



## Private Sponsorship of Refugee Resettlement in the United States:

### Guiding Principles and Recommendations

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*Cover photo: Welcome reception for Syrian refugees on Prince Edward Island, © Government of Prince Edward Island.*

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## Private Sponsorship of Refugee Resettlement in the United States: Guiding Principles and Recommendations

### Executive Summary

**Overview:** Individuals and organizations in the United States are seeking significant ways to assist refugees caught in the worst refugee crisis since World War II. There is fast-growing support for a private sponsorship program in the United States. **Private sponsorship offers communities, organizations, companies, and philanthropies the opportunity to support the resettlement of additional refugees to the United States.** Building upon the well-established model of the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP)—a public-private partnership between the federal government and nonprofit resettlement agencies that successfully resettles thousands of refugees each year—private sponsors would be paired with refugees upon their arrival, providing financial support as well as cultural orientation and community integration. In the short-term, refugee families—especially those with special vulnerabilities—would enjoy dedicated attention and support from sponsors, while in the long-term, sponsors would expand the constituency of those invested in refugee resettlement and drive innovation in resettlement.

**Legal authority to establish a private sponsorship program already exists.** Under federal law, the president can determine the annual number of refugees to be admitted to the United States. President Reagan used this authority to launch the Private Sector Initiative, allocating 10,000 spaces for privately-supported refugees each year and facilitating 16,000 refugees' admission during the program's existence. **A private sponsorship program must maintain the principle of "additionality"—i.e., any refugees who are resettled using private sponsorship should be in addition to refugees who are resettled using government funds** rather than replacing government support. Other key aspects of a private sponsorship program should include:

**Numbers:** Within the annual Presidential Determination (PD) of the number of "government-sponsored" refugees to be admitted through USRAP, the president would establish a separate quota for "privately-sponsored" refugees—either as an absolute number each year, or as a percentage of the annual PD of "government-sponsored" refugees.

**Selection and Matching of Refugees and Sponsors:** The model for selecting refugees and sponsors in a private sponsorship program should accommodate the motivations of sponsors, while ensuring the resettlement of the most vulnerable refugees the efficient use of government resources. Three key models are: (1) **matching** a refugee already within existing priority streams of USRAP and pre-selected by the U.S. government or resettlement agency with a private individual or organization screened and approved by the U.S. government or resettlement agency, with no pre-existing relationship between the refugee and sponsor; (2) the **U.S. sponsor names a refugee relative overseas**, submitting an application to the U.S.

government for acceptance of the sponsor and refugee and contingent upon screening and approval; (3) the **U.S. sponsor names a refugee overseas who they are not related to**, submitting an application to the U.S. government for acceptance of the sponsor and refugee and contingent upon screening and approval. Sponsors could be required to: (i) live in certain states with robust benefits for refugees and/or organizations to train and monitor sponsors; (ii) undergo background checks; and/or (iii) provide proof of sufficient financial resources.

Privately-sponsored refugees would undergo overseas processing identical to that of all other refugees—i.e., they would be screened by relevant federal agencies to ensure that they legally qualify as a “refugee” and to verify admissibility. Privately-sponsored refugees would undergo the same multi-agency security checks as all refugees in USRAP.

**Sponsorship:** To ensure the principle of “additionality” and minimize the need for additional Congressional appropriations and government-funded benefits, sponsors would replace or cover government resettlement costs. Private sponsors could pay for pre-arrival costs through a combination of donations and fees to the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, and other non-profit and international organizations involved in overseas processing. Post-arrival, private sponsors would be required to provide financial support for one year through a variety of methods. Sponsors could make in-kind donations (e.g., free housing); replace government benefits by directly providing refugees with cash assistance and benefits; and/or make tax-deductible donations to cover the cost of services best provided directly to refugees by government or resettlement agencies. After the private sponsorship term, refugees could enroll in means-tested benefits, if necessary.

In addition to financial assistance, sponsors would be responsible for cultural orientation and community integration, including initial reception, securing and setting up housing, assisting with the employment search, educational enrollment, and language classes, and providing information about the basics of living in the United States.

**Training, Oversight, Monitoring:** Adequate training, mentorship and monitoring is crucial to the success of a private sponsorship program. A resettlement agency or other organization would train sponsors on serving and supporting newly-arrived refugees. The organizations would serve as mentors and monitors—ensuring that the refugees’ needs are met, avoiding exploitation or abuse, and serving as a safety net should the sponsorship relationship dissolve. Sponsors could be required to provide a donation to the organization to cover training, monitoring, and other costs.

**Driving Innovation in Resettlement:** Private sponsorship could generate innovative models for private engagement in refugee issues. Private individuals, companies, and philanthropies could contribute to private sponsorship financially and logistically, even without being linked with a sponsored refugee. Municipalities and the private sector could establish group resettlement programs to fund the resettlement of groups of refugees in a particular area, with the possibility of special job opportunities. Educational institutions could sponsor resettlement for qualified refugees to continue their studies.

## Introduction

Individuals and organizations in the United States are seeking significant ways to assist refugees caught in the worst refugee crisis since World War II. There is fast-growing support for a program allowing private sponsorship of refugee resettlement in the United States. Private sponsorship offers communities, organizations, companies, and philanthropies the opportunity to support the resettlement of additional refugees to the United States.

This white paper presents research and analysis of the key principles that should guide the creation of a private sponsorship program in the United States. It explores the considerations for various components of a private sponsorship program: legal authority for a program, selecting sponsors and refugees, funding, financial and other resettlement assistance, and sponsor training and monitoring. This paper proposes options for program design and concludes with recommendations regarding a pilot program that could be implemented in the short-term.

### I. Private Sponsorship: Goals and Projected Outcomes

The United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) is a well-established public-private partnership, with nine private resettlement agencies and hundreds of local affiliate organizations partnering with the federal government to resettle and integrate refugees in the United States.

While the growing global refugee crisis demands large-scale responses, the United States is constrained in its ability to resettle refugees, in part by limited Congressional appropriations for USRAP. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) each year refers far more refugees to the United States for resettlement than USRAP can accommodate. Private engagement could supplement public funding and expand resettlement opportunities through USRAP. One possible solution—which has found long-standing success in Canada and has been implemented in countries such as Germany and Italy—is a private sponsorship program.

Private sponsorship in the United States should have two main goals. First, private individuals and organizations can facilitate the resettlement of additional refugees by providing both funds and critical support to refugees as they resettle in the United States, supplementing Congressional appropriations and integration services provided by resettlement agencies. Any system of private sponsorship should build upon the success and expertise of existing refugee resettlement agencies, and ensure that the addition of private resources does not decrease government support or overall refugee admissions.

Second, private sponsorship enhances and broadens support for refugee protection by directly involving private citizens in refugee resettlement. It would forge personal connections among individual Americans and resettled refugees, helping to dispel fears about

refugees and national security risks. It would increase private and philanthropic involvement in refugee resettlement by offering funding opportunities that are directly linked to additional refugee admissions. Private sponsors would become invested in refugee resettlement and refugee issues more broadly, creating a constituency that pushes Congress to increase funding and implement reforms. Sponsors can provide dedicated attention and support to refugees, including families with special needs, speeding self-sufficiency and heightening integration. A successful private sponsorship program in the United States may also benefit global refugee protection by encouraging other countries to increase resettlement through private sponsorship.

## II. Background on Refugee Private Sponsorship Programs in the United States and Abroad

Private participation in refugee resettlement in the United States is not new. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, private organizations contributed to the costs of refugee resettlement, connected refugees with relatives in the United States, and assisted refugees with employment, housing, and integration. In the late 1980s, President Reagan created the Private Sector Initiative (PSI) and established a special quota for the admission of refugees who would be supported by private sector funding, in addition to those refugees supported by government funds. While 16,000 refugees were admitted through the PSI across five years, the program was discontinued in 1996 due to the steep and variable financial requirements for sponsors and a complex process for approving sponsors. Specifically, the health care costs of refugees, which could vary significantly between individuals and were difficult for a sponsor to anticipate in advance, became prohibitive.<sup>1</sup>

Today, refugee resettlement in the United States is funded by the federal government and numerous non-profit resettlement agencies, along with state and local public service providers. The resettlement agencies receive arriving refugees and ensure that their daily needs—such as housing, food, household items, and other living expenses—are met for several months after arrival. Some resettlement agencies offer “co-sponsorship” programs, in which a group of individuals in the community is matched with a refugee or refugee family. Trained by the resettlement agency, the co-sponsors partner with agencies to provide housing and cash assistance, and help the refugees integrate into the community, including enrolling in school and finding employment. Co-sponsorship programs in their current form do not increase the total number of refugees admitted to the United States, but they do increase the capacity of local resettlement agencies to assist additional refugees, to expand the scope of services, and provide specialized attention to particularly vulnerable refugees.

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<sup>1</sup> Bier, David and Matthew La Corte, Private Refugee Resettlement in U.S. History at 13. Niskanen Center (Apr. 2016), available at <https://niskanencenter.org/blog/news/private-refugee-resettlement-in-u-s-history/>.

Private sponsorship programs—in which private individuals or organizations pledge to cover most or all of the costs of resettlement for a specific refugee or refugee family—currently exist or have been implemented for short periods of time in Canada, Australia, Germany, and Italy, and are being considered in a number of other countries. Established in 1979, Canada’s private sponsorship program has allowed Canadians to offer new homes to 275,000 refugees. The Canadian program operates on two main principles, “additionality” (privately-sponsored refugees are over and above the refugees resettled and funded by the government) and “naming” (sponsors can propose the individual refugees they wish to sponsor for resettlement, although they are not required to do so). A 2007 government study of the Canadian private sponsorship program noted that, for a variety of reasons, privately-sponsored refugees became self-supporting more quickly than government-supported refugees, though the long-term earnings of both groups became roughly equivalent over time.<sup>2</sup> Alongside the successes of the private sponsorship program, the Canadian government-funded program remains important.

### III. Legal Authority for Creation and Funding of a Private Sponsorship Program

A private sponsorship program can be established using the existing legal authority over refugee screening and admission vested in the Executive Branch. Pursuant to the Refugee Act of 1980, the president has authority to determine and establish the annual number of refugees to be admitted to the United States. In fact, the Act *requires* the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to incorporate the availability of private resources in its assessment of resettlement policies and strategies. Using this authority, President Reagan established the Private Sector Initiative, allocating 10,000 spaces for privately-supported refugees in addition to the refugees resettled and funded by the federal government.

Mechanisms currently exist that would allow private sponsors to cover various costs of processing and providing services to privately-sponsored refugees, perhaps assisted by philanthropic contributions from foundations, corporations, or private individuals. For example, the three federal agencies that carry out refugee screening and resettlement—the Department of State’s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), the Department of Homeland Security’s U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), and ORR in HHS—could choose to accept gifts or set fees that cover the overseas processing and resettlement costs associated with privately-sponsored refugees. Fees and donations from private sponsors could be used to hire additional personnel to conduct overseas processing, or to fund the resettlement benefits issued by ORR to resettled refugees. International partners such as UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) could accept donations from

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<sup>2</sup> See Summative Evaluation of the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program. Citizenship and Immigration Canada (Apr. 2007), *available at* <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/evaluation/psrp/psrp-summary.asp>.

private sponsors to cover expenses such as pre-departure medical exams that are otherwise funded by the federal government.

However, agencies that carry out security and background checks, including the FBI, National Counterterrorism Center, and Defense Intelligence Agency, are unlikely to set fees or accept gifts to augment their funding. The cost of security checks for privately-sponsored refugees would require funding through increased Congressional appropriations or internal reallocation of existing agency resources. Unless the costs of privately-sponsored refugees are covered through private sources or increased Congressional appropriations, the addition of privately-sponsored refugees to USRAP could increase backlogs and delays in USRAP.

#### **IV. Ensuring that Private Sponsorship Does Not Displace Other Refugee Resettlement to the United States**

Any private sponsorship program in the United States should maintain the principle of “additionality”—that is to say, any refugees who are resettled using private sponsorship should be in addition to refugees who are resettled using government funds. Additionality ensures that one major goal of a private sponsorship program is achieved—admitting more refugees to the United States—and avoids the possibility that private support for refugee resettlement displaces government support.

Additionality could be achieved by the president establishing a separate quota for “privately-sponsored” refugees in addition to the annual Presidential Determination (PD) of the number of “government-sponsored” refugees that are currently resettled through the USRAP program. For example, the PSI established by President Reagan established a special quota for privately-sponsored refugees that would be used only if private funds were made available to support these refugees. The quota of “privately-sponsored” refugees could be set as an absolute number each year, or as a percentage of the annual PD of “government-sponsored” refugees. As support for a private sponsorship program grows, the percentage method would link an increase of the “privately-sponsored” quota of refugees to an increase in “government-sponsored” refugees. Further, it could sidestep the concern that an increase of the “privately-sponsored” quota would be accompanied by a decrease in the “government-sponsored” quota.

#### **V. Refugees Admitted through Private Sponsorship Program Would Undergo Identical Processing and Screening as other Refugees**

Overseas processing of refugees admitted through a private sponsorship program would be identical to processing for refugees admitted through USRAP currently, except that the costs of resettlement of “privately-sponsored” refugees would be borne by the private sponsors and other private supporters of the program.



Refugees could be referred through existing priority streams and referred to PRM. (The program could later be expanded to include broader categories of family reunification, or to allow sponsors to propose refugees to be admitted based on family ties or other community-based ties.) Privately-sponsored refugees would be screened by USCIS to ensure that they fall within the definition of a “refugee” under U.S. law and to verify admissibility. They would undergo the same multi-agency security checks as all refugees in USRAP. Upon successful processing through USRAP, a privately-sponsored refugee would be admitted as a refugee to the United States and thereafter paired with their private sponsor for further resettlement assistance.

## VI. Models of Sponsor and Refugee Selection

Several possible models for selecting sponsors and refugees in a private sponsorship program exist, some of which are used by private sponsorship programs in other countries and some of which draw upon the existing streams of refugees currently in USRAP. Each model reflects different interests and priorities. The model(s) chosen for a private sponsorship program should accommodate the motivations of sponsors, while ensuring the efficient use of government resources and that the humanitarian objectives of refugee resettlement are fulfilled.

### (1) Organization or Individual Sponsor “Matched” with Pre-Selected Refugee:

In this model, a sponsor would be matched with a refugee already within existing priority streams of USRAP and pre-selected by the U.S. government or resettlement agency to participate in private sponsorship. This is similar to the Canadian Blended Visa Office Referral program, and to co-sponsorship programs currently operated by U.S. resettlement agencies. The U.S. “sponsor” could consist of a group of individuals or an organization (church, synagogue, nonprofit, etc.) that demonstrates the ability to provide logistical and financial support, is screened and approved by the U.S. government or resettlement agency, and is trained by that agency.

By matching sponsors with refugees that have already been selected and screened by the U.S. government, this model would ensure that individuals will not be rejected by USCIS for not meeting the legal definition of a “refugee.” Further, sponsors would be matched with refugees slated to arrive to the United States in the short-term. Sponsors would not have to bear long processing delays before the refugees arrive, during which time sponsors may lose interest or financial resources. This model also facilitates private sector engagement between resettlement agencies and individuals or organizations not already involved in refugee issues.

This model could facilitate increased resettlement of refugees that face protection challenges or other vulnerabilities that warrant resettlement. Particularly vulnerable refugees, such as unaccompanied minors, torture victims, or single adults, whose psychosocial or financial needs are not currently met, could be matched with private sponsors who are

interested and willing to provide this support. A private sponsorship program, once well established, could fill gaps in benefits and services for these particularly vulnerable groups.

However, this selection and matching model, used alone, would not accommodate private sponsors who wish to sponsor a particular refugee that they know, motivated by a pre-existing relationship with that person or a desire to assist particular groups of refugees. Further, sponsors may have little lead time to establish a relationship with the sponsored refugee and may have limited information available to them about the refugee before his or her arrival to the United States.

(2) Sponsor “Names” Refugee who is a Relative:

Under this model, the U.S. sponsor is a relative of a particular refugee abroad. The sponsor can possess any type of legal immigration status in the United States and may have entered the United States in any way (i.e., as a refugee, as a visa holder, as a permanent resident). The familial relationship between the sponsor and refugee should allow sponsorship of married and adult children, siblings, uncles/aunts, nephews/nieces, cousins, and grandparents/children. Sponsors and refugees would submit a joint application to the PRM and/or USCIS requesting approval of the private sponsor and admission of the refugee into USRAP. To avoid the naming of individuals who are unlikely to fall within the definition of refugee under U.S. law, a refugee could be required to provide documentation that he or she has been recognized as a Convention refugee by UNHCR or a national government, or qualifies as a refugee under U.S. immigration law.

Family links between a sponsor and refugee can enhance resettlement and integration outcomes. Further, sponsors that are related to the refugees are likely to maintain their interest in sponsorship despite lengthy screening and processing times in USRAP. Should family sponsors not possess sufficient financial resources for the sponsorship themselves, they could partner with community-based groups or other organizations to serve as sponsors.

Family relationship should not, however, be the only criterion for eligibility for private sponsorship. Used alone, this model would exclude refugees that do not have family members in the United States to serve as sponsors, as well as refugees who may be unable or afraid to take advantage of family ties (e.g. LGBTI refugees). Family relationships could also be drawn too narrowly, and indeed a model based upon family relationships between the refugee and sponsor must acknowledge and accommodate a broad definition of family relationship in order to avoid the issues that led to the suspension of the P-3 stream in USRAP (fraud concerns, delays in DNA testing, etc.). Eligible family members would have to meet the definition of a refugee under U.S. law, in order to avoid USCIS rejection and inefficient use of government resources. Finally, if family links are required for private sponsorship, private engagement may not be forthcoming from new sources of civil society and private actors.

(3) Organization or Individual Sponsor Proposes or “Names” Refugee:

Under this model, the U.S. organization or individual sponsor can propose or “name” a specific refugee or refugee family it wishes to support, with no requirement of a family relationship between the sponsor and refugee. Sponsors and refugees would submit a joint application to PRM and/or USCIS requesting approval of the private sponsor and admittance of the refugee into USRAP. As with family members, a refugee could be required to provide documentation that he or she has been recognized as a Convention refugee by UNHCR or a national government, or qualifies as a refugee under U.S. immigration law.

This model would facilitate private sector engagement by individuals and organizations that are motivated to resettle a particular refugee or group (e.g., LGBTI refugees). Further, by allowing refugees to be proposed by sponsors, the model provides a pathway to resettlement for individuals who are unable or afraid to seek assistance from UNHCR or the government agencies that serve as the usual method of entering USRAP.

Possible disadvantages of this model could include the possibility that sponsors without a family relationship to the refugees may lose interest or financial resources over the course of the lengthy USRAP process. In addition, there is the potential for fraud or exploitation by middlemen who request payment from refugees in order to introduce them to a U.S. sponsor.

(4) Sponsors Providing Financial Support Only:

Private individuals already provide crucial financial contributions directly to resettlement agencies to support their work. For private individuals or organizations that wish to provide financial support to further a private sponsorship system, philanthropic donations could be directed to a “pooled” account held by a resettlement agency or other organization that would be used to fund privately-sponsored refugees at a local, state, or national level. Alternatively, a financial sponsor could be matched with a willing group of private sponsors to match the private sponsors’ raised funds or to provide the financial portion while the other private sponsors provide community support and integration. This could be particularly important in assisting private sponsors to cover major costs such as for overseas processing and screening, or for the health insurance costs of refugees.

(5) Other Models of Public-Private Engagement and Sponsorship:

A private sponsorship program could spur further innovation in refugee resettlement programs and increase private sector engagement. For example, municipalities and the private sector could establish a group resettlement program in which a group of refugees is funded and resettled together within a particular area or provided with special job opportunities. Another example is group sponsorship and resettlement through education institutions for qualified refugees.

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Building on the various sponsor-refugee selection models described above, further limitations and requirements could be included in a private sponsorship program. For example, sponsors may be required to live in particular states, such as those states with strong benefits and infrastructure to welcome and integrate refugees, those states with robust health care coverage available to refugees, and/or those states with local resettlement agencies that can provide training and oversight for private sponsors. In addition, sponsors may be required to undergo a background check or to provide proof of financial resources.

## VII. What Would Private Sponsorship Entail?

Private sponsors would provide a range of resources, financial and otherwise, to the sponsored refugee. Depending on the model, private sponsors could contribute to pre-arrival processing and/or post-arrival resettlement costs. A private sponsorship program should fulfill the principle that “additional” refugees are resettled, while also ensuring that the need for additional Congressional appropriations and government-funded benefits are kept to a minimum. Estimates by other organizations of the cost of post-arrival refugee resettlement for the first year have ranged from \$10,000 to \$15,000 per person, not including Medicaid for those eligible.

Pre-arrival refugee processing: If federal agencies agree to utilize their gift-acceptance or fee-setting authorities, private sponsors could contribute to the costs of pre-arrival processing, carried out primarily by the Departments of State and Homeland Security. The cost of these activities can be established by reviewing Congressional appropriations to the relevant agency accounts and discussion with the agencies. Private sponsors (rather than resettlement agencies) could reimburse the federal government for some or most costs of pre-arrival processing:

- 1) Processing by the Department of State could be covered by making a tax-deductible donation, as the Department of State is authorized to accept gifts.
- 2) Processing by USCIS could be covered by a fee paid by sponsors. Alternatively, USCIS could cover its costs of refugee processing through a fee on other visa and benefit applications.
- 3) The costs of security screening, carried out by a variety of other law enforcement, security, and intelligence agencies that perform background and security checks, are not readily ascertainable and likely cannot be reimbursed by sponsors due to the many agencies involved and the confidentiality of the screening process.
- 4) Refugees’ travel is arranged for and provided through a travel loan from IOM, which would still be provided to refugees and which sponsors, rather than the refugees themselves, could repay if they elected to do so.

Post-arrival refugee resettlement is funded, implemented, and overseen by the Department of State, ORR, and a network of nonprofit resettlement agencies throughout the country. Services that resettlement agencies currently provide include housing, furniture and household setup, cash assistance, transportation, clothing, English language classes, and employment services. Refugees also may receive federally-funded, state-administered benefits such as Medicaid, TANF, and SNAP food assistance, if they are otherwise eligible.

Private sponsors, along with private companies, philanthropic organizations, and other groups, could fund federal, state, and local services to refugees, and assume many of the costs and in-kind benefits provided by resettlement agencies. The cost of benefits and services from all sources can be established by reviewing Congressional appropriations to relevant agency accounts and discussion with resettlement agencies.

Private sponsors would commit to funding post-arrival services and benefits for one year, though sponsors would be encouraged to continue mentoring and providing community support in the long-term. Sponsors could continue providing financial support beyond one year if they so elected, but like the government-funded resettlement program, they should place a very strong emphasis on refugees achieving self-sufficiency within the sponsorship period. Research has shown rates of employment among refugees comparable or exceeding their U.S.-born counterparts,<sup>3</sup> and sponsors should work to ensure that high rates of employment continue.

Private sponsors can fund post-arrival services and benefits through a combination of methods, including:

- (1) replacing certain government benefits. For example, the private sponsor would provide the refugee with funds so that refugee does not receive Reception and Placement funding from PRM or enroll in public benefits. While privately-sponsored refugees would remain legally eligible for means-tested benefits (such as food stamps), the sponsor would provide financial or in-kind support to exceed federal poverty guidelines and ensure that sponsored refugees did not need means-tested benefits for the sponsorship period;
- (2) providing in-kind donations such as free housing;
- (3) providing a tax-deductible donation to ORR or the U.S. Treasury that reimburses ORR and the federal government for the provision of benefits and services to the refugee, including additional ORR administrative and personnel costs;
- (4) providing a tax-deductible donation to the resettlement agency that covers the agency's cost of identifying and training sponsors, monitoring, and other services; or
- (5) some combination of these methods, so that the sponsor directly provides certain benefits through direct funding or in-kind donations, supplemented by a tax-deductible

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<sup>3</sup> See Capps et al., *The Integration Outcomes of U.S. Refugees: Successes and Challenges* at 16, Migration Policy Institute (2015), available at <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/integration-outcomes-us-refugees-successes-and-challenges>.

donation to resettlement agencies and/or ORR to cover services best provided by resettlement agencies or ORR. Funds committed by a private sponsor could be supplemented by corporations and philanthropic institutions giving grants or in-kind donations to expand assistance to both privately-sponsored and government-sponsored refugees as well as the host community.

After training and drawing upon the expertise of a resettlement agency or other organization, private sponsors would assist refugees in their integration in the United States. These activities would include:

Reception and Placement (obligation for one year)

- (1) welcoming family upon arrival in United States;
- (2) locating appropriate interpretation services;
- (3) locating and securing affordable and appropriate housing;
- (4) initial setup of housing, utilities, and basic necessities;
- (5) providing transportation to facilitate services, health care, benefits, and employment;
- (6) registering children and adults for documents and education;
- (7) facilitating access to English language classes;
- (8) facilitating access to health care and additional needs. Options include covering health care costs through purchase of an Affordable Care Act exchange plan or another private insurance plan, providing a donation to ORR for Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA) benefits, or making a payment to a government agency to reimburse the cost of Medicaid coverage. Further research would be needed to determine the preferred method to cover the expenses of refugee health care;
- (9) providing information about cultural orientation on basics of living in the United States (laundry, grocery, shopping, banking, public transportation, etc.);
- (10) providing assistance in locating employment and job interviews;
- (11) providing cash assistance for incidentals; and
- (12) coaching family on budget, building credit, and other financial literacy.

Community Support, Mentoring, Civic Engagement (obligation for one year, encouraged to provide long-term)

- (1) community support and mentoring; English conversation; ongoing cultural advice;
- (2) educational and job support;
- (3) obtaining adjustment to legal permanent residence and assistance with possible family-based reunification; and
- (4) citizenship classes and application, and voter registration.

Private sponsors could be required to submit a resettlement plan and budget, as well as proof of sufficient financial resources. Sponsors also could be required to submit a signed statement agreeing to supply the needs of the refugee family through cash and in-kind

donations at a level that places the family at a standard of living above that of food stamp recipients (e.g. \$27,000 for a family of 3 people). Models for demonstrating sufficient financial resources are the Affidavit of Support required in I-130 petitions, or the resettlement plan used by the Canadian private sponsorship program. Alternatively, private sponsors could establish a trust account for the benefit of a particular refugee or refugee family, into which funds can be deposited.

Sponsors would be partnered with a resettlement agency or other organization (such as a university) that would serve as a safety net should the sponsorship relationship dissolve. Sponsors could be required set aside a fixed sum or percentage of money to be held for the benefit of refugee, pending the successful admission of the refugee into the United States. If the refugee is approved for travel and arrives in the United States, those funds would be progressively used and disbursed for the benefit of the refugee throughout the sponsorship term. If the sponsorship relationship dissolves, the agency would still possess the financial resources to support the refugee. If the refugee does not arrive in the United States, the funds would be returned to the private sponsor. Insurance could also be obtained to cover unexpected expenses or sponsorships that dissolve.

#### **VIII. Overcoming Concerns Related to Private Sponsorship**

A private sponsorship program provides exciting new ways for the private sector to engage with refugee issues. Private sponsorship should fulfill the principle of additionality as much as possible. The admission of privately-sponsored refugees should not be used as a way for the federal government to reduce the number of refugees otherwise admitted through USRAP.

Further, the availability of private funds to assist refugee resettlement should not be used to advocate for diminished Congressional appropriations for USRAP, ORR, or resettlement agencies, which are currently underfunded. Rather, funds from private sponsors should be used to augment the funding of overseas processing and USRAP, thereby alleviating backlogs by increasing personnel and facilitating interviews and background checks. Private sponsors may pledge sufficient funds so that the need for additional Congressional funding for privately-sponsored refugees is minimized and states and resettlement agencies do not bear additional, unfunded resettlement costs.

Accountability and monitoring of private sponsors will be a crucial component of a private sponsorship program. Private sponsors should be trained and overseen by resettlement agencies, given the agencies' decades of experience resettling refugees. The relationship between sponsors and refugees should be monitored, to ensure that the needs of vulnerable individuals are being met and to avoid any exploitation or abuse. Monitoring and evaluation of a private sponsorship program should include consultation prior to private sponsorship to allow for adequate information collection, as well as feedback from sponsors, refugees, and training and service agencies about strengths and weaknesses. Assessment of private

sponsorship should include a variety of indicators of integration outcomes and the actual cost of the program to government agencies and to private sponsors. Further, evaluation should assess the model for refugee selection that is chosen, and whether that model fulfills the objectives of the private sponsorship program.

## **IX. Recommendations for a Pilot Program**

A pilot of a private sponsorship program should be implemented in a manner that tests and assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the key components of a full-fledged program. In the short-term, a pilot would channel additional funds into USRAP, and if successful, would build robust support among communities for launching an expanded private sponsorship program.

The needs of resettled refugees exceed current levels of government-funded benefits and services. Stakeholders such as ORR have expressed interest in targeted pilot programs that focus on particularly vulnerable refugees, such as unaccompanied minors, torture victims, or single adults, whose psychosocial or financial needs are not currently met. A private sponsorship program, once well established, could fill gaps in benefits and services for these particularly vulnerable groups. It is important to recognize that the current public/private model still requires ample community and private funding support to meet the needs that *all* refugees have that are beyond the scope of the current model.

A pilot can be used to test and establish some of the baseline requirements for refugees and sponsors, and to measure some of the costs of private sponsorship. A pilot that could be implemented in the short-term would have the following characteristics:

### **(1) Selecting Refugees for the Pilot**

- (a) The U.S. government, in conjunction with the resettlement agencies, would select the refugees to participate in the pilot from refugees already at an advanced stage in USRAP. These refugees have already been vetted by USCIS and undergone the numerous necessary security and background checks.
- (b) The pilot would be open to refugees of any nationality.

### **(2) Selecting Host Communities and Sponsors for the Pilot**

- (a) Site selection should be based on a combination of the following factors: (1) welcoming state governments with strong benefits, infrastructure, and enthusiasm for refugee resettlement; (2) participation in and availability of Medicaid and ACA health insurance plans; (3) local resettlement agencies that can providing training and oversight; and/or (4) companies and other private sources of grants or in-kind donations that can provide additional support. A pilot program could be used to investigate the best way for sponsors to cover



healthcare costs, and to assess the average cost of health care to sponsors.

- (b) States that have indicated their support for the refugee resettlement program include: New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Vermont, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Washington, Oregon, California, Hawaii, Colorado, and Utah.
- (c) Sponsors would be identified and selected by resettlement agencies, drawing upon individuals and community groups that have shown interest.
- (d) Sponsors would be trained, supervised, and monitored by resettlement agencies.

### (3) Welcoming and Supporting Refugees

- (a) Sponsors may be asked to provide a financial contribution to PRM and USCIS to cover pre-arrival processing costs. This could be provided directly by the sponsor or raised from voluntary community contributions.
- (b) IOM travel loans will remain available to refugees in the pilot. Sponsors will have the option to pay for the travel of the refugee family.
- (c) Sponsors would provide financial sponsorship for one year, though the means of doing so should be flexible in order to test different methods. While some sponsors may be able to demonstrate that they can finance all reception and placement benefits, cover community integration and mentoring services, and pay for or provide long-term integration and self-sufficiency support for one year, other sponsors can participate if other sources (such as companies) can provide cash or in-kind donations that cover state expenditures on behalf of refugees.
- (d) Sponsors should provide a fixed monetary contribution to the partner resettlement agency or other partner organization. This sum is used to cover costs for training sponsors, benefits and services provided to the refugee through the resettlement agency, and costs related to monitoring and evaluation.
- (e) Sponsors should ensure that sponsored refugees adjust status to legal permanent residents.

### (4) Monitoring and Evaluation of the Pilot

- (a) A robust evaluation process should be created prior to the start of the pilot to ensure that appropriate objectives are established and relevant data is collected throughout the pilot.
- (b) Refugees should be involved in the evaluation process throughout their participation in the pilot and after the pilot concludes.

## Afterword

Although the civil war in Syria and the resulting refugee crisis started many years ago, it first registered on our national consciousness in September 2015. This is when images of 3-year-old Alan Kurdi's body, washed ashore after the boat carrying his family capsized, were broadcast to a horrified audience. Those tragic images served as a wake-up call for many Americans who began looking for ways to help refugees fleeing persecution, violence, and war worldwide.

The magnitude of the current refugee crisis—unprecedented in recorded history—has led many in the U.S. to push for ways to harness the tremendous goodwill of everyday Americans looking to do their part to help. The idea of private refugee sponsorship answers the question refugee advocates receive from Americans on a daily basis: how can I help?

Private refugee sponsorship offers individuals, communities, and charities the opportunity to support refugees in addition to those admitted under the federal cap. Thanks to IRAP and Human Rights First's important new report, *Private Sponsorship of Refugee Resettlement in the United States: Guiding Principles and Recommendations*, the specifics for what such a program could look like are now clear.

Private refugee sponsorship offers a new platform to those who want to help those impacted by the current humanitarian crisis. It provides a more direct pathway of support and allows Americans to forge deeply personal connections with refugees. Moreover, such a program fosters a robust pro-refugee constituency, while increasing private sector and philanthropic involvement in resettlement. Such a program increases America's capacity to resettle refugees and infuses new resources into our refugee programs.

IRAP and Human Rights First's report serves a crucial new function in the effort to launch private sponsorship in America: it answers many hard questions about how exactly the U.S. could create such a program. For example, questions about strategies to set the private quota, the process to select both sponsor and refugee, what sponsorship would entail for post- and pre-arrival services, the structure of a pilot, and others are answered cogently in the report, drawing on the expertise of leading refugee authorities and the successful Canadian model of private sponsorship.

As announced in September, a refugee sponsorship pilot program is under consideration at the U.S. State Department. With this report, administration officials have a clear road-map to use for what a private refugee sponsorship pilot project should look like in 2017.

America's tradition of openness, compassion, philanthropy, and freedom should compel policymakers to launch a private refugee sponsorship program to further improve our refugee

system and expand our ability to provide safe haven to those in need by relying on passionate and selfless Americans.

Harnessing the extraordinary power of the private sector is one of the great challenges refugee advocates face during this era of unprecedented global displacement; private sponsorship is the answer to this challenge and the critical next step in honoring America's remarkable history of empathy and charity.

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