is thought to be generally sincere, there may be an *expectation* of gratitude, adequacy or appropriateness of support received notwithstanding (Lim 2019, Kyriakides et al. 2018).

Some studies point to risks that sponsors may seek to impose their own views on the integration journey of resettled persons (Neuwirth and Clarke 1981, Beiser 2003, Hirsch et al. 2019). For instance, Agrawal (2019) reported findings from sponsors who had "vetoed the refugees' idea to work or live closer to their compatriots" on the basis that "the refugees should be surrounded by English speakers" (ibid.). Other studies report inappropriate pressure from sponsors in relation to employment (Beiser 2003) and housing location (Beiser 2003, Neuwirth and Clarke 1980).

It is important to emphasise that this is not to suggest that all or most groups seek to exert control in this way. The literature points to widely varying attitudes and behaviours among sponsor groups and there is evidence from some studies of sponsors explicitly trying to avoid paternalistic relationships (Gingrich and Enns, 2019; Lenard, 2019). The lesson from the literature is the need for measures which guard against the *potential* for abuses of power and which help reduce inequalities of power between sponsors and resettled persons (Lim, 2019).

Oversight, Monitoring and Consultation

While an increasingly important focus within the literature on international development, questions related to 'accountability' and 'voice' have received relatively limited attention within the literature on refugee resettlement until recently. This perhaps reflects the lack of a substantive right to resettlement in international law and, at national level, the non-citizen status of resettled persons within host states. In this section insights from the literature on Community Sponsorship and other resettlement pathways are presented in respect of complaints/grievance mechanisms; monitoring and evaluation; and consultation/participation.

Safeguarding rights: mechanisms for complaints and grievances

As noted above, the literature on Community Sponsorship points to potential challenges for sponsored persons in expressing views and preferences in relation to support received due to the voluntaristic nature of provision. This has obvious implications for asserting rights in that putting in place provisions for making formal complaints or accessing a legal remedy are more complicated than in the case of government delivered services (Lim 2019). Lim (2019: 318) recommends funding be put in place for NGOs to offer "informal and confidential" support to privately sponsored refugees encountering problems with sponsors as well as training for personnel involved in formal mediation of disputes to identify "dominating and infantilising behaviour" on the part of sponsors. As preventative strategies, Lim recommends compulsory training for sponsors; clearly delineated roles and responsibilities for sponsors; and separation of the financial and social/ emotional dimensions of sponsorship (ibid.).

The question of whether and to what extent voluntary actors should have financial responsibility for persons admitted under resettlement, is an important one. Agrawal (2019) notes that on occasion, for various reasons, sponsors become unable to meet their financial commitments. The city of Manitoba has an assurance scheme to underpin sponsor commitments, to protect against such eventualities (Silvius, 2016). More recent schemes, in Ireland and the UK for instance, set a requirement for sponsorship groups to raise a given sum of money or in-kind support *before* their application to sponsor is accepted. This offers protection against problems in fulfilling financial obligations, but not other types of breakdown.

In the Canadian context, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) can provide mediation in the event of sponsorship breakdown for reasons such as conflict/disputes between sponsors and resettled persons, changes in the resettled persons' circumstances, failure of sponsors to meet obligations (Refugee Sponsorship Training Program, 2017 cited in Lim, 2019). Possible results of mediation include finding a replacement sponsor or shifting resettled persons to the government assisted programme; loss of assistance for the refugee (if found to be at fault); or declaration of a sponsorship 'default' (Lim, 2019).

Monitoring and Evaluation Research

In the literature on monitoring and evaluation relevant to resettlement of persons with International Protection status, the three main aspects of monitoring and evaluation are

examined: strategic goals and outcomes; processes/programme management; and impact (Ahad et al. 2020). As is evident from the discussion below, by far the greatest focus in this literature is on impact, with the main emphasis understandably on the impact on resettled persons. At the same time there are significant gaps in existing knowledge in relation to impact: as Ahad et al. (2020) note, few countries engage in systematic monitoring and evaluation of resettlement programmes. The dearth of longitudinal and quantitative studies in the domain of migrant integration more generally is highlighted by Puma et al. (2018) who comment on the particular challenges of retention in this area of research.

Monitoring Strategic Outcomes

There is relatively limited attention to strategic goals and outcomes in monitoring of resettlement of persons with refugee status (Ahad et al. 2020). Resettlement and complementary mechanisms such as Community Sponsorship are understood not just as a mechanism for protection of individuals, but also for more equitable sharing of responsibility for international protection globally. This is explicitly set out in Article 90 of the Global Compact for Refugees which provides that resettlement is both a "tool for protection of …refugees" and "a tangible mechanism for burden- and responsibility-sharing" across states (UNHCR, 2018). In the context of European migration policy, resettlement is also represented as a "safe and legal pathway" for protection (EU Commission, 2015). The explicit goal of such pathways is to limit independent crossing of borders, so there are implications here in respect of the right under international law to seek asylum. Given the potential for policy ambiguity and confusion, it is essential that the strategic goals of Community/Private Sponsorship initiatives have been explicitly identified and elaborated if effective monitoring and evaluation is to take place (on this point see Ahad et al. 2020: 7). Furthermore, in the context of long-term trends in securitisation of international protection and migration (see e.g., Ageymang, 2016; Bamberg, 2018; Léonard and Kaunert, 2022; Saunders, 2014), close attention to human rights and equality implications is necessary in setting strategic goals and monitoring and evaluating outcomes for Community Sponsorship programmes.

One particularly important strategic issue in relation to Community or Private Sponsorship is the matter of 'additionality', that is whether resettlement places offered through Sponsorship programmes are intended to be part of or are over and above places offered through government resettlement quotas. In Canada Lenard writes that the Blended Visa Office Referral Programme was represented by critics as "an attempt by the government to offload the costs of Canada's humanitarian obligations to private citizens" (2016: 303). Analogous arguments were made in Australia, where the government included privately sponsored refugees within the national Refugee and Humanitarian Programme (Kumin 2015; Hirsch et al. 2018). Another important strategic issue relates to the goals and criteria in respect of *selection* of beneficiaries. For instance, private sponsorship may lead to

prioritisation of persons displaced by situations which have a higher media profile such as the Syrian conflict (see e.g. Bradley and Duin, 2021), rather than those with the greatest need or vulnerability. There are issues here related to the role of sponsors in 'naming', as this shifts the basis of selection from identified vulnerability to relationship with sponsors. The experience of sponsorship initiatives in Canada and Australia indicates that where sponsors have a role in selection, the schemes can become a mechanism for family reunification (Hirsch et al., 2018, Hynie et al., 2019), and while the particular importance of family reunification for persons with international protection status is recognised under international human rights law, there are concerns that Community Sponsorship is not the appropriate mechanism for this (see e.g. Morris et al, 2020). The tensions and controversies around these issues underline the necessity for clearly defined and communicated strategic objectives, ideally formulated via a transparent and inclusive decision-making process (see Ahad et al., (2020:18) for brief discussion on use of workshops for stakeholders to discuss resettlement programme objectives).

Process/management monitoring

Monitoring of processes/programme management involves data related to the various different elements of running a resettlement programme, which, as Ahad et al., (2020) point out, involves a number of distinct stages and a variety of different actors. Process/management monitoring addresses issues such as programme efficiency and value for money, and Standard Operating Procedures for implementation. It can also involve monitoring of the extent and quality of stakeholder involvement/participation and whether processes are rights-based (O'Leary, 2017).

Ahad et al. (2020) write that monitoring of processes/management outcomes should take into account all of the different steps or stages involved in a resettlement programme (which occur in different countries under the auspices of different organisations) and the relationship between these, the resources designated at each step and the results obtained.

Common management issues that emerge from monitoring or evaluation processes in different countries include communication between the multiple actors in Community Sponsorship initiatives; communication of the nature and purpose of specific schemes; and selection processes for refugee inclusion in sponsorship schemes (see IRCC 2016; Finn 2021; Government of New Zealand 2019).

An evaluation of the pilot phase of Community Sponsorship Ireland (Finn, 2021) recommended creation and implementation of a Monitoring and Evaluation framework (no such framework was in place at the time of writing) and highlighted that such a framework should include both impact and project (or process) monitoring. Finn (2021) recommended that overall responsibility for monitoring should rest with the IRPP, and that monitoring

obligations should be incorporated into funding agreements with institutional partners (e.g., Regional Support Organisations, the National Support Organisation). Such monitoring, Finn states, should "feed directly into improving the efficacy, efficiency and impact of the project and contribute to evidence-based policy making" (Finn, 2021: 45).

Outcomes and Impact

Monitoring and evaluating results of programmes or interventions over the short, medium and longer-term is typically framed in terms of outputs, outcomes and impact (Ahad et al., 2020). In the context of resettlement of persons with refugee status, outcomes and impact are conventionally conceptualised and measured in terms of *integration.* While there is no one standard definition of integration, there is generally an emphasis on access to rights and entitlements for all and participation in society *on one's own terms*, that is without having to relinquish one's cultural identity, values or beliefs. This is the understanding of integration which underpins Irish policy (Department of Justice, 2017). This means that the systems and institutions of the host state must be sufficiently inclusive to accommodate cultural diversity. Integration is accordingly represented in the policy literature as a "two-way process" in that it involves not just adaptation on the part of newcomers as they adjust to a new society, but also structural and cultural adaptation on the 'receiving' side (Phillimore, 2012; Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016). Increasingly integration is regarded as "multi-directional" involving a variety of different actors and organizations from different sectors in society (UK Home Office, 2019).

Integration is regarded as involving a number of dimensions – economic, social, political and cultural - and encompassing a variety of domains or areas. For instance, the influential UK Home Office Indicators of Integration framework sets out fourteen domains of integration within a four-dimensional framework: *markers and means* (work; housing; education; health and social care; leisure) *social connections* (social bonds; bridges and links); *facilitators* (language, culture, digital skills, safety and stability).; and *foundations* (rights and responsibilities) (ibid.).

Impact at community/society level

Despite its framing as a two-way process measurement of integration outcomes has tended to focus heavily on outcomes for migrants, with a particularly strong emphasis often placed on indicators such as employment, education and language acquisition (on this point see e.g., Phillimore, 2012). There has been less emphasis on outcomes at the level of the receiving society, which in respect of Community Sponsorship might include the effect on public opinion as suggested by Hough (2018) or *per* McNally (2020) on civil society mobilisation in favour of refugees.

The rationale for adoption of Community Sponsorship initiatives rests in part on assumptions of positive impact at the level of local communities or the host society more generally. Arguing that Canada has "robustly resisted" anti-refugee sentiment, Lenard suggests that "the strength and depth of the private sponsorship regime in Canada" is a possible explanatory factor (2016: 305). Also writing in the Canadian context, Lim conjectures that the social connections forged in sponsorship relations could potentially lead to refugees being "more quickly woven into the fabric of Canadian society" and have a positive effect on public attitudes (2019: 306). It has been suggested that while "not a panacea for scepticism about resettlement" sponsorship may serve to cultivate a "sense of ownership and control" over international protection at community level (Fratzke, 2017: 3-5). There is a need for further study and analysis on the relationship between sponsorship and public attitudes towards persons with refugee status and other migrants (Phillimore and Reyes 2019) and on the impact of sponsorship and resettlement programmes on receiving communities/societies more generally. Ahad et al. (2020: 10) point to an evaluation study examining the fiscal impact of refugee resettlement in the United States from 2005-2014 which found a very substantial net benefit to local, state and federal government to the amount of $63 billion in this period. Such studies are rare and as Ahad et al (2020) point out the evidence presented in this evaluation did not buttress the American resettlement programme against the significant retrenchment implemented under the Trump administration.

Impact on volunteer sponsors

The research evidence points to positive impacts on the individual volunteers directly involved in supporting people admitted under Community Sponsorship programmes including new "kin-like" connections (Phillimore and Reyes 2019a); an opportunity for social action/advocacy (Hirsch et al. 2019; Treviranus and Casasola 2003); and for skills enhancement for those immediately involved in sponsorship projects (Gingrich and Enns 2019; Treviranus and Casasola 2003). Evidence from the literature suggests that there may also be risks of negative impacts. In a qualitative study with refugees and sponsors in Canada, Agrawal (2019: 955) reports that the daily demands of sponsorship can be experienced as onerous. These daily demands include taking people to the doctor or English classes, administrative tasks, finding interpreters and so on (ibid.). In the final evaluation report of the UK Community Sponsorship programme (Phillimore et al 2020) the experience of being a volunteer sponsor is described as both the "hardest" and "most rewarding" of one's life – participants reported that the time commitment involved in the post-resettlement period far exceeded their initial expectations and the authors highlight the risk of volunteer burnout. This underlines the necessity of quality data on the experiences and support needs of volunteer sponsors to inform policy review and development. Furthermore, it is important to understand whether the responsibilities associated with volunteering impact

particularly heavily on certain social groups, in order to identify and address any barriers to involvement in Community Sponsorship groups related to equality grounds.

Impact on resettled persons

As noted above, the main focus within the literature on Private/Community Sponsorship is on the impact for persons resettled under such programmes, typically measured through integration outcomes. Much of the evidence is derived from the Canadian context, where outcomes of persons admitted under Community Sponsorship/Private Sponsorship initiatives have been found to be more favourable than those of persons provided for under mainstream state-led resettlement programmes (Hynie et al. 2019; Oda et al. 2018). While there are certainly indications of more favourable outcomes in respect of employment and earnings (Beiser, 2003; Hynie et al., 2019; IRCC, 2016; Kaida et al 2019; Treviranus and Casasola 2003); language acquisition (IRCC 2016); and health (Agrawal 2019, Oda et al. 2019) for privately sponsored individuals, assessing the available evidence is not straightforward and requires certain factors to be taken into account.

Firstly, the pre-arrival characteristics and experiences of resettled persons necessarily informs subsequent outcomes. Canadian research indicates higher education levels (Hynie et al. 2019) and higher levels of host language ability (IRCC 2016) on arrival among those privately sponsored than those admitted under the government assisted resettlement programme. Variation in health status on arrival must also be taken into account in examining subsequent health outcomes (Oda et al. 2019). Consideration of possible disparities in pre-arrival experiences, such as length of time in camps, is also important (Hynie et al. 2019). Factors, such as gender, racialised identity, and disability status, associated with interpersonal and structural discrimination are also likely to have a strong impact on integration outcomes, but with few exceptions (e.g., Senthanar et al., 2021) have rarely been taken into account in cross-programme comparisons.

Secondly, the terms Community and Private sponsorship are utilised in relation to a variety of different models of provision. In the Canadian context much of the literature on outcomes for beneficiaries stems from research on the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Programme. As noted above, due to the role of volunteer hosts in the selection process, the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Programme has tended to be utilised as a vehicle for family reunification (see Labman and Hyndman, 2019) which can mean that those admitted have a particularly strong social network on arrival. There is limited evidence on the newer Blended Visa Office Referral scheme, the design of which is much closer to the Irish model of sponsorship.

Evidence from both the UK and Canada suggests that private sponsorship can offer more individualised support than mainstream government resettlement programmes (e.g., Oda

et al. 2019; Alraie et al. 2018; Agrawal 2019). Although not usually problematised in this way in the relevant literature, such research findings raise troubling questions in relation to *programmatic inequality*, in particular the question of whether it is acceptable that persons with similar needs admitted under different programmes should be treated differently in respect of access to supports and resources. It is also important to attend to findings from the literature which point to disparities in supports received *within* Community Sponsorship programmes, as well as evidence that support received from volunteer groups may not always be aligned with the needs and preferences of resettled persons (Neuwirth and Clarke 1981, Beiser 2003, Hirsch et al. 2019, Agrawal 2019). There would appear to be a need for more robust evidence on the factors which influence outcomes for persons admitted under both mainstream and Community Sponsorship resettlement programmes. Improved data could provide the basis for greater standardisation across – and within – programmes and perhaps allow for the design of approaches to resettlement which combine the most effective features of existing models.

Monitoring for Equality Issues

In the last two decades there has been increased awareness of the importance of equality monitoring, that is monitoring the impact of inequalities such as gender, race/ethnicity, disability and sexual identity on access to services and/or outcomes. A number of ethical and practical considerations have been raised in the literature underlining the complexity involved in compiling, analysing and interpreting disaggregated data (Balestra and Fleischer, 2018). Of particular significance are concerns about privacy and potential for human rights abuses which have led to caution, particularly in respect of gathering data on race/ethnicity and on sexual identity (ibid.). While Fay and Kavanagh, (2019: 232) note that "data abuse" is understood to have been less of an issue in the Irish context, it of course remains a risk to be guarded against. At the same time, it is imperative that lack of visibility does not lead to policy neglect of the issues facing structurally disadvantaged groups (ibid.). A question on race/ethnicity was included in the Irish national census from 2005 (Balestra and Fleischer, 2018), but while gathered by some public sector bodies, data on race/ethnicity is not yet gathered routinely. For instance, an 'ethnic-identifier' is utilised in education and health services, but data on ethnicity is not gathered by the Child and Family Agency, despite concerns that certain racialised groups are significantly overrepresented in childcare proceedings (Coulter, 2015). Data on gender has long been gathered routinely in research and administration, however it is only very recently that non-binary gender identities have been recognised and recording of gender as other than male or female is not yet standard practice.

In respect of migrant/refugee status there are significant gaps in the data available in the Irish context which hinder tracking of integration outcomes (Fahey et al, 2019). While nationality

is captured in Census data and in administrative data across a range of domains, many of migrant background have acquired citizenship status, so it is difficult to meaningfully compare outcomes for those of migrant background to those for the population generally. Former or current refugee status is not generally captured in administrative data and there is very limited evaluation data and a complete lack of longitudinal data in respect of the various pathways for international protection in Ireland (ibid.).

The prevalence of hostile and discriminatory attitudes towards persons of refugee status, captured by the term anti-refugee racism necessitates particular attention to monitoring racism, especially given that the intersection of refugee status with racialised minority status is associated with distinct forms of inequality and discrimination. Persons of refugee status of African descent and/or of Muslim faith may be particularly severely disadvantaged on the grounds of the intersection of various forms of racialised inequality. The necessity for further research on how racism impacts on integration outcomes for those of refugee/international protection background has been raised by Phillimore (2021). Deficits in systems for reporting and recording racism, discrimination and hate crimes are recognised as an obstacle to obtaining data on prevalence (Rodríguez Maeso and Araújo, 2017; de Schutter, 2019). Various qualitative studies have found that participants of international protection background tended to minimise personal experiences of discrimination (see e.g. Curry et al, 2017). Writing from the US perspective, Viruell-Fuentes et al. (2012) suggest that the "learned skill" of identifying discrimination is one which newly racialised immigrants may not have acquired, a point which is likely to be relevant in other country contexts.

According to Curry et al (2017) equality grounds such as gender, age, and socioeconomic status have not received extensive attention in the international and Irish literature on resettlement outcomes. There are some examples where gender analysis has formed part of evaluation of resettlement programmes (eg Department of Social Services 2017, for Australia; IRCC 2016 and Evaluation Unit 2019, for Canada), and of analysis by age category (e.g. Phillimore et al, 2020 for the UK).

In the case of the *Building a New Life in Australia* longitudinal study on settlement outcomes for humanitarian migrants, a module on children and youth was added at wave three of the study. Although the study is still ongoing and there is, as yet, no final report, the first module on children and youth reported that rates of social and emotional behavioural difficulties for resettled children were not significantly greater than for the general child population. 22 per cent of the children in this study had experienced discrimination and a strong association was found between experiences of discrimination and social and emotional behavioural difficulties (Department of Social Services, 2017).

While not an evaluation, a recent study on the needs of children resettled under the Irish

Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP) (Ní Raghallaigh et al 2019) provides insight into the experiences of children and their families under the domains of health, education, economic security, social integration and welfare/protection. Among other findings, the study identified gaps in provision in relation to English-language support for school-aged children as well as mental health supports. The findings point to the challenges for young people in establishing peer connections post-resettlement and the sense of isolation which can result from not having regular contact with others from the same linguistic and cultural background (see also Smith et al, 2020).

In respect of disability, evaluations carried out on a resettlement programme in Colorado (Taintor and Lichtenstein 2016) and in Canada (Evaluation Unit 2019, Canada) have provided some useful insights. In the case of Colorado in the US, the 5-year longitudinal RISE study found that language acquisition and cultural adjustment were most challenging for refugees aged over 55, and those with disabilities (Taintor and Lichtenstein, 2016). In a participatory assessment carried out by UNHCR Ireland, resettled Syrians with disabilities reported barriers to integration. Three individuals reported accommodation unsuitable for their particular disabilities (UNHCR 2016). "Several" people interviewed for the study reported that applications for disability allowances or travel passes for persons with medical needs had been unsuccessful for reasons which were not clear to the applicants (UNHCR 2016).

While not necessarily framed as such, evaluation research comparing outcomes between different pathways for international protection provides potentially useful data in respect of programmatic inequality. The discussion above indicates the importance of controlling for pre-arrival characteristics in addition to factors such as extent and quality of existing social/family connections in the host country in taking into account diverging outcomes – with this in mind arguably there is a greater need for comparative research on variation in rights and entitlements across programmes rather than simply focusing on outcomes and impact.

Monitoring for disparities *within* programmes is also important –the study by Ní Raghallaigh et al (2019) identified divergence across local authority areas in respect of how programme budgets were utilised. This *in part* reflected disparities in access to services and therefore different needs arising in addressing "gaps" in provision, for example in relation to transport or English language classes, but also reflected different choices made at local level. The study findings suggest that while a degree of flexibility in budget allocation is important, perceptions of unfairness can easily arise.

Voice and participation

Participation in decision-making

Calls for "meaningful participation" of persons in need of international protection have been growing in recent years (Harley and Hobbs, 2020). It is only since the mid-1990s that formalised structures have been put in place at the international level to drive resettlement policy development and implementation: the establishment of the Working Group on Resettlement (WGR) in 1995 and then in 1996 the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement (ATCR) provided fora for states, NGOs/civil society stakeholders and UNHCR to work towards a coordinated approach to policy and provision (UNHCR, 2011). It is noteworthy that "increased participation of refugees in the ATCR" has been identified as an issue to be addressed by the UNHCR (2019a:22). Lack of participation of refugee persons at the level of policy could be said to reflect their relatively powerless position within resettlement policy and practice (see de Boer and Zieck 2020).

The community-based approach operations guide produced by UNHCR (2008) frames participation in decision-making as a *right*, and notes that participation should be as inclusive as possible, requiring "special efforts" to include members of structurally disadvantaged groups such as "women, children, older persons, persons with disabilities and minority groups". Without making efforts to broaden participation, there is a risk that "only a few will decide for all", or that participation might be tokenistic (2008: 18). The UNHCR (2008) emphasises the dependence of the right to participation on *the right to information*, asserting that "[p]eople must have opportunities to ask questions about their rights and, if necessary, to challenge the content and help determine what and how information is disseminated." (UNHCR, 2008: 19).

In the Irish context grassroots organising on the part of international protection applicants has been important in driving policy developments (Khambule, 2019). The small scale of resettlement until recently, the relatively short time which persons admitted under resettlement programmes spend in congregated reception centres, lack of proximity to resettled peers post resettlement in the community, and the more extensive supports provided in comparison to those arriving independently to seek protection are likely factors explaining the lack of equivalent grassroots activism on the part of resettled persons. The mainstream resettlement programme does not include representatives of resettled persons in decision-making structures (Ní Raghallaigh et al, 2019). While there is provision for a representative of refugee background within the structures of the National Support Organisation of CSI, the current representative was not admitted under the programme.

Participation in research

Participation in research, including monitoring and evaluation research, is another means by which the views and preferences of resettled persons can feed into decision-making processes. As is the case with decision-making, in the context of research, the term 'participation' covers a broad spectrum of activities, from minimal and relatively passive involvement up to being actively involved in developing, designing and implementing a study.

There is a growing body of literature concerned with capturing the lived experiences and views of those resettled for international protection purposes. In the Irish context, since the expansion of resettlement operations from 2015, there have been a few studies of the mainstream government resettlement programme which drew on the experiences of resettled persons - and other stakeholders – to help inform policy debate and development. In 2016 UNHCR conducted a "participatory assessment" with resettled Syrian refugees resettled in 2016. The study involved structured interviews with 80 adults who had been admitted via resettlement (IRPP) or complementary mechanisms (SHAP or family reunification). The findings provide an insight into the issues of most concern to resettled Syrian refugees in Ireland, which included *language acquisition; access to the labour market; access to higher education; accommodation/ housing; family reunification;* and *access to information*. The study by Ní Raghallaigh et al (2019) on the needs of children admitted under the IRPP was carried out on behalf of the Children's Rights Alliance and involved interviews and focus groups with children and young people and parents, all Syrian nationals. An adult researcher of Syrian refugee background was employed to assist with data collection. Consultative focus groups carried out with children and young people at the start of the data collection process informed the design of instruments utilised with other participants: a key message from the young people in these focus groups was the importance of attending to diversity among those resettled from Syria – including diversity in experiences and circumstances; social background; and values. More recently, a study carried out by the International Organisation of Migration (IOM, 2021) aimed to obtain the views of Syrians resettled under the IRPP in order to assess integration outcomes. 153 individuals over the age 18 were interviewed for the study. Interviewers were all native Arabic speakers, and four members of the research team were of refugee background, described as "an important contributor to the development of the research approach and analysis" (IOM, 2021: 4). Among the key findings of this study was the importance placed upon "housing security" as a good in itself and as a basis for other aspects of integration; challenges in respect of English-language acquisition and the knock-on effect on employment outcomes; reported positive outcomes in relation to belonging and social connections.

There has been increasing interest in collaborative and participatory approaches to monitoring and evaluation research in the sphere of resettlement (see Ahad et al 2020), although as yet there is not an extensive amount of published research on resettlement based on participatory principles. One notable example is the aforementioned RISE survey, a longitudinal survey-based study on the integration of resettled refugees in Denver, Colorado in the US (Puma et al., 2018). In this study 'community connectors' (a term roughly analogous to the more commonly used 'peer researcher') were "integrally involved in all aspects of the study, including survey and research design, data collection and feedback on findings" (Puma et al, 2018: 621). The unusually high response and retention rates in this study were attributed in large part to the inclusion of the cultural connectors as valued members of the research team and the dedication which they in turn brought to the study (ibid.).

Puma et al. (2018: 622) reflect on the challenges, as well as the strengths, of the approach adopted. They argue that the approach was "effective but not efficient", due to difficulties in maintaining regular contact and organising scheduling with community connectors. The reliance on community connectors positioned individual connectors as gatekeepers to entire communities, rendering it impossible to conduct research with some sub-groups of resettled persons if a suitable 'community connector' could not be employed.

It is important to emphasise that the ethical and practical challenges involved in conducting research with resettled populations – and those of refugee and migrant background more generally – will not be addressed simply by including researchers from the community of interest on research teams. Inequalities associated with nationality/citizenship; race; educational, occupational and socio-economic status; and institutional affiliation necessarily shape the dynamics of the research process, rendering collaboration and participation on equal terms challenging. Funding models and ethics procedures can inadvertently create barriers to participatory research as 'meaningful participation' requires considerable time and resources. Ethics guides for conducting research with people of international background emphasise the importance of careful attention to informing participants about their rights; avoiding research fatigue by only carrying out research which is necessary/beneficial; engaging in collaborations with other researchers; minimising potential for retraumatisation in data collection; valuing appropriately the time and expertise of persons of refugee background contributing to the research and taking this into account in research budgets; the importance of training and capacity-building; reflection on power dynamics within research teams and between research teams and persons participating as respondents; disseminating findings in accessible formats (see e.g. Albtran et al, 2022; Centre for Refugee Studies et al, 2017; Goodson and Phillimore, 2010).

Concluding points

The literature provides evidence on the various equality issues which affect persons resettled under Community Sponsorship and those of refugee background more generally. These include discrimination and disadvantage on the basis of refugee status and the intersection of refugee/migrant status with other axes of inequality. Also of importance is programmatic inequality due to differential approaches to supporting those admitted under different pathways for international protection. Of specific relevance to persons resettled under Private/Community Sponsorship schemes are potential challenges arising due to unequal power dynamics between resettled persons and volunteer sponsors.

Lessons from the literature in relation to oversight and monitoring of resettlement programmes point to the need to have structures in place to deal with problems which may arise in the context of Community Sponsorship including complaints mechanisms; provisions to ensure financial commitments of groups are honoured; and mediation supports. The literature on monitoring and evaluation points to the importance of clearly defined programme objectives; formal procedures for process monitoring and approaches to impact monitoring and evaluation which adequately take into account pre-arrival characteristics and relevant contextual factors. There is increasing emphasis on the importance of including the subjective views of persons admitted under resettlement schemes and the literature provides some guidance on participation of resettled persons in research and in decision-making.

Equality issues in Community Sponsorship in Ireland

Equality Matters in Community Sponsorship

CONSIDERATIONS FOR OBTAINING FEEDBACK FROM STAKEHOLDERS

This section sets out the findings from the study in relation to equality issues which might potentially arise in the context of Community Sponsorship in Ireland. The section deals with three key issues: discrimination and disadvantage on equality grounds, which incorporates discussion on intersecting inequalities; programmatic inequality which incorporates findings on the closely related issue of spatial inequality; and unequal power dynamics between refugee background stakeholders and sponsors.

Discrimination and disadvantage on equality grounds

In discussions around discrimination on equality grounds there was a strong perception evident among programme stakeholders and CSG stakeholders that significant progress had been made on equality issues in Ireland.

> *…where Ireland is right now, I think has come miles. … I mean so open to different sexual orientation like equality men/women. Ireland's very liberal now.*
> *(CSG stakeholder)*

Refugee background stakeholders shared their perception that equal treatment is a core public value in Ireland:

> *…the law here doesn't discriminate against anybody….*
> *(refugee background stakeholder)*

> *People are open minded and very welcoming here.*
> *(refugee background stakeholder)*

> *I think they (Irish people) support equality to everybody, they treat everybody the same. (refugee background stakeholder)*

At the same time throughout focus group and interview discussions, participants identified existing and potential issues of concern in relation to discrimination and hostility, including knowledge gaps at programme level in respect of the experiences of resettled people and CSGs. Unsurprisingly, discrimination and hostility on the grounds of race was the most frequently raised equality issue raised across the interviews and focus groups conducted for this study. Issues arising from the intersection of gender inequality with disadvantage on other grounds was also a significant focus of discussion. Within the literature on Community Sponsorship and resettlement more generally employment and housing are identified as key domains of inequality, and this was reflected in our findings.

Racism

As discussed earlier in the report, refugee/international protection status is recognised as a distinct target of racialised discrimination and hate. Reflecting on inequality associated with refugee status, a programme stakeholder noted that the term 'refugee' itself is "othering":

> *…even the term referring somebody as a refugee …you're not a refugee. Refugee is a legal concept …you're somebody who has refugee status.* (*programme stakeholder)*

Other aspects of the identities of those with refugee/international protection status are likely to be construed in racialised terms within host countries, this obviously includes race/ethnicity if perceived as different from that of the dominant majority in the host society, in addition to nationality and religion. As noted earlier, for persons resettled in Ireland under Community Sponsorship the intersection of anti-Muslim racism with anti-refugee racism is a particular consideration. Reflecting on incidences of racism, one programme stakeholder commented on issues which could arise *before* the arrival of refugee background stakeholders in a particular area, identifying 'Islamophobia' as an underlying factor in negative attitudes towards resettlement:

> *I guess racism and islamophobia they can come to life actually, funnily enough, before the family arrives to begin with, and you know when there's kind of a prospect of a resettled family moving to a certain area. Several groups have come across what everyone tends to refer to as that one person. …. And you know have encountered and relayed to us kind of conversations that they had with people with doubts, but also people who may be also expressing racist opinions. And also you know shrouded within those doubts is you know potentially racism and islamophobia anyway*
> *(programme stakeholder)*

Programme stakeholders identified a knowledge gap in respect of the prevalence of racist incidents directly involving persons resettled under Community Sponsorship:

> *I have no real sense of what issues are arising, if they're arising and what's the frequency apart from you hear of one or two quite egregious issues ...*
> *(programme stakeholder)*

> *I haven't heard of racist incidents directed at families but that doesn't mean it hasn't happened.* *(programme stakeholder)*

Similarly in the focus group with volunteer members of CSGs one participant commented that groups might not always be made aware of issues arising for resettled families:

> *They might be slow to say anything to us really. I'm not sure. Maybe they just bide their*

> *time and see how things went or keep to themselves. I'm not sure really.*
> *(CSG stakeholder)*

There was also an identified knowledge gap on the part of programme stakeholders on how effectively CSGs responded to incidences of racialised discrimination. It was noted that, as part of training, groups were encouraged to report incidents to the Garda Síochana, but that there was no mechanism within CSI for formally reporting and recording such incidents and thus limited knowledge as to how groups were actually responding to issues in practice. Commenting on the role of CSGs in countering racist attitudes, one programme stakeholder noted that group members might be reluctant to "challeng[e] members of their own community" noting that "[w]e've no idea how … they're doing it".

In the focus group with volunteer members of CSGs there was some uncertainty evident in how to deal with racism within the community, for instance if neighbours of resettled people were to exhibit hostility:

> *There's one thing about it being mentioned, it's another thing that what would we do about it. That's something that you know you'd have to be very careful about how you handle something like that because you want the families staying in the community. You want things to be good there. (CSG stakeholder)*

Recounting an incident identified as racialised discrimination, one of the participants in a focus group with refugee background stakeholders discussed sharing the incident with CSG stakeholders who were described as very supportive. While in this case the CSG stakeholders had wanted to report the incident to the relevant authorities, the refugee background stakeholder did not. An important point made in this focus group was that it would be easier for refugee background stakeholders to discuss issues related to racism and discrimination with fellow Arab speakers:

> *I think if there's an Arabic speaking member in the group, it will be much easier to the family. (refugee background stakeholder)*

The complexity and difficulty involved in identifying racism in its various forms is recognised in the literature and was raised directly by a programme stakeholder, who noted that "when it gets into structural racism or implicit racism its always harder to pin down". A number of participants identified examples of unequal treatment of persons with refugee/international protection status which could be categorized as *structural discrimination*. For instance, programme stakeholders identified challenges for people in opening bank accounts and obtaining driver's licences. For volunteer members of CSGs differential treatment in respect of third level fees – three years' residency is required to qualify for 'free fees' in Ireland – was the biggest concern raised:

> *…you're going to have people coming here who'll say well I didn't get to finish my degree or I would like to do that and you have to say to them well actually you know that's not really possible. … And it is an inequality. (CSG stakeholder)*

The issue of recognition of prior qualifications was also raised as an equality issue in the focus group with CSG stakeholders:

> *…this isn't exclusive to refugees but if qualifications could be recognised in Ireland I mean that would be amazing for everyone but especially refugees. Again if we're gonna be treating them like Irish citizens and we know what countries they're coming from can we not have already in advance made sure that they are recognised here or at least take the time and the expense to get them recognised.*
> *(CSG stakeholder)*

A programme stakeholder commented that the process of supporting settlement was likely to increase awareness among volunteers of the "invisible barriers" faced by those with refugee status in Ireland and there was much discussion in the focus group with CSG stakeholders about challenges encountered in supporting refugees in accessing entitlements such as social protection benefits and Housing Assistance Payment (HAP). Difficulties in relation to HAP were raised by various participants and it was noted that requests for supporting documentation sometimes lacked sensitivity to the particular circumstances of persons of refugee background:

> *…there are definitely things like that which seem quite subtle but obviously add up into you know some potentially quite seismic negative impacts on resettled refugees' access to equality in certain areas (programme stakeholder)*

Gender and Intersecting inequalities

There is evidence in the literature to suggest that women are affected "differently and disproportionately" by the intersection of international protection status with other axes of inequality (Cheung and Phillimore, 2016), potentially giving rise to particular needs for support. One stakeholder expressed concern that the distinct support needs of women resettled under Community Sponsorship needed to be given greater consideration:

> *…I do think that groups probably need to be more aware of the position of women. Because I think even within settlement again a lot of female refugees experience isolation. And it's around making sure that I suppose not adequate but suitable English language provisions are in place. (programme stakeholder)*

Female resettled participants recounted their personal experiences of isolation and boredom and commented that there appeared to be greater support offered to men in relation to economic participation. There was evident frustration from two participants that the expressed desire to take up employment had been met with a very limited response:

> *…that isn't easy. We don't see a lot of people. For example, I told several people how bored I am, and how my kids grow up enough which gives me a lot of time to work.* *(refugee background stakeholder)*

> *It feels like they give men better chances. Maybe because he's the main earner (master of the house), and he's responsible of his family, he gets more support. They prioritise his work, and the wife's work comes second*
> *(refugee background stakeholder)*

A programme stakeholder commented on what was referred to as the "triple discrimination" associated with "being a woman from another culture and of another religion" which was associated with risks of isolation and barriers in relation to employment supports. There was concern from some programme stakeholders that preconceived notions about women of Muslim faith might lead to some groups making inaccurate and unhelpful assumptions, something identified as an issue to be addressed in the training provided to CSGs:

> *I think as Regional Support Organisations sometimes we find that when we are working with sponsor groups they have a lot of preconceived ideas about Islam in the first place and there's a lot of nervousness and fear about it. So we're trying to kind of really tackle that in the training and look at Islamophobia and what that is and what that means because I think that is a problem. And in particular the perception of Muslim women can be quite challenging sometimes as well you know what I mean. And there's this idea that they're coming from a good place and that their intentions are good. And I'm sure they are but at the same time it can be offensive you know what I mean. So I think there's a bit of work that needs to be done around Islam, Islamophobia and in particular women. So some groups have a perception that women are forced to wear the veil. … There's a lot of work that needs to be done in that intercultural piece and I think that's a really critical piece in the training and, that needs to be very very very strong.* *(programme stakeholder)*

In the focus group with CSG stakeholders there was some discussion around gender inequality, with a perception evident among some participants that women would be better treated in Ireland than in Syria and an assumption that "their opportunities would be more here". As discussed in the sub-section below this assumption was not necessarily shared by resettled participants.

Inequality in employment

That persons with refugee/international protection status face particular challenges in relation to employment is evidenced by research across various jurisdictions, although divergence in labour market outcomes across jurisdictions and between different groups points to the importance of the policy context in shaping opportunities for economic integration and to the necessity of attending to diversity within the population of persons with international protection status, some of whom may face particular barriers due to racialised discrimination and/or gender inequality among other equality grounds.

Commenting on the issue a programme stakeholder identified a knowledge gap in relation to challenges faced by refugee background stakeholders in the labour market:

> *…tying in with equality, and also ethnicity and race potentially, you know, it does seem to be difficult for families who are resettled to at least initially access work that would be in their preferred area or even you know sometimes work in general. But I think it's definitely relevant to add you know work that the family member or the refugee background stakeholder might actually want to work in as well. And I suppose it does seem that there are potential barriers in that regard and of course that has an effect on equality but again you know to what extent that that is as a result of their status as a refugee or their race or ethnicity for example isn't something that I have measured or know.* *(programme stakeholder)*

As discussed above, in the focus group with women admitted under Community Sponsorship the intersection of racialised inequality, religion and gender was felt to create particular challenges:

> *I feel wearing Hijab make it more difficult for women to find work as work involves a lot of interaction between men and women. I feel that they try to avoid Hijabi women.* *(refugee background stakeholder)*

While this participant did not explicitly frame the issue as a matter of inequality, she commented that "work opportunities are fewer for women who wear Hijab" particularly in respect of public-facing roles such as working as a waitress. In response to this another resettled participant, demonstrating recognition that women who practice Hijab could be penalized for not conforming to Western beauty norms, commented on perceptions that "women are better looking and prettier without Hijab".

Other participants raised the issue that some forms of employment might not be compatible with Islamic religious principles, in particular around food and alcohol. This was identified as a particular issue in relation to the hospitality sector which was represented as a sector with a high number of available opportunities. This raises questions in relation to whether

employment supports available are sufficiently sensitive to the particular needs and potential barriers which might arise for refugee background stakeholders and others of refugee/international background, including those related to Muslim religious principles, and suggests that further research on this topic would be beneficial.

Housing Discrimination

The housing model operating in the Community Sponsorship programme relies on accommodation in the Private Rented Sector (PRS). For those on low incomes state housing subsidies are available, the most significant of which is Housing Assistance Payment (HAP). Discrimination against recipients of housing payments in the PRS is a recognised issue in Ireland and receipt of housing benefit has recently been a recognised ground under Equal Status legislation in relation to access to housing services.

It was suggested that the intersection of housing benefit status with race/ethnicity created particular challenges for refugee background stakeholders in accessing housing:

> *it's upon race and then it's upon housing status as well, so you're … doubly hindered. (programme stakeholder)*

As discussed above, structural discrimination in accessing housing benefits was also raised as an issue, specifically lack of sensitivity to the challenges those of refugee/international protection background might experience in relation to supporting documentation for applications.

Programmatic Inequality

Although not framed in those terms, the issue of programmatic inequality was raised in almost all the focus groups and interviews carried out for this study. Based on self-reported views of refugee background stakeholders and reports from other stakeholders, Community Sponsorship appeared to be viewed as less favourable in comparison with the mainstream resettlement programme:

> *…there's a sense among some families especially those who had been in contact with other families say in Lebanon who then came to Ireland via the mainstream resettlement program there's a sense that they kind of pulled the short straw in some respects. (programme stakeholder)*

> *I think there's a lot of drawing comparisons between the Community Sponsorship scheme and the national scheme of bringing refugees in. They would say the other refugees that come in under the national scheme now [have] two cars per family, why is this, you know why can't we? So I just think there are advantages in both schemes. You know they recognise that they are very lucky to have the support of our group to advise them in all the different directions they have to find help you know. But I think it peeves them a bit that they're not getting as much help financially or materially I think. (CSG stakeholder)*

In focus groups with refugee background stakeholders the most salient differences perceived between the two programmes were that under the mainstream programme people were initially accommodated in a hotel and were then allocated *permanent* accommodation by local authorities, while those resettled under Community Sponsorship came straight to a home, but a home which was privately rented. Comparisons centred on two key issues arising from these differences – *opportunities for interaction and forming connections with other Syrians resettled in Ireland* and – a much bigger issue for participants - *security and affordability of housing*.

Although not everyone shared this view, that people resettled under the mainstream programme lived in a congregated setting with other Syrians on arrival in Ireland was seen as an advantage by some participants:

> *….they meet Arabic speakers and find people to talk to. I spend months without any Arabs around me except my family members. I met an Arabic family but we hardly get to meet once a month. (Sponsored person)*

In relation to housing, refugee background stakeholders who participated shared their frustration worry and stress in relation to housing and what one programme stakeholder referred to as a "sense of unfairness" that those resettled under Community Sponsorship were treated differently from those on the mainstream programme:

> *...when arriving to a hotel, one might spend few months there, but you leave the hotel to your permanent house. But under community sponsorship you barely get settled in the first two years, and then you'll have to move out again.*
> *(refugee background stakeholder)*

> *…when people come to hotels, they stay there for a while but later they'll go to good furnished houses with all means of comfort and dignity. We come straight to a house in a community, but with great sense of stress. Will I ever get a house, or will I spend my life paying more than what I can afford? (refugee background stakeholder)*

The views expressed by participants indicated challenges in feeling completely 'at home' in their privately rented housing, due to not being able to make changes such as arranging the furniture to their liking. The insecurity associated with living in the private rented sector – and the knowledge that the CSG supporting them had an obligation to provide housing only for the first two years post-resettlement – appeared understandably to weigh heavily on participants who had been in Ireland for sufficient time to appreciate the impact of the housing crisis:

> *When you tell me, people come to reception centres or hotels, they spend time there, whether it's for 3 months, 4 months, 6 months or even a year, then they get permanent rented accommodation. I didn't feel stressed out at first, for many months I felt so lucky, I had a house, I wasn't locked up in a camp or a hotel … now I have more knowledge about the country. I understand there is a housing crisis in the whole state. I'm part of this crisis.*

Some participants also felt aggrieved that there were additional expenses associated with living in the private rented sector in comparison to the local authority sector, due to the gap between HAP payments and the cost of rent. While directly provided local authority housing and HAP-supported private rental accommodation are both classified as 'social housing' in which a differential model of rent payments applies, HAP recipients are permitted to pay 'top-ups' to private landlords (up to a certain limit) and existing research suggests that some tenants are paying further top-ups beyond this limit (Hearne and Murphy, 2018; Threshold and SVP, 2019)), which seemed to be the case for at least one participant in the current study.

While not raised in focus groups with refugee background stakeholders, the issue of within-programme inequality in relation to housing was addressed by other participants. For instance within the focus group with CSG stakeholders one participant noted that comparisons in the size and quality of accommodation provided were an issue (although not seen as a serious point of contention) within the programme:

> *Some people have got big places. Some people have got gardens. Some haven't. (CSG stakeholder)*

Other participants raised issues related to differential access to services for those resettled under Community Sponsorship depending upon geographical location:

> *There's massive differences in timeframes or for different services being available. For example HAP was really easy to get in Dublin in comparison to I think it was Cork or another county. (CSG stakeholder)*

Geographical disparity was also relevant in respect of direct access to RSO support by families:

> *They will engage with [the RSO] in the normal course …if they need something or if they want to access a service or if they want clarity around something. But that's fine if they're living in [Cork or Dublin]. Not so fine if you're living in [a county] … where you don't have the [Regional] Support Organisation there.*
> *(programme stakeholder)*

For refugee background stakeholders the major disparity *within* the programme was in relation to the experience of support from groups. Although this was a very small sample there were widely diverging experiences of support. One participant noted that while fortunate in the support received personally, not all were so lucky:

> *I met many people who came to Ireland under community sponsorship, as I said it's a matter of luck. Those who God blessed with a strong, well-trained group didn't lack anything. More than one person came under this program are struggling. But I didn't. (refugee background stakeholder)*

Another participant recounted the experience of a support group described as "neither united nor organised". While the group had sourced housing and organised school places, it seems that there was limited support provided after the family had arrived in Ireland. Unmet expectations in relation to practical and emotional support had resulted in feelings of isolation for the family concerned and a sense that they had fared poorly in comparison with others:

> *I had [a] few friends here, so when I arrived they told me about the support they got. But I didn't see any of that. My group lived far away from me; I didn't get much support. I feel neglected. ….. We spent a fortune on taxis because we didn't know bus routes and schedules; we took buses and got lost few times. … I felt very lonely and neglected the first few months.*

It must be noted that this particular family had arrived in Ireland during the Covid-19 pandemic, which might account for some of the problems experienced, but the diverging experiences of support highlight the challenges of ensuring standardised provision within Community Sponsorship programmes.

Unequal power dynamics in relations between sponsors and refugee background stakeholders

To a great extent the success of Community Sponsorship relies upon the quality of the relationship between refugee background stakeholders and volunteer sponsors and there were positive comments about the nature of this relationship from members of CSGs, from refugee background stakeholders and from personnel working in RSOs and other stakeholders. It was clear from the focus group discussions with refugee background stakeholders and volunteer members of CSGs that the relationship was not viewed as purely instrumental but that the affective dimension was highly valued. In the focus group discussion with volunteers the term 'family' was used by a number of participants to describe the relationship between CSGs and those they were supporting:

> *…they are part of my family. They are accepting and understanding.*
> *(refugee background stakeholder)*

> *it's there to be a family. They know we've said it to them we're a family to ye here when your family are away. There's a bond built up. (CSG stakeholder)*

This familial-type relationship was viewed as a key strength of the Community Sponsorship approach to resettlement:

> *that's the beauty of community sponsorship because that's the one thing that you won't get from government support. … You won't get actual genuine love and support. (CSG stakeholder)*

At the same time there was recognition of the inequality inherent in the relationship, particularly in the initial period following resettlement:

> *I would actually say it's not an equal relationship because we're there to sponsor and to help the person coming in and that our job is to balance that up over the two years and to give them that independence. So I don't think its equal initially. That doesn't mean it's not respectful. (CSG stakeholder)*

The *risks* associated with the unequal power dynamics between volunteers and refugee background stakeholders were dealt with in greater detail in interviews with programme stakeholders. Participants reported that to date few serious problems in relations between CSG stakeholders and refugee background stakeholders had been encountered but were conscious of potential challenges which could arise. Reflecting issues addressed in the existing literature on Community Sponsorship, important points raised included concerns about controlling or judgmental behaviour – not uncommon in helping relationships in which the desire to assist can sometimes be accompanied by attachment to particular

outcomes. An example was given in relation to normative expectations in relation to paid employment, an issue which, as discussed above, has been raised in previous research on Community Sponsorship:

> *…there were concerns among the group that for instance one of the family members didn't want to work and quite a lot of judgement in that regard. And it was kind of a benevolent concern, but it was still a slight controlling behaviour.*
> *(programme stakeholder)*

At the other end of the spectrum – *lack* of support from groups can equally be viewed as inhibiting the agency of refugee background stakeholders, particularly in the initial period after arrival. To a great extent the members of the CSG set the terms of engagement, if a group is not functioning effectively or loses members refugee background stakeholders may not receive the necessary support. As referred to above, findings from focus groups with refugee background stakeholders pointed to the distress associated with inadequate support and how difficult it can be for individuals in this situation to get resolution.

As noted above, an issue frequently raised in the literature on resettlement is the expectation that persons with international protection status should be 'grateful' for *any* support received no matter how inadequate or inappropriate. As one of the programme stakeholders in this study noted:

> *The whole mindset across resettlement and community sponsorship not just here, it's across all the jurisdictions but you're getting people out of conflict zones, out of shitholes. There's kind of an attitude – it's not written down anywhere - but anything's better than what they've come from and there should be a sense of gratitude.*

While expectations of gratitude are not unique to volunteers involved in resettlement, the nature of the sponsor-sponsored relationship could heighten the sense that sponsored persons are beneficiaries of charity rather than rights-holders. This point was made by the participant quoted above who noted that while attitudes were "slowly changing", traditionally voluntaristic activity in various domains has been underpinned by "goodwill towards the deserving". One of the key dangers, as another participant commented, is the chilling effect on the ability of sponsored persons to voice their needs, preferences or concerns:

> *Because given the imbalance, you know, refugees might kind of think look they've been so good and they're so nice giving us a house and I can't really complain if I don't want this job that they found for me or whatever ... (programme stakeholder)*

Another programme stakeholder noted that volunteer members of CSGs, who were likely to have dedicated significant time and energy to sourcing housing and preparing for a family's arrival, might subsequently feel resentful if their efforts were not appreciated or take offence if issues or concerns were raised. This participant referred to an example of a particular situation – which it must be noted was represented as an exceptional case - which had arisen in which a CSG appeared to resent any requests from the family they were supporting:

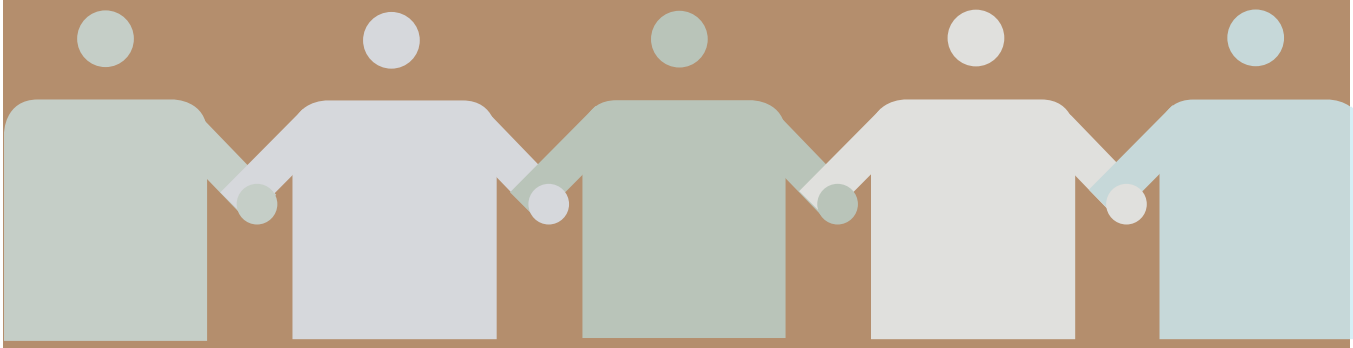
> *… it had got to the stage where the group sort of were unhappy about being asked for anything and the family then felt nervous to ask for anything and weren't voicing what they needed and also weren't able to get it if they did voice it. And I suppose part of that was that you know as a result the family felt that they weren't allowed to ask, and they weren't allowed to have some fairly basic things that they should have reasonably been able to expect.*

It must be emphasised of course that participants were to a great extent discussing risks, rather than problems which had already been identified, however, from the examples provided by programme stakeholders and the experience of some refugee background stakeholders who participated, it is clear that relations do not always conform to the idealised model. Furthermore, as Lim (2019) has previously suggested, the ambiguity of and weight of expectation upon the voluntaristic relationship - whereby volunteers are at once assumed to be in a kin-like relationship and performing the role of resettlement support worker – can create challenges in addressing problems which do arise.

Concluding points

This section has dealt with a number of equality issues for consideration identified by stakeholders in Community Sponsorship Ireland. These include issues related to direct/personal and structural discrimination and disadvantage related to equality grounds with a particular focus on racism and gender and intersecting inequalities and on the domains of employment and housing. It must be noted that findings are limited due to the small number of participants of resettled background – a larger and more diverse sample would likely have brought other equality issues to light. There were also issues raised in relation to programmatic inequality and housing was raised as a key issue here – the reliance on the private rented sector as a source of accommodation resulting in unfavourable comparisons with the mainstream programme and a sense of injustice among at least some of those resettled under Community Sponsorship. The section also dealt with unequal power dynamics between refugee background stakeholders and sponsors and the potential problems associated with this in the absence of requisite safeguards.

Oversight, accountability and empowerment



Equality Matters in Community Sponsorship

CONSIDERATIONS FOR OBTAINING FEEDBACK FROM STAKEHOLDERS

The discussion on equality issues points to a variety of concerns to be taken into consideration in the planning, implementation and ongoing review and development of resettlement programmes. There was a broad consensus among participants in this study in relation to the need for mechanisms for minimising risks and identifying and responding to issues and problems which might arise, in addition to the need for ongoing monitoring of the effectiveness of the programme. The themes of accountability and empowerment were very important in discussions with the various stakeholders who in general advocated putting in place formal structures to ensure protection of rights and oversight of the programme. Cutting across these was the theme of recognition of diversity and inclusion. As is clear from the findings presented below, there was a variety of views among stakeholders as well as a broadly shared recognition of the inherent complexity in putting in place empowering and inclusive structures and processes.

Rights protection and oversight

Community Sponsorship programmes are unusual in the heavy reliance placed upon private individuals acting in a voluntary capacity to deliver a support service. As noted above it is anticipated that volunteer sponsors will occupy multiple roles in the lives of refugee background stakeholders. This creates challenges in terms of accountability and in ensuring that the rights of refugee background stakeholders are realised in practice. Among programme and policy stakeholders who took part in this study there was broad agreement that greater formalisation of structures and processes was needed as the scale of the programme increased. The challenge identified was to achieve an appropriate balance between informality and formality to ensure that the relationships upon which the programme depended could flourish, but that there was also some oversight and accountability.

> *…while there has to be a good degree of informality I think because that's the nature of how people interact and that's the kind of strength of this model there also has to be some aspect of formality so there has to be a balance you know.*
> *(programme stakeholder)*

The need for more formalised oversight was expressed most strongly in the focus group with volunteer members of CSGs - two participants suggested that based on their own experience existing provisions were in need of enhancement:

> *…if this is going to develop even more over the country, I feel like somebody should be checking for legitimacy as well. Because for example we had I think two members*

of the Department of Justice walked our family out, handed them over and I've never heard or seen from them again. And I doubt that they know how well looked after our family are. Now like I said a slight dark thought, but I feel that there needs to be a follow-up of have they remained in housing or did they end up in a worse situation. Have we been able to financially support them. Have we stuck to our promise. Because again we're not regulated. Nobody is watching us. We are purely members of the public helping out friends essentially. And I feel that that needs to be checked. *(CSG stakeholder)*

…Like we may have thrown them into a rat-infested apartment. Nobody knows. *(CSG stakeholder)*

While was not a significant focus across interviews and focus groups, concerns around the lack of oversight of the work of RSOs were raised by one programme stakeholder, who referred to the need to ensure that a standardised approach was being taken in the training of groups. It should be noted that at the time we collected data a training module to be utilised by all RSOs was in development which should promote a standardised approach, although without necessarily removing the need perceived by some participants for greater oversight of the RSO role, an issue explored further in relation to monitoring below.

Information on rights and entitlements

Persons resettled in Ireland – as is the case for all those with refugee status - have roughly equivalent rights and entitlements to citizens in most respects. The importance of ensuring that refugee background stakeholders were fully informed of their rights and entitlements was emphasised by a number of participants. Referring to the dependency of refugee background stakeholders on groups, volunteers argued that this could be avoided if there was greater clarity around entitlements to services and more accessible information provided:

You know they come here and it's all about trust. You know so certainly our experiences were sorting out you know medical card application, was sorting out getting on the housing list, was sorting out GNIB, we're doing all of that and the person really hasn't a clue what we're doing. She's just trusting us… *(CSG stakeholder)*

Like these are all adults who have lived full lives and have done very well to get this far. They don't need us to mind them but that's what's happening because they haven't got that clarity. *(CSG stakeholder)*

The importance of ensuring that refugee background stakeholders were fully informed of their rights and entitlements was also emphasised by programme stakeholders. As one put it, information on rights and entitlements was "an important part of the entire empowerment piece of the programme" and "something that [should be] just built in as part of the programme and from the outset". This participant noted that the training provided to groups included information on the rights of refugee background stakeholders and encouraged groups to inform families, but argued that this mechanism could not be fully relied upon, and that information should be provided directly to refugee background stakeholders as a matter of course:

> *So, you know, in an ideal world all groups would be super empowering and very eager to ensure that the family is aware of their rights … but I suppose that's of course no guarantee that that actually happens. So I would say you know its informal as a mechanism goes... even if it was something simple like a booklet or whatever it was, but you know that perhaps there needs to be sort of maybe more information directed at families rather than going through the filter of the group alone. (programme stakeholder)*

The role of the RSO in informing families of rights was described as generally limited to situations where problems had already arisen, which one participant suggested was "not as proactive as it ought to be in order to safeguard rights" (programme stakeholder).

The need to provide information in an *accessible* format was emphasised by a resettled participant who discussed the importance of delivering information on rights and entitlements in the first language of refugee background stakeholders. This participant also recommended that a booklet or some other form of physical resource should be provided to resettled people, so that they had information easily at hand when required.

An important aspect of empowerment of refugee background stakeholders related to protections against racism and discrimination. While there was seen to be scope to enhance the training provided to CSGs on how to identify and respond to racism, there was also a view that refugee background stakeholders should be provided with the necessary information to identify and report issues and access support independently of the CSG:

> *…it's so important that perhaps as part of an information pack or similar that the family directly knows about those mechanisms as well and also knows what is and isn't. Coming back to rights you know that, just because, for example, to put it sort of loosely, you know, just because you're a refugee in Ireland doesn't mean you have to accept it when people say things to you or are racist, you know, and even just being aware of what you absolutely can complain about or report or bring to a group*

> *member, if that's something that a family member would want to be comfortable with and how to do that. So, I think that could be improved on … it could just be more ensured that they are aware of their rights in that regard and their ability to report and how to report and absolutely be encouraged to do it if they want to do it and to bring it forward if they want to say it to someone you know.*
> *(programme stakeholder)*

A refugee background stakeholder suggested that "training for the newcomers" around racism could be provided in addition to ensuring that CSG stakeholders had received the necessary training:

> *We were just saying racism now and discrimination are done very smartly in almost undetectable ways. So maybe it's good to talk with refugees about their rights, about their entitlements, what mightn't be acceptable for people to say to them, what kind of jokes maybe aren't acceptable, what kind of discrimination they should look out to or be careful to. And also, I know it's maybe very very hard to detect, but there's also a matter of culture differences. Some things you might say It's only a cultural difference like you said, it's not racism. (refugee background stakeholder)*

The comments here resonate strongly with the point referred to earlier from Virruell Fuentes et al (2012) which underlines the importance of ensuring that migrants who might be newly positioned as racialised are provided with the skills to identify racism.

Raising issues and making complaints

It is clear from the discussions above that stakeholders in CSI are very aware of the potential for issues and problems to arise. This point was explicitly made by some participants when discussing how concerns and complaints should be dealt with:

> *You're dealing with humans. You're dealing with people. Stuff will go wrong.*
> *(programme stakeholder)*

> *…we're all human and something can go wrong and could go wrong.*
> *(CSG stakeholder)*

Complaints and concerns in the pilot phase and subsequent rollout of Community Sponsorship were dealt with informally, the expectation being that if refugee background stakeholders had an issue to raise, they would approach the CSG supporting them in the first instance, with recourse to the RSO if necessary.

A programme stakeholder noted that due to the small scale of the programme to date, refugee background stakeholders were likely to have had direct contact with RSO personnel

> *So I think you know it's not perfect but even just being aware of the mechanisms you know that the family can say for instance contact the RSO, knowing who the RSO is and knowing that they have every right to do that if they feel they're not being heard ...*
> *(programme stakeholder)*

Another programme stakeholder noted that contact between RSOs and refugee background stakeholders might be more limited as the programme scales up. Furthermore some resettled families had been accommodated at quite a significant distance from the relevant RSO. Similar concerns were raised in the focus group with volunteer members of CSGs where it was noted that refugee background stakeholders would not necessarily have direct contact with RSO personnel. There was concern about the lack of a formal mechanism for complaints by refugee background stakeholders who encountered difficulties with their group:

> *I think they should be able to do something without our knowledge. If they were actually saying this group is doing everything that's wrong here … And you'd like to think that they'd [resettled people] have the mechanism to say, 'okay I want to make a complaint' or 'I want to check something out even'.*
> *(CSG stakeholder)*

At the time we collected data, work was ongoing on drafting a formal protocol for management of concerns and complaints which apparently builds on existing practice. Should refugee background stakeholders wish to raise a concern or make a complaint, the first point of contact is the relevant CSG, with perhaps one group member appointed to serve as a designated complaints officer. If necessary, the concern or complaint will subsequently refer the issue to the relevant RSO, with the possibility of further escalation to the IRPP. Similarly, if groups have a concern or complaint, it should be raised with the RSO and escalated to the IRPP if necessary. One programme stakeholder identified a need for greater clarity on how issues were to be dealt with by RSOs, noting that RSOs had relatively limited authority to put in place solutions where serious problems had arisen:

> *…it may not necessarily be evidently resolved within a day or two so the RSO may need to play a more active role in just monitoring how that goes and providing ongoing mediation support or other kinds of support. … actually having a bit more of a framework in place for that would be good and a sense of the RSO's responsibilities and at what point then it might be escalated again if need be. it's not being resolved again the RSO can then refer it to the Irish Refugee Protection Programme who*

> *obviously have ultimate authority… who then can advise on a solution. But again to what extent they have capacity to do this is another question. They're enormously underfunded and understaffed, I think. … as the RSO you have the benefit of having a relationship with the family, a relationship with the group and more of a sense of what's happening overall. But we don't have the authority that the IRPP do in terms of resolving a situation. If it comes to the point where we're thinking oh you know for instance this group isn't working out anymore, we don't have the authority to just disband that group single-handedly for instance or provide alternative supports to the family or do any of that. (programme stakeholder)*

On the issue of whether there was a need for an *independent* mechanism for complaints and grievances within CSI there were mixed views from programme stakeholders:

> *…it's not big enough. It's still finding its feet. Stuff is being addressed as quickly as it can be. It's very much a learning space at the moment as well for everybody. You know yourself, when you formalise and put even more layers of bureaucracy into stuff it will confuse things. (programme stakeholder)*

> *I think it would be ideal I suppose to have as many at least theoretically … having as many avenues as possible to complain to avoid the risk of coming to a dead end or it not necessarily being dealt with properly you know whether it's a human rights body or similar or you know some kind of Ombudsman type scenario. I think there should really be I suppose externally ideally if anything. … in theory absolutely it could be a really positive thing. …I think you know again anything that sort of enhanced the rights of the stakeholders means that their rights are safeguarded, and they're supported which is surely a positive thing. But I suppose I'm also not unaware that it would be a highly contentious thing potentially. (programme stakeholder)*

In the focus groups with resettled people, participants shared experiences of raising issues with the CSGs supporting them and with RSOs. These included issues such as dissatisfaction with the housing provided, as well as issues directly related to the adequacy of the support relationship with the CSG. The latter was raised directly and informally with group members rather than with the RSO and it was reported that "nothing changed". None of the participants had made what could be described as a formal complaint.

There were mixed views among participants about the value of an independent mechanism for raising issues, making complaints and/or providing feedback on the programme, which appeared to reflect mixed experiences of support received:

> *I think it's rather shameful just overtake my group and talk directly to a higher authority. I would feel like I'm avoiding them. (refugee background stakeholder)*

> *I have a different opinion. I think it's a very good idea to have a website that you can go into to give positive or negative feedback. (refugee background stakeholder)*

It should be noted that one refugee background stakeholder identified the value of a mechanism which could be shared with the mainstream resettlement programme:

> *…it's important to have something like that available. There should be a website for things like that. Not only for us. Resettlement scheme refugees also face a lot of problems and might not know where to go or what to do; if the social worker responsible for them is busy, they'll be left with no support.*
> *(refugee background stakeholder)*

Early intervention and risk management

Programme stakeholders emphasised the importance of addressing any issues which might arise for groups and families as early as possible. Under the programme structures RSOs have responsibility for supporting and checking in with CSGs. In reference to risks referred to above around unequal dynamics between sponsors and sponsored, the role of the RSO in "stay[ing] on top" of issues and promoting positive communication was identified as an important safeguard by a programme stakeholder. Referring to instances where an RSO had been involved in resolving issues between a CSG and a resettled family, one programme stakeholder identified "miscommunication" as a potential source of problems. Accordingly, the importance of *high-quality* interpretation in supporting effective communication was emphasised.

A need was identified by a programme stakeholder to "regularise" visits from RSOs to sponsor groups *and* to refugee background stakeholders – six monthly intervals was suggested – to carry out a "fairly informal check-in". At the same time, this stakeholder cautioned that not all refugee background stakeholders would necessarily have equal opportunity to contribute through this kind of informal mechanism:

> *… if you are say doing an in-person… having a conversation in-person… of course again it happens that there tends to be especially through interpreters there tends to be kind of one spokesperson rather than everyone necessarily contributing. So that might not as I say access all of the voices that you might want to access.*
> *(programme stakeholder)*

The comment here suggests that a check-in might best be carried out by someone with the requisite language skills to communicate in the first language of resettled persons without

the assistance of an interpreter, to lessen the risk that one voice in a resettled family might dominate.

Refugee background stakeholders who took part in the study also emphasised a proactive approach to checking in with families. A recommendation that families had regular interaction with an independent person came with the caveat that this should be 'friendly' and 'informal':

> *I think since most refugees come from third world countries and we come with a huge burden of being under authority and it's not a very friendly one. So I think the reporting is a heavy process. It's more like a formal communication. And the safety net just friendly visitation and a friendly process just so the family won't feel like they're left alone under the mercy of the sponsors. Because that could happen. It might happen once in every hundredth family but still it can happen...*
> *(refugee background stakeholder)*

The importance of thorough screening of groups was emphasised by another refugee background stakeholder, who commented on the importance of ensuring that groups were fully appraised of and had the capacity to deal with the commitment involved in sponsorship.

Also related to taking a proactive approach to managing issues, a policy stakeholder commented on the value of utilising a "risk register" for matters of potential concern. An example provided was where rental housing allocated to refugee background stakeholders was owned by a member of the CSG, which, while not regarded as a conflict of interest *per se,* was viewed as something which should be formally recorded so that risks arising could be identified and managed in a transparent manner.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Research: gathering data from stakeholders

There was fairly general agreement among all those who participated about the importance of monitoring and evaluation for the purposes of accountability and for policy-learning.

As an accountability mechanism, the view was that monitoring and evaluation would help ensure that appropriate structures, policies and procedures had been put in place to limit the scope for "discretionary judgement" and "muddling through":

> *We constantly do things on a discretionary basis. We constantly muddle through. We don't allocate sufficient preparatory work. We don't build the appropriate*

> *mechanisms. And you know 80 per cent of the time we get through. 20 per cent of the time it's a catastrophic failure you know, catastrophic failure and people are silenced, abused and left to fend for themselves you know.*
> *(policy stakeholder)*

In respect of policy learning there was a strong appetite for evidence to inform programme review and development. Learning from "successes and failures" was viewed as essential in supporting scaling-up of the CS programme.

> *I think it's very important because we're in a kind of a funny stage now in the programme because yes we had the initial evaluation and now, we're kind of moving into this as a more permanent programme and we're trying to scale and grow it, you know. So, I think without having that monitoring piece you know we need to make sure that if we are scaling and growing something that it is as effective as it possibly can be and it works for everybody you know.*
> *(programme stakeholder)*

There was also a view that learning from the Community Sponsorship programme could be beneficial for the mainstream resettlement programme, which as one participant noted has never been formally evaluated.

Monitoring data/ reporting and feedback

Commenting on the lack of a systemic approach to gathering data for monitoring purposes, a policy stakeholder suggested that systematic reporting – a twice-yearly basis was suggested - could be built into the service-level agreement with RSOs. This could incorporate monitoring data, potentially including baseline assessment data obtained on arrival of refugee background stakeholders, operational data including indicators on access to services as well as data on integration outcomes. This recommendation aligns with the findings discussed above in relation to the oversight role of RSOs and the need for regular communication between RSOs and groups and with families.

In relation to gauging the effectiveness of the programme, key issues raised were the quality of the support provided by RSOs to Community Sponsorship Groups and the quality of the support provided by CSGs to refugee background stakeholders, and whether support was provided in line with a rights-based approach. There was a great deal of interest in obtaining feedback on these issues from Community Sponsorship Groups and most especially, refugee background stakeholders.

Obtaining feedback from CSGs on the adequacy of the training and preparation provided for working with refugee background stakeholders was identified as important by programme stakeholders:

> *… it would be interesting to hear from sponsor groups what they think the RSO how they think we're doing and what we could do better. Because I don't think they realise. It's all fine when everybody's training but its only when the families come … sometimes it's like a tsunami. And at that stage the relationship is kind of petering out, do you know what I mean, it's not as intense as it was at the start. So it would be very helpful if we could hear from the sponsor groups as to what more we could do you know what I mean to support them. (programme stakeholder)*

Feedback from CSGs was also viewed as a useful way of identifying wider issues related to interaction with social services and government agencies, as well as a mechanism for monitoring progress made in supporting families to achieve particular milestones in their settlement journey.

In the focus group with members of CSGs there was a lengthy discussion on the importance of regular feedback – monthly was suggested – and of the most appropriate feedback mechanism to employ. One of the participants in this focus group argued for the use of a flowchart or process diagram which would serve the multiple functions of (1) guiding the work of CSGs; (2) promoting transparency and clarity; (3) producing data on progress against specified indicators/reaching milestones and (4) identifying blocks or barriers encountered:

> *So we're all doing the same thing. This is a repeated process, so we need a process diagram. And then if you have that what are the dependencies and then under that you can see what is working and what isn't working because you've got a standard process piece that everybody has to work to because we all are doing the same thing effectively. And then you can start to see where the blocks are in that flow chart in that process and that that can then be fed back… (CSG stakeholder)*

An analogous point was made by a programme stakeholder in pointing to the value of a defined set of indicators to measure the progress of groups:

> *… just have set markers as well about how groups are working over a period as well, so that you can spot the gaps in the Programme. (programme stakeholder)*

The importance of obtaining feedback from refugee background stakeholders on their views and experiences of the programme was emphasised by programme and policy stakeholders, 'voice' being viewed as a key principle which should inform monitoring, evaluation and research. There were concerns however raised about practical and ethical

barriers to obtaining data. In particular, the small number of people admitted under the programme and consequent likelihood of research fatigue was raised by one stakeholder:

> *Not a large amount of people and there's a lot of requests for wider things coming in, so I think people have been very polite …, but I'd imagine that the families …. are getting frustrated by the amount of requests… (programme stakeholder)*

Participants also commented that issues discussed above in relation to unequal power dynamics represented a potential barrier to obtaining credible data:

> *I think probably the biggest challenge is that idea that like it or not there is that real power imbalance. So, it's that equality piece. And I think there may be a reticence. We seem to be sensing that of refugee families that there may be a reticence around critiquing or criticising anything you know. I think that's probably a big challenge. (programme stakeholder)*

Concern with avoiding potential upset was evident in the comments of one of the participants in the focus group with refugee background stakeholders. The willingness of this participant to speak about the negative experiences encountered was on condition of strict anonymity and confidentiality:

> *…they are volunteers. They formed the group for my family and me. Maybe they didn't know better. I don't like the idea of making them feel hurt or offended. I don't ever want them to know. (refugee background stakeholder)*

In focus groups with refugee background stakeholders, discussions around providing feedback on the programme brought to the fore that the concept of 'feedback' is somewhat culturally specific. While in Ireland a request for feedback has become a taken-for-granted feature of provision of goods and services, peer researchers identified that this is not the case in Syria. Explaining the concept of feedback thus took a little time in these focus groups. As noted above, the issue of providing feedback was discussed in these focus groups in conjunction with raising issues or providing complaints which may have further complicated the issue, but for at least some participants there was interest in an opportunity to provide both "positive and negative feedback".

In reflecting on their motivation to take part in the current research study participants of refugee background expressed their desire to help improve the programme and to support its expansion:

> *I don't wish for anyone to go through what I had to go through. I mean, to correct mistakes of the program. (refugee background stakeholder)*

> *I participated in this study hoping to bring more support to the program so more people can come under it. (refugee background stakeholder)*

These comments – in which the impetus to feed into programme review and development is clear - underline a point made by other participants in the study that it is not sufficient to merely solicit the views of persons resettled under the programme, there must be a commitment to actually engaging with and utilising the data provided. In the words of one programme stakeholder "there has to be a receptive audience", while a policy stakeholder emphasised that there must be commitment to *closing* the feedback loop:

> *But you know with a feedback loop per say it has to be closed so it has to actually feed into project design. It has to actually feed into how things are rolled out.*
> *(policy stakeholder)*

A final point on the issue of motivation, a refugee background stakeholder raised the issue of financial remuneration for providing feedback or taking part in research. In this discussion payment was represented in terms of recognition of the value of the contribution made by participants: "the gesture of recognizing that they're giving their time and efforts like" (refugee background stakeholder).

Measuring outcomes and impact

As noted above, a key focus in research and evaluation on resettlement is on the effects on the lives of those resettled. In this study, reflecting the existing literature on resettlement in Ireland and elsewhere, discussions around measuring results centred on two key themes – *independence* and *integration*, viewed as interrelated.

> *…the overarching measure of success is that the family or individual you know I'm not saying that they've divorced from the group, in fact probably the opposite but that they've become members of the community and neighbours and they may still have some needs, but also, they aren't dependent on the group to manage their own life in Ireland and make their own decisions. (programme stakeholder)*

Programme stakeholders advocated a multidimensional and 'holistic' approach to measuring integration, highlighting that successful integration involved more than economic indicators and would look somewhat different for different people:

> *…much more holistic than as I say just career and just language acquisition. I think it has to be tailored to the individual, the family or individual. But yeah, the concept of wellbeing I think and independence. I didn't really mention wellbeing that much, but I think that's obviously so key. (programme stakeholder)*

> *I think it has to come down to also what the particular family and individual wants and sees as success. (programme stakeholder)*

While emphasising the subjective aspects of 'successful integration', programme stakeholders also referred to standard indicators which they viewed as particularly important as facilitators or means, specifically access to language supports and housing supports.

A number of programme and policy stakeholders identified longitudinal research as important for gauging the impact of the programme over the longer term. There was a sense that the newness of the programme and its small scale provided an ideal opportunity to track outcomes over time in a way which hadn't been done in Ireland previously.

A refugee background stakeholder also emphasised the importance of evaluating outcomes for those resettled under Community Sponsorship over the long-term, placing particular emphasis on indicators in relation to language and employment and pointing to the importance of gender disaggregation:

> *If you let's say you're you're doing the study again in 10 years and we're all still here and we're like …300 400 families and none of us like - only a minority - secured a long-term good income employment. … all the women are still unemployed and speak no English ….*

In respect of measuring results over time, key challenges identified related to costs associated with conducting longitudinal research of this kind, although one policy stakeholder argued that it was possible to carry out research cost-effectively, for example by drawing on the RSO personnel employed on the programme to gather data.

> *...annual surveys can be done you know through the NGOs that are working in the area. … You can do it through the people you have as long as they're trained and know what they're doing, and you've got someone to do the analysis.*
> *(policy stakeholder)*

Another challenge raised by the policy stakeholder quoted above related to the willingness of those resettled under the programme to take part in research over the longer term:

> *So, there's a point in time where you're no longer a resettled refugee, you're just a part of the community. You might have that in part of your personality and part of your identity, but it doesn't have to be your primary one. I think that if you're a participant in a programme like this or any other programme that deals with the movement of people from a traumatic or conflict environment there has to be a*

> *point in time where they can just assume their anonymity and not be involved you know. (policy stakeholder)*

The value of comparing outcomes for persons resettled under Community Sponsorship with those admitted under the mainstream resettlement programme was raised by some participants. While only the two 'policy stakeholders' commented on this issue in any depth, there was quite a bit of divergence in the opinions offered. While one of the policy stakeholders argued that there was a valuable opportunity to compare outcomes across the two programmes, the other sounded a strong note of caution. For this stakeholder there was a need for a "standardised approach" to measuring integration which could be utilised in monitoring and evaluation of both programmes but given "sensitivities" around comparison, as well as practical challenges in "comparing like with like", there was an argument that direct comparisons should be avoided.

Participatory research

Reflecting the emphasis placed on 'voice' as a guiding principle of monitoring, evaluation and research, some policy and programme stakeholders commented positively on the use of participatory methodologies for evaluating impact:

> *I think a participatory approach to understanding the impact on beneficiaries is critical. (policy stakeholder)*

At the same time, it was recognised by this participant that participatory research was a complex undertaking:

> *…it's how you do it and that it's not tokenistic and that you do it the right way, none of which are straightforward questions you know*

A programme stakeholder commented on involvement of refugee background stakeholders in the design and implementation of monitoring and evaluation. According to this participant, given the sensitivity of the issues and potential for re-traumatisation, this level of participation required careful navigation of ethical issues around consent and avoidance of harm, which would necessarily require investment in training of those taking part in the study.

The need to recognise heterogeneity among resettled populations and attend to diversity in social characteristics, experiences and attitudes was raised:

> *You know we have an idea that we can create the perfect way for people to participate but it may not be so straightforward you know. So, to give you an*

> *example some of the community groups just assume, you know, if you're from Syria … you want to know Syrians... So, all Syrians are the same. All Irish are the same. All English are the same or whatever you know. So, I think we can homogenise it. (policy stakeholder)*

In respect of attending to diversity, it was cautioned that the small scale of the programme threw up particular challenges:

> *What if there's one person out of the whole of the resettled who identifies as for example transgender or, you know,.. how do they feed back or do they even want to. They're really quite complicated questions. (policy stakeholder)*

While not a fully participatory study, the research on which this report is based was informed by participatory principles and offers some potential for learning. That the research team included two members with direct experience of Community Sponsorship was invaluable and their role included providing input into supporting documents and focus group schedules, facilitating focus groups with refugee background stakeholders, reflecting on preliminary findings and inputting into the draft report. That focus groups with refugee background stakeholders were carried out through the first language of participants and by researchers with in-depth knowledge of the issues appears to have been a key factor in the quality and richness of the data obtained and in the openness with which participants of refugee background discussed problems encountered. At the same time, it is important to be conscious that not all participants – and perhaps especially those disadvantaged on equality grounds will wish to engage with researchers from the same cultural background (see e.g. Ghoershi, 2008 and Jacobsen and Landau (2003) both cited in Marlowe et al, 2015).

In our study participants in the focus groups with persons of refugee background expressed a preference for in-person methods of data collection for research purposes, however the need to have a range of different methods of data collection and the possibility of providing views anonymously to facilitate those whose voices might not be often heard was emphasised by policy/programme stakeholders.

Consultation, Peer Support and Representation

As with the mainstream resettlement programme in Ireland there appears to be little by way of formal mechanisms in place for persons resettled under Community Sponsorship to input their views and insights into strategy and policy development. At least this was the case at the time data was collected. While the views of CSG stakeholders have been sought through formal consultation, to date we understand that there has not been formal

consultation with refugee background stakeholders. CSGs also appear to have far greater opportunities for informal input into the programme either via RSOs or through direct contact between individual CSGS and the IRPP. An informal peer support network for CSGs has been established which in addition to serving as a mechanism for mutual support appears to also provide a forum for CSGs to raise issues at programme level, potentially supporting advocacy efforts. An equivalent network for resettled people admitted under the programme had not been established.

A number of the programme and policy stakeholders who took part commented on the advocacy activity of CSGs. There was a view that the experience of sponsoring a family sharply illuminated the challenges faced by migrants in Ireland in navigating systems and provided new insight into the impact of the housing crisis. This understandably provided motivation to lobby on behalf of resettled families:

> *…the really tough realities of certain systems is a shock to people and they want to lobby for what's best for the family that they've been working with.*
> *(programme stakeholder)*

Some stakeholders expressed the view that CSGs were in a stronger position to lobby than the resettled families they were working with and could leverage their economic, cultural and social capital to raise issues at the political and programme levels. In the absence of formal mechanisms for participation in decision-making, the advocacy efforts of CSGs offered the "most powerful" – if indirect – means by which resettled people could exert influence.

> *And what tends to happen is I suppose through sponsorship then and through communities engaging with families, communities themselves can become very strong advocates for the refugee family. .. there's been no formal platform established for refugees. … I think that's the route that's probably the most powerful as well for families to directly link in. (programme stakeholder)*

Lobbying efforts to date have reportedly focused on two key issues – housing and family reunification. As discussed above the issue of family reunification – closely related to the role of CSGs in 'naming' - has been a significant and somewhat contentious issue in relation to Community Sponsorship in other jurisdictions (see for instance Labman, Hyndman et al. 2019; Pearlman 2021). There were mixed views from programme and policy stakeholders in this study around advocacy on this issue. While one programme stakeholder – sympathetic to a potential role for Community Sponsorship in responding to "deficits in the current model for family reunification" - expressed the view that advocacy on the part of CSGs could help bring about positive change, this view was not shared by all. A policy stakeholder

commented on the potential unfairness of utilising Community Sponsorship as a vehicle for family reunification and recommended that the understandable desire to respond to challenges experienced by resettled families around reunification with family members was best met through the existing family reunification mechanisms:

> *A lot of people involved in this, you know, want to respond to the needs they see, and you know when they hear someone asking for help, want to be able to respond to that, which I get. But I think the way to do that is through family unification programme, expanding the definitions in the International Protection Act.*
> *(policy stakeholder)*

A more general point in relation to advocacy and representation related to the possibilities for *self*-advocacy and the importance of mechanisms by which refugee background stakeholders – "the main stakeholders in all of this" could express views and promote their interests:

> *I think there is an issue generally with advocacy for families … There are some academics who believe that actually community sponsorship kind of perpetuates stereotypes because it insulates families … you know with the use of a welcome group … so they don't feel like they can speak up and all of that. So, there is definitely a group basis for a representative advocacy group coming together, I think.*
> *(programme stakeholder)*

From an equality perspective the question of whether views and issues raised in such a forum would necessarily be representative was an important concern raised. One policy stakeholder referred to the risk of 'elite capture' in the case of a representative group not formally aligned with the programme structure:

> *I'm not sure it would actually get necessarily vulnerable populations, because they're also heterogeneous, so you know there's a wide variety of them and also, they may not want to be involved you know. Perhaps if you manage to get out of Syria into Lebanon and you manage to get out of Lebanon into Ireland and you're, you know, a young gay male or you're trans … the last thing you might want to do is actually be involved in an advocacy group you know which is essentially what it would become. If it doesn't have a project structure it becomes an advocacy group and then that's where the elite capture comes in and silences people who you're trying to give a voice to you know. … You really have to be careful you know.*
> *(policy stakeholder)*

These comments further illustrate the challenges of attending to diversity in the context of a very small programme and the care required to put structures and processes in place which would allow persons disadvantaged on equality grounds to safely share their views if they so wished.

Other participants referred to the potential value of a peer network group which would not necessarily - or exclusively –serve as a vehicle for self-advocacy. For one programme stakeholder, in addition to providing opportunities for unmediated communication *from* refugee background stakeholders a peer network would allow for direct provision of information and support *to* the resettled population, offering the potential to "empower through … direct engagement" (programme stakeholder).

The value of a peer network as a source of mutual support was noted by another programme stakeholder:

> *I mean from when they arrive that there'd be a group, a space that they can join …. people might just chat. So somebody might bring up saying I've no idea where to get my kid's school uniform. It doesn't matter what it is. And then somebody else might say well actually and just give them that information so they're not always reliant on your sponsorship group either and you're broadening your own network of support. (programme stakeholder)*

It was recognised that not all those resettled would wish to be part of such a network - as one refugee background stakeholder put it - "Some people after they leave their countries, they never want to meet their country mates". A programme stakeholder emphasised the importance of choice – of providing people with the *option* of a mechanism for connecting with resettled peers if they so wished. Participants identified potential issues and challenges in relation to the establishment of a peer network for resettled people. This included the matter of who might take responsibility for initiating such a network and whether the network should be formally established as part of the programme. On a very practical level, the lack of a centralised mechanism for contacting families resettled around the country was raised as a barrier inhibiting personnel employed within the CSI structures in supporting the establishment of a peer network or indeed to carrying out consultation with resettled persons. RSOs by definition operate on a regional level only, while the National Support Organisation does not have direct a direct role in working with resettled persons and contact is mediated by CSGs. Some participants referred to efforts in at least one region to bring families resettled under CSI together for a social activity. This raises the possibility that coordination of efforts across RSOs to provide opportunities for interested resettled persons to connect and could provide the basis for building a peer network nationally.

Concluding points

The issues dealt with this section relate to programme oversight, review and development and how to most effectively ensure that those intended to benefit from the programme can input into these important processes. Community Sponsorship in Ireland is at an early stage of development and structures and processes are evolving as the programme scales up. The findings reported above suggest that stakeholders are in general in favour of greater formalisation of structures and processes and putting in place more robust mechanisms to safeguard the rights of persons resettled under the programme. There appeared to be a perceived need for greater oversight of and support for CSGs and, relatedly, for a more proactive role for RSOs in engaging directly with families.

Something which came through strongly related to the right to information, obviously a crucial enabling right, without which refugee background stakeholders will experiencing difficulties in realising rights more generally. Ensuring that families were directly informed of their rights and entitlements in an accessible way, including how to complain, raise issues or report racism was identified as an important issue by participants.

There was broad agreement on the need for ongoing monitoring and evaluation and some useful suggestions around regular reporting from CSG groups and from RSOs and on obtaining feedback from refugee background stakeholders for monitoring purposes. In respect of monitoring impact, participants emphasised the need for subjective as well as objective indicators of outcomes for refugee background stakeholders.

Finally, there was general support for the idea of either a representative forum or a peer network for refugee background stakeholders, although a number of practical constraints were identified, in particular, lack of a centralised mechanism for contacting persons resettled under CSI.

Overview and Recommendations

Equality Matters in Community Sponsorship

CONSIDERATIONS FOR OBTAINING FEEDBACK FROM STAKEHOLDERS

Community Sponsorship Ireland is a relatively new and still small-scale resettlement programme established in Ireland in the context of unprecedently high rates of displacement globally and against the background of a crisis in housing supply and affordability locally. The programme relies heavily on the initiative and effort of unpaid volunteers and can be viewed as an expression of public solidarity with those forced to flee their homes to escape conflict or persecution. While this can be seen as a strength of the programme, resettlement under Community Sponsorship throws up various equality issues to be considered in programme design, implementation and review and some distinct challenges in how to identify and respond to such issues.

This report has drawn attention to a number equality issues to be considered in the planning, implementation, oversight and evaluation of Community Sponsorship, including issues related to discrimination and disadvantage on one or more equality grounds; what we have termed 'programmatic inequality' and the related issue of spatial inequality; and issues related to unequal power dynamics within Community Sponsorship programmes. To a greater or lesser extent these have been raised in the international literature on Private and Community Sponsorship and all were raised by participants in the current study.

In relation to discrimination and disadvantage on equality grounds, racialised hate and discrimination, the intersection of gender with racialised inequalities on the basis of religion, ethnicity/nationality and the intersection of housing status with racialised inequalities were identified as the most significant issues likely to impact persons resettled under Community Sponsorship. Concerns about knowledge gaps in relation to the extent and form of racialised inequality encountered by refugee background stakeholders was raised as an issue and relatedly knowledge gaps were identified as to how CSGs were responding to issues encountered in local communities or reported to them by refugee background stakeholders.

The issue of programmatic inequality came to the fore most strongly in relation to housing, with participants identifying comparison between the housing model of the mainstream resettlement programme and that of CSI as a significant point of contention. Some participants of refugee background also viewed opportunities to build relationships with resettled compatriots as a favourable aspect of the mainstream programme.

A number of issues were raised in relation to unequal power dynamics within CSI, in particular unequal dynamics between members of CSGs and the refugee background stakeholders whom they were supporting. This included risks of controlling or judgemental behaviour as well as risks related to inadequate support. That the altruistic basis of the relationship can

create particular challenges in addressing issues which might arise was evident in findings from focus groups with refugee background stakeholders as well as other stakeholders. It must be noted that the need for increased oversight of support offered by CSGs was an issue identified in the focus group with CSG stakeholders.

There was broad agreement across the various participants about the need for more formalised structures and processes as the Community Sponsorship programme scales up, along with concern to maintain a degree of informality in the relationships at the heart of the programme. Among the issues discussed were the need for information on rights and entitlements to be provided directly to refugee background stakeholders and for more standardised oversight of the support offered – and received – by CSGs. Programme and policy stakeholders seemed generally happy with the protocol in development for raising concerns and issues, with most not seeing the need for an independent complaints mechanism in the context of the small scale of the programme. Findings from focus groups with refugee background stakeholders suggest that opportunities to raise concerns or provide feedback to an independent body, possibly anonymously but at least on a confidential basis, might be welcomed. Given the nature of the programme of course it would be difficult for concerns related to CSGs to be raised anonymously, but it seems that some thought could be given to how to deal with concerns in a discreet and confidential manner, without directly involving the refugee background stakeholders raising the issues. The importance of a proactive approach in addressing potential problems was addressed by a number of programme stakeholders, with regular check-ins by RSOs both with CSGs and independently with refugee background stakeholders viewed as a useful mechanism for forestalling problems.

Participants provided a lot of insight into the challenges and complexities of obtaining feedback from stakeholders in CSI, in particular from those refugee background stakeholders who are disadvantaged on multiple equality grounds. A suggestion from the focus groups with CSG members was that a procedure be developed for regular and structured reporting, which could provide data on the support provided by each CSG and on the integration journey of refugee background stakeholders as well as on obstacles encountered by CSGs in supporting access to services/liaising with agencies. Reporting by RSOs could be enhanced by feedback obtained during the 'check-ins' with CSGs and refugee background stakeholders mentioned above. In terms of direct feedback from refugee background stakeholders there were various suggestions for how this could be provided, including via a website or smartphone application.

There was broad agreement on the importance of monitoring and evaluation. It is important to note the mixed views in this study on comparative analysis of outcomes from

the mainstream and sponsorship-based resettlement programmes, especially in light of the challenges identified in respect of the Canadian literature. It is the view of the principal investigator of this study that comparative analysis would be valuable, not in assessing outcomes, but in evaluating equality of access to benefits, services and supports across the two programmes and indeed across all of the various pathways for international protection including the International Protection and Asylum System (IPAS) as well as Family Reunification. Accordingly, it can be argued that development of a monitoring framework for CSI should be in the context of development of a monitoring framework for provision for persons of international protection background more broadly.

Participants identified a need to incorporate the subjective views of refugee background stakeholders on *what* to monitor and to utilise participatory methods in carrying out research on the impact of the programme. From the perspective of the current study the inclusion on the research team of personnel with direct experience of resettlement under Community Sponsorship and who had the language skills to conduct research in the first language of participants of refugee background was immensely valuable in planning and implementing the study, reflected in the rich data obtained in focus groups with persons resettled under CSI. Recruitment for the study was challenging, perhaps reflecting research fatigue among the still small cohort of potential participants.

Finally, on the question of representation to a great extent it appears that the voice of refugee background stakeholders is mediated by CSGs. There was fairly broad support for the development of a peer network for persons resettled under CSI which could serve as a mechanism for peer support, representation and a conduit for information.

Recommendations

The research on which this report is based was a small-scale, qualitative study and the views expressed cannot be taken as representative of all stakeholders in CSI. Based on the insights shared it seems appropriate to make some recommendations around issues to be considered in relation to strengthening the rights-based focus of the programme and obtaining feedback for the purposes of oversight, accountability and policy-learning.

Enhancing rights

- **Ensure provision in native language and accessible format of a reference guide/ resource on rights and entitlements directly to refugee background stakeholders as soon as possible after arrival in Ireland.**
- **Ensure that accessible information on rights and entitlements in appropriate format is made available to children/young people; persons who are pre-literate in any language; persons with sensory impairments; persons with additional learning needs.**
- **Information on rights and entitlements provided to refugee background stakeholders should include clear information on how to raise issues/concerns and make complaints within CSI and on how to recognise and report discrimination on racialised or other grounds.**
- **Development of a training module on rights and equality aimed at persons with international protection status should be considered.**
- **To ensure that refugee background stakeholders are facilitated to communicate effectively with members of CSGs and personnel in RSOs and other service providers, access to quality interpretation and intercultural support should be available as of right. Consideration should be given as to how to most effectively enhance, share, and coordinate provision of language and intercultural support across the two resettlement programmes.**
- **Regular 'check-ins' should be conducted with refugee background stakeholders, independently from the CSG, either by personnel employed in an RSO or another CSI stakeholder agency. We recommend that check-ins are conducted in the first language of the refugee background stakeholder and therefore consideration should be given to employment of personnel with requisite language skills who could carry out this function.**

- **Mechanisms for consultation with persons resettled under CSI should be developed in order to feed into policy development, review and reform.**
- **Support should be provided to establish a peer network for refugee background stakeholders (potentially across the mainstream and sponsorship programmes)**
- **Consideration should be given to the establishment of an independent body such as a dedicated Ombudsman or Commissioner responsible for promoting and safeguarding rights of persons with refugee status and international protection applicants.**

Feedback for the purposes of accountability and policy learning

- **Standardised reporting procedure for CSGs should be developed and implemented**
- **Provisions should be put in place for obtaining regular feedback from resettled persons through regular check-ins with RSO personnel or other appropriate persons as well as provision for feedback on anonymous basis**
- **There should be clear procedures for reporting and recording incidents within CSI of discriminatory treatment on racialised or other equality grounds**
- **Provision should be made for monitoring of experiences and outcomes for persons resettled under CSI during and after the programme period. Monitoring indicators should incorporate subjective views of refugee background stakeholders and take into account diverse needs, interests and challenges of persons disadvantaged on one or more equality grounds.**
- **Provision should be made for monitoring access to rights and entitlements across the various pathways for international protection in Ireland, in order to identify instances of programmatic inequality and address any disparities in provision.**
- **Monitoring and evaluation should take into account persons disadvantaged on one or more equality grounds. This could be achieved by disaggregating quantitative data according to key variables including gender, age, racialised identity, religion, gender and sexual identity, and disability status; and by actively seeking qualitative input from individuals disadvantaged on equality grounds.**

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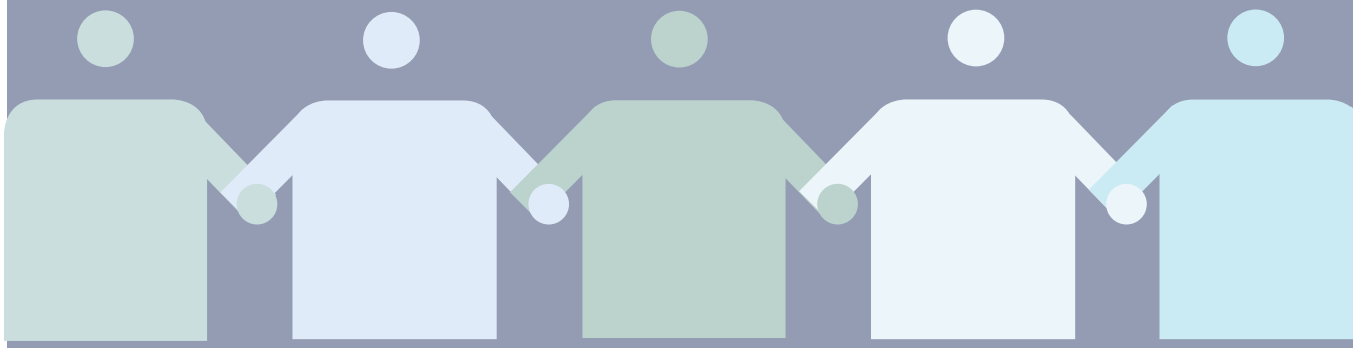

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