An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt
agus Comhionannais
Department of Justice
and Equality

Community Sponsorship Ireland

Initial Policy Framework

Department of Justice and Equality
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An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt agus Comhionannais
Department of Justice and Equality

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FOREWORD

The Government of Ireland, working with a diverse range of organisations and partners, is pleased to introduce a Community Sponsorship Programme into the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP).

The development of a new Community Sponsorship Programme represents the fulfilment by Ireland of an important commitment expressed in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. The Declaration, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 19th September 2016, expanded and developed resettlement, humanitarian admission programmes and other legal pathways including private/community sponsorship. This commitment has been further strengthened in the most recent Joint Statement of Ministers from Canada, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Argentina, Spain and New Zealand which underlines support for community based refugee sponsorship signed in advance of the 2018 United Nations General Assembly and agreed in the Global Compact on Refugees. It is the shared intention and expectation of all the stakeholders involved in the establishment and development of Community Sponsorship that it will enhance the Irish State's capacity to provide a positive experience for refugees.

Ireland is, in many ways, the perfect environment for a community sponsorship programme. There is an enormous well of public support and good will for Ireland's humanitarian resettlement programme. Ireland has a large and thriving civil society sector and a wealth of valuable experience to draw on in its citizens who have worked abroad in the delivery of humanitarian and development assistance.

The Irish people have a consciousness about both our migrant history and the increasingly global nature of modern Ireland that naturally engenders a welcoming society. The Irish economy is growing, providing the resources for communities to invest in welcoming refugees through direct participation. Equally, the rights-based legislative framework for resettled refugees and the Government's commitment to maintaining such a rights-based approach is an important safety net for refugees as they seek to re-establish their lives. Community Sponsorship has the potential to promote inclusion through the innovative approach of empowering refugees within local communities to integrate and by enabling communities to support refugees along their journey to becoming active participants in Irish society.

It is in this spirit that the Irish State and civil society organisations have come together to design a community based resettlement programme within the existing IRPP.

Ní neart go cur le chéile

David Stanton TD
Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality with special responsibility for Equality, Immigration and Integration

GLOSSARY

Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP): In 2015, the Irish government established the IRPP in response to the humanitarian crisis that developed in Southern Europe due to mass forced displacement from conflict areas, particularly in the Middle East. The IRPP has the responsibility of ensuring Ireland meets its commitment to take in 4000 persons in need of international protection. Since its establishment, the IRPP has accepted over 2,000 refugees and asylum seekers and aims to take in many more in coming years through both state-centred and community-sponsored streams. Situated within the Department of Justice and Equality, IRPP is the body primarily responsible for the development and oversight of Community Sponsorship Ireland.

IRPP Taskforce: The work of IRPP is overseen by a taskforce consisting of the key stakeholders who support the programme. These include a number of government departments, representatives of local councils, a number of NGOs and other associated bodies. The Taskforce is chaired by Minister of State, David Stanton and meets quarterly.

United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR): UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is a global organisation dedicated to saving lives, protecting rights and building a better future for refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people. UNHCR is governed by the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations.

UNHCR is a member of the IRPP Taskforce and is responsible for the referral of refugees on resettlement to Ireland. UNHCR is also a member of the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative and has encouraged and supported Government in the development of a new Community Sponsorship programme in Ireland. Under the new programme it will continue to play a primary role in resettlement co-ordination and to support and advise government in the operational roll-out of community sponsorship in Ireland.

Irish Red Cross: The Irish Red Cross is a volunteer-led Irish charity dedicated to providing impartial services and support to those in need. As a National Society of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, its work is guided by the seven fundamental principles of the Red Cross, they are humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality.

The Irish Red Cross is a partner of the Government of Ireland and a member of the IRPP Taskforce. It is tasked under its mandate as an auxiliary to the Irish Government with coordinating pledged accommodation and supporting social integration at community level.

Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (GRSI): A joint initiative led by the Government of Canada; the UNHCR; the Open Society Foundation; the Radcliffe Foundation; and the University of Ottawa. GRSI works to assist and inspire countries around the world to open new pathways for refugee protection by sharing Canada's history, experience, and leadership in private sponsorship and by supporting the creation of new programmes that countries design to meet their unique needs. Members of GRSI have visited Ireland on a number of occasions, hosted a meeting in Canada on February 2018 and provided on-going information, advice and support in the development of a new programme in Ireland.

Community Sponsorship Ireland (CSI): A new community sponsorship programme under development by the Government of Ireland in collaboration with civil society organisations and partners, and supported by GRSI. Community Sponsorship Ireland will become a new strand of the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP).

(Glossary Continued)

Community Sponsorship Group (CSG): A group, comprised of a minimum core group of five people, all of whom must be over 18, who undertake to sponsor a refugee family under the Community Sponsorship Ireland programme. Sponsors may be drawn from faith-based organisations, trade unions, sporting associations and any and all manner of community groups. Community Sponsorship Groups commit to providing financial, social, emotional, and resettlement support to help newly-arrived refugees to integrate into life in Ireland. Prior to commencing their sponsorship activities under the Community Sponsorship Ireland programme, Community Sponsorship Groups will be required to align with an approved Regional Support Organisation (RSO) to receive training and guidance in developing and preparing for the sponsorship.

Regional Support Organisations (RSOs): RSOs are organisations that enter into an agreement with the Department of Justice and Equality to provide guidance and support to a Community Sponsorship Group to enable them to sponsor refugees under the Community Sponsorship Ireland programme. RSOs may be, for example, non-governmental, religious, ethnic, community, or humanitarian organisations; they must be incorporated (a legally created organisation) and have a physical presence in Ireland.

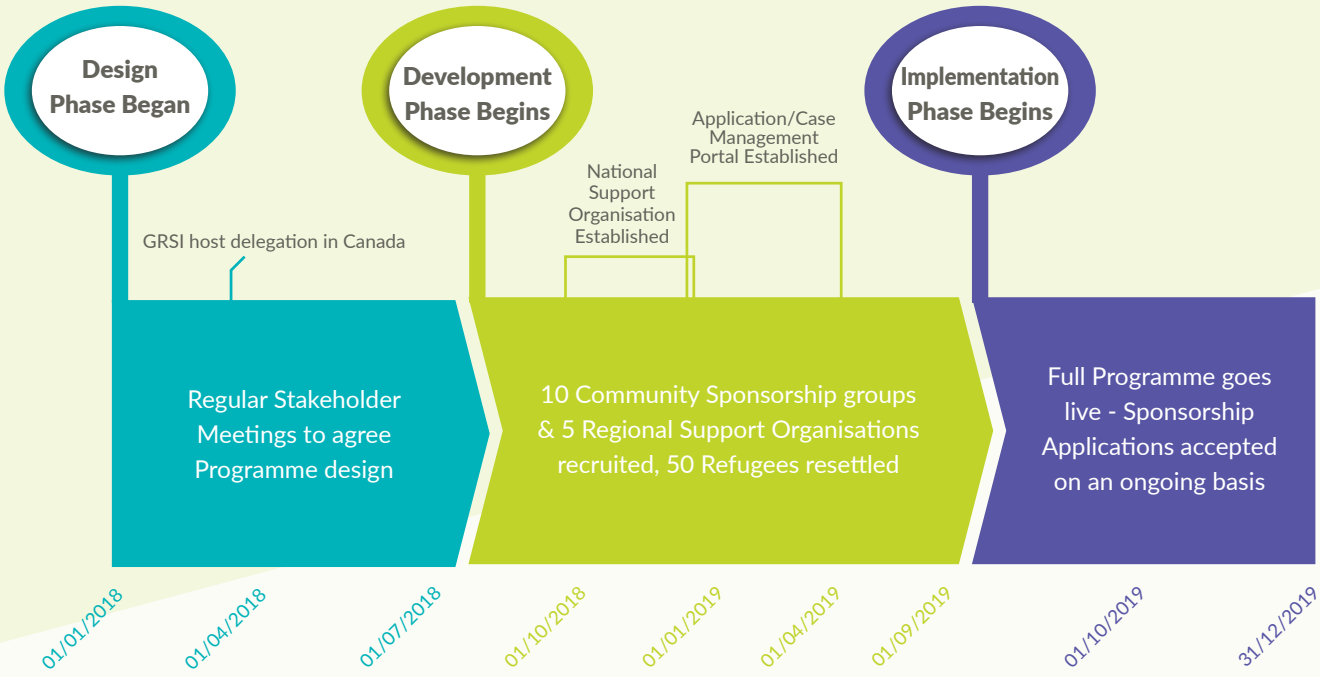
Who is the Policy Framework for?

This Policy Framework is the product of a period of ongoing discussion and engagement between Government, civil society and a range of stakeholders interested in promoting and developing refugee community sponsorship in Ireland. Its aim is to summarise the consensus that has emerged from those consultations and to provide an overview of the key programme design aspects agreed. Its intended audience include: government partners; interested Non-Governmental Organisations and Civil Society Organisations; refugee policy experts and other informed stakeholders who are interested in the development of a new programme in Ireland.

Developing a community sponsorship programme in Ireland

Together, the Irish Government and its civil society partners intend to demonstrate the concept of community sponsorship in Ireland during an initial Development Phase to run from August 2018 to October 2019 and to develop the infrastructure necessary to scale up the programme when the full programme goes live thereafter. At the beginning of this Development Phase, the Department of Justice and Equality will enter into an agreement with a minimum of five Regional Support Organisations who will in turn recruit 10 Community Sponsorship Groups with the aim of resettling 50 refugees over the course of the 12 months.

During the Development Phase a new Applications/Case Management Portal will be created and tested for full deployment during the Implementation Phase. Training programmes and support tools will be developed and tested, and a new National Support Organisation will be established to further develop the programme at a national scale. It is intended that Community Sponsorship Ireland will be fully operational and in a position to accept applications on an on-going basis before the end of the current mandate of the IRPP in 2019.



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What is Resettlement?

Resettlement involves the selection and transfer of refugees from a State in which they have sought protection to a third State that has agreed to admit them - as refugees - with permanent residence status. The status provided by the resettlement State ensures protection against return to their country of origin where they will be at risk of persecution. The resettled refugee and his/her family or dependents will be provided with access to civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights similar to those enjoyed by nationals. Resettlement also carries with it the opportunity to eventually become a naturalised citizen of the resettlement country, subject to meeting the eligibility criteria.

The refugee resettlement programme in Ireland has been in operation since 2000 and is run by the Irish Government and coordinated by the Department of Justice and Equality in collaboration with UNHCR. As refugees admitted to Ireland have already been determined by UNHCR to meet the definition of a refugee, they are not required to apply for refugee status upon arrival in Ireland. Their rights are set out in the International Protection Act 2015. In most respects, including access to education, employment and social protection, resettled refugees have the same rights and entitlements as Irish citizens. Following arrival they become eligible to apply for naturalisation after three years residing in the State.

In 2015, the Irish Government established the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP), in response to the humanitarian crisis that developed in Southern Europe due to mass forced displacement from conflict areas, particularly in the Middle East. The IRPP has the responsibility of ensuring Ireland meets its commitments. It is currently mandated to arrange for the admittance of a total intake of 4,000 persons in need of international protection through resettlement and other pathways. As of December 2018 the IRPP had accepted over 2,200 refugees and asylum seekers and aims to take in many more in the coming years through both state-managed and community-sponsored resettlement streams.

What is Community Sponsorship?

Unlike traditional refugee resettlement models, where the state or state-supported actors provide settlement and integration services directly to refugees in their country of resettlement, community sponsorship invites members of the community to play a role in the delivery of those supports. Private citizens and community organisations, rather than government officials, become the face of welcome for refugees arriving to our country. Sponsors commit to providing financial, emotional and settlement support to help newcomers as they settle into their new communities. Community sponsorship creates lasting bonds between new members of the community and their neighbours. In doing so, it strengthens communities and builds awareness of broader refugee-related issues.

Policy objectives of Community Sponsorship Ireland (CSI)

The objectives of the policy framework designed to support Community Sponsorship Ireland are as follows:

- Enhance Ireland's humanitarian tradition with respect to forcibly displaced and persecuted persons by providing opportunities and mechanisms for communities to become involved in the direct support of the resettlement of refugees.
- Provide new pathways for refugees' language acquisition, housing, education, employment, social protection, and social inclusion through direct involvement by Irish communities in resettlement.
- Involve a wider set of Irish individuals, civil society organisations, and community actors in refugee protection and integration.
- Maintain a human rights-based approach to protection, resettlement, and the well-being and security of refugees and Irish communities.

Foundational Principles of Community Sponsorship Ireland (CSI)

The development of Community Sponsorship Ireland is guided by the following core principles:

Empowerment entails both the community and refugees being empowered through sponsorship arrangements to promote, support and facilitate access to knowledge, resources, opportunities and decision-making power, and to raise their awareness of participation in their communities in order to reach a level of control over their own environment. It means providing communities and refugees with the capacity to find pathways and solutions tailored to the local context and to facilitate the independence of refugees and their stake in society.

Engagement entails promoting direct involvement by individuals, the community, and refugees in resettlement through the mechanism of sponsorship. This means providing mechanisms to channel humanitarian intentions into concrete actions. A key goal of engagement is to create or facilitate a more welcoming and positive environment for refugees in Ireland. It recognises that resettlement, and the integration that follows, is a two-way process, with both refugees and the community changing positively through the experience.

Enhancement means that the programming created through community sponsorship will enhance existing resettlement mechanisms and build national capacity to provide additional resettlement places. In consultation with NGOs and other stakeholders in the sector, this principle of additionality has been strongly emphasised. It is not a replacement and does not derogate from any existing rights enjoyed by those in need of protection in Ireland. Community sponsorship is a means to: improve refugee outcomes; involve more of civil society in refugee protection; and find solutions to the challenges of protection and resettlement through communities working with government. Sponsorship will enhance government responses, communities, and the lives of refugees resettled to Ireland.

Partnership means that community sponsorship involves co-leadership by the Government and civil society, co-development, co-management, and co-ownership. The State and civil society undertake to fulfil these roles with integrity and respect, mindful of each other's responsibilities, mandates, and interests but committed to joint efforts in community sponsorship.

Protection underpins community sponsorship. Refugees often flee countries where their physical security is at risk and basic human rights are not upheld. Community sponsorship offers protection on the basis of equality, in a non-discriminatory fashion requiring a community response primarily guided by the individual protection needs of the refugees concerned. It is designed to ensure that human rights are respected and promoted by sponsors in the community in line with the Irish government's obligations in this regard. It is not intended to reduce costs or existing roles; rather, it is meant to promote refugee protection at its fullest as a reflection of Irish values.

Key Characteristics of Community Sponsorship Ireland

CONSENT BASED, COMMUNITY BASED

Under the provisions of the CSI programme, a number of refugees, referred by UNHCR through existing resettlement mechanisms and accepted by the IRPP for resettlement to Ireland, will be offered the opportunity to participate in a pilot community sponsorship resettlement model. Those participating will be asked to consent to the sharing of basic biodata and essential information to members of the IRPP Taskforce and their designated RSO in order to facilitate a process of matching with potential sponsors in Irish communities. Sponsors, once matched to refugee families, will enter into an undertaking to be responsible for assisting those refugees during the period of their initial settlement and integration to Irish society.

Responsibilities will include assisting sponsored refugees with finding suitable accommodation in the community, assisting them to register and engage with State and other service providers, orienting refugees to life in the community, providing appropriate language training, supporting them to explore employment and education pathways in the community, as well as introducing them to social networks. Prospective Community Sponsorship Groups will be asked to undertake a formal agreement to provide these key community-based activities for a set period and will be required to demonstrate sufficient financial and non-financial resources to carry out their responsibilities.

ENHANCES EXISTING RIGHTS-BASED SUPPORT

The legal rights of resettled refugees are set out in s.59 of the International Protection Act 2015[1]. Resettled refugees have a right to legal residence upon arrival and in most respects they have the same rights and entitlements as Irish citizens. They become eligible to apply for naturalisation after three years.

The rights and entitlements of resettled refugees who participate in Community Sponsorship Ireland will remain unchanged. Upon arrival, rather than being offered accommodation in an Emergency Reception and Orientation Centre (EROC), the sponsored refugees will go directly to the community to begin the process of resettlement. Their community sponsors will take responsibility for introducing and registering the refugees with the essential state services who will meet their basic needs in the areas of health, education, employment and social protection. The sponsors will also offer informal mechanisms by which the refugees will become socially included. At the same time, through training and support provided by Regional and National Support Organisations, sponsors will ensure that the refugees in their communities are encouraged to become self-reliant and develop the capacity to participate fully in Irish life.

PROMOTES POSITIVE INTEGRATION OUTCOMES

Data collected by the Canadian government[2] indicates that community sponsored refugees tend to have relatively early, positive integration and settlement outcomes, thanks in part to the social support they receive from sponsors. In developing a new model of community sponsorship in Ireland, particular focus will be placed on encouraging positive integration outcomes for resettled refugees in line with the Government's Migrant Integration Strategy[3]. Training and support will be provided to sponsors with respect to cultural awareness and public policy to promote integration, which is understood as the: 'ability to participate to the extent that a person needs and wishes in all of the major components of society without having to relinquish his or her own cultural identity.'[4] In particular, refugees will be supported and enabled to:

- interact with the local community and participate in cultural, sporting and other activities while also preserving their own traditions as they wish.
- celebrate their national, ethnic, cultural and religious identities.
- develop language skills sufficient to enable them to participate in economic life and in the wider society.
- access and navigate public services.
- benefit from access to education.
- participate in economic life – in employment and self-employment.
- develop a knowledge of Ireland, its history and culture.
- participate in politics and public life.
- become full and active members of the community and Irish society

[1]http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2015/act/66/enacted/en/print#sec59

[2]IRCC (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada). 2016b. "Evaluation of the Resettlement Programs (GAR, PSR, BVOR and RAP)." Evaluation Division.
http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/evaluation/resettlement.asp

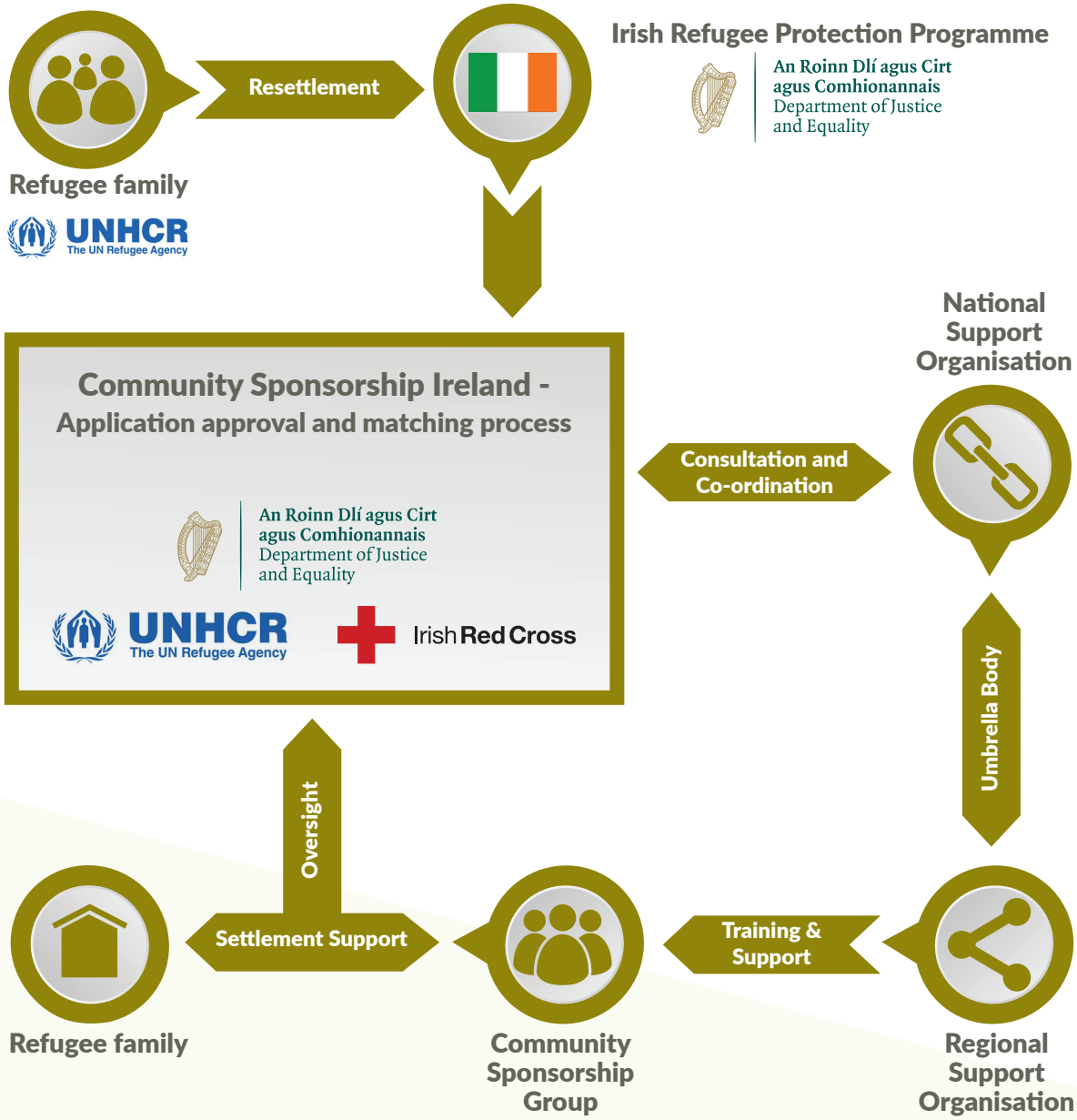
[3]http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Migrant_Integration_Strategy_English.pdf/Files/Migrant_Integration_Strategy_English.pdf

[4]Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (1999) Integration: a Two Way Process. Dublin

How will Community Sponsorship Ireland Function?

Through the establishment of a Community Sponsorship programme in Ireland, communities will for the first time be supported to provide direct assistance to refugees settling in their locality though a structured programme backed by a unique collaboration between Government, UNHCR, NGOs and civil society.

Interested communities groups will come together to form a Community Sponsorship Group and register with a Regional Support Organisation who must agree to provide the necessary training advice and guidance and support. The Group will then complete a detailed application form, undertake training and develop a settlement plan. Once approved the plan forms the basis for preparation for arrival of the refugee family!



COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP GROUPS (CSGs)

Sponsorship is a community activity that involves individuals in groups of differing purpose, size, and origin. In Community Sponsorship Ireland, suitable sponsors can be drawn from faith-based organisations, trade unions, sporting associations, neighbours, friends, and all manner of community groups, building upon the huge well of altruism and public interest in helping refugees, which is found across Irish communities. A Community Sponsorship Group (CSG) must be comprised of a minimum core group of five people, all of whom must be over 18, who jointly undertake to sponsor a refugee family. Individual members of prospective sponsorship groups will be required to undergo Garda vetting and safeguarding checks. Groups applying to participate in the Programme will also be required to align with an approved Regional Support Organisation (RSO) to receive training and guidance in developing and preparing for the sponsorship.

Prospective CSGs wishing to participate in the programme will be required to develop a detailed settlement plan with the assistance of their Regional Support Organisation. They will be required to provide information on the nature and membership of the sponsoring group and its plans for supporting the sponsored refugees. This will include financial and non-financial goods and services to be provided by the CSG in order to enhance the resettlement process and to progress integration into the community, as well as specific knowledge about the community of settlement.

Sponsoring groups will be required to commit, in a formal undertaking with the Department of Justice and Equality, to ensuring an appropriate housing solution will be in place for a 24-month period and to ensuring 18 months of financial and non-financial support is provided as indicated in their settlement plans. Sponsoring groups will be required to demonstrate that they have a minimum of 10,000 Euro on hand to support a sponsored family for this period, of which a maximum of 2,000 Euro may be in-kind contributions as permitted in the instructions from Community Sponsorship Ireland for settlement plans.

Financial and non-financial support contributed by sponsors can include:

- Exceptional needs or specialist costs for physical, mental and/or dental health
- Transport
- Interpretation / Translation
- Language training
- Housing
- Employment preparation and job seeking
- Start-up needs such as household supplies and furnishings
- Clothing
- Cultural and social activities
- Access to religious activities
- Access to education

Applicant CSGs will be required to submit a formal settlement plan to the IRPP that details how the goods and services of the group will be deployed. The settlement plan will also indicate the sponsors' knowledge of existing services available to refugees in the community or nearby, and show how the refugees will be introduced to health, housing, education, employment, and social protection resources in the community. The settlement plan will also provide information on contingency planning and knowledge of services available in the event of challenging issues arising over the course of the sponsorship.

Housing support is a commitment to ensure that housing has been identified and is available upon arrival into the destination community and remains so during the period of the sponsorship. Housing options identified by sponsors and contained within the settlement plan may include donated housing, purchase of property, rent payment, or supplements to the existing Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme.

Refugees resettled under CSI will benefit from a range of health, education, employment, and social protection services offered by the Irish state. To supplement this, Community Sponsorship Groups will indicate in their settlement plan how they plan to enhance these services as appropriate or necessary through direct financial support to refugees. For example, sponsors will facilitate access to language training, enrolment in community activities such as sports, leisure, cultural programming and transportation assistance. Sponsors will demonstrate funds on hand, in-kind goods and services, and concrete fund-raising plans equal to a pre-set minimum amount of €10,000 per family.

Community Sponsorship Groups will provide key introductions to members of the local community, providing a bridge to new opportunities and social connections. Through direct, personal interaction, sponsors typically develop meaningful and lasting relationships with the people they sponsor. Sponsors also learn about the experiences and challenges faced by refugees and often become advocates for acceptance and increased resettlement more generally. Community sponsorship is a true partnership between communities and the government with community empowerment the key to its success.

OVERSIGHT, VERIFICATION AND SAFE-GUARDING

Oversight of Community Sponsorship Ireland will rest with the Department of Justice and Equality, specifically the Irish Refugee Protection Programme. In seeking to design a programme that is scalable, efficient and responsive, IRPP's verification and oversight will work collaboratively with other stakeholders. This reflects a whole of society approach to community sponsorship whereby Government, civil society, community groups, individual citizens, and the private sector each have an important role to play to ensure successful resettlement outcomes for refugees.

Operational reporting, monitoring and evaluation will be incorporated into the programme from its inception and will be co-ordinated through the IRPP (see further below).

The Irish Red Cross and UNHCR are members of the IRPP Taskforce. Both organisations will assist in the process of profiling and matching refugees with approved Community Sponsorship Groups.

UNHCR will continue to play a primary role in resettlement co-ordination and support and advise government in the operational roll-out of community sponsorship in Ireland.

In light of the pressures currently being experienced in the Irish housing market, finding homes for refugees in the community will be one of the most pressing challenges to be addressed through Community Sponsorship Ireland. The Irish Red Cross has for some time played a key role in managing this challenge for the IRPP through the creation of a register of pledges of accommodation from the public. The Irish Red Cross may be requested by the Department of Justice and Equality to play a similar support role with respect to properties nominated by CSGs.

Each Community Sponsorship Group will be required to align themselves with a Regional Support Organisation (RSO). These organisations (whose role is further detailed below) will enter into agreements with the Department of Justice and Equality and provide a direct conduit between government and the CSGs working in the community. They will be required to have the necessary expertise, capacity, resources and practical know-how to support the CSGs in ensuring that they meet all necessary data protection, child protection and other legal obligations, without placing an undue burden on individual sponsors. Training will be provided to ensure that sponsors are aware of their obligations and supported in planning for the implementation of their settlement plans. Sponsors will also be required to undergo vetting through the National Vetting Bureau of An Garda Síochána.

PROCESS OVERSEAS

As Community Sponsorship Ireland will constitute a strand within the Irish Refugee Protection Programme, the process overseas in the country of first asylum for refugees will therefore be largely the same is it is now through the State's existing resettlement programme.

Every person nominated for consideration for resettlement will have already been registered with UNHCR, and declared to be entitled to refugee protection based on an individual assessment. Resettlement is a measure of last resort and eligibility is based on precise criteria by reference to protection needs and potential vulnerabilities. UNHCR's Resettlement Submission Categories include: Legal and/or Physical Protection Needs; Survivors of Torture and/or Violence; Medical Needs; Women and Girls at Risk; Family Reunification; Children and Adolescents at Risk; and Lack of Foreseeable Alternative Durable Solutions.

The final decision to accept a refugee for resettlement remains with Ireland, not UNHCR. UNHCR provides the Department of Justice and Equality with detailed fact sheets on each person referred. Resettlement missions are then carried out by staff members of the Irish Refugee Protection Programme where face-to-face interviews are held with those persons referred for resettlement. The interview process provides an opportunity to: verify the information on file and address any gaps; ascertain the full extent of family, their status and location; hear first-hand their story and that of their family; impart information on the resettlement process including rights and responsibilities, and to manage expectations on all sides; and gather additional information that may assist service providers in meeting their needs post-arrival in Ireland.

Each candidate is also the subject of a separate Garda security assessment and interview, including checking of fingerprints against national and international databases. Pre-departure orientation and health screening is also provided. The decision to accept or reject a case is not taken at the time of the interview but is made on return to Ireland by IRPP staff. Special needs and medical cases may be referred on to the HSE for consideration as to whether or not Ireland can offer the necessary medical treatment or supports. All cases are referred for security clearance prior to final decision.

Currently (as of 2018/2019), refugees being referred by UNHCR for resettlement to Ireland are living in Lebanon and Jordan, the vast majority of whom are Syrian nationals. This may be subject to change in the future by agreement between UNHCR and the Irish Government. Similarly, the resettlement programme currently focuses primarily on families but single vulnerable individuals, such as LGBTI or women-at-risk, may also be included in future. Currently family composition for resettlement referrals average between 4 and 5 family members.

Once refugees identified by UNHCR have been referred to the Irish Government, IRPP staff, when conducting a resettlement selection mission, will identify potential cases for referral to the Community Sponsorship Ireland programme. Those persons selected will be given an opportunity to indicate their consent to be resettled via this route. They will first be informed of the features of the Community Sponsorship Ireland programme by IRPP staff so that they can make an informed decision in this regard.

In referring cases to the Government for resettlement under this programme, UNHCR will apply standard submission and prioritisation criteria for resettlement[5]. In doing so, however, UNHCR will take cognisance of the challenges likely to be encountered in providing for high needs cases during the early years of the nascent CSI programme. UNHCR, the IRPP and the Irish Red Cross will seek to ensure that those cases referred to CSI are matched appropriately by reference to the individual needs and characteristics of the people themselves and the community resources and capacities of the RSOs and sponsorship groups.

Refugees opting for CSI will be asked when doing so by IRPP staff to consent to information about their settlement needs, such as that relating to the size of family, ages, family status, education, language skills, and other relevant information, being provided to the Irish Red Cross and to the Regional Support Organisation designated by the Department of Justice and Equality to inform matching and the provision of suitable supports upon arrival. This information could also include indications of trauma, physical and/or mental disability, or health conditions that will require access to appropriate services in the proposed location of settlement.

The transfer of information and its retention under CSI will be fully in compliance with applicable data protection standards and regulations.

MATCHING PROCESS

A successful sponsorship application will be met with a quick turnaround by the Irish State to ensure the speedy arrival of the refugees into Ireland so as to take advantage of the community resources prepared.

Under the auspices of the IRPP Taskforce, IRPP staff, UNHCR and the Irish Red Cross will together consider eligible refugee families and approved Community Support Groups for the purposes of matching. Although the final decision will be taken by the Department of Justice and Equality, appropriate consideration will be given to the recommendations of UNHCR and Irish Red Cross in doing so.

Refugees opting for CSI will be asked to consent to basic practical information about their settlement needs also being shared with their matched CSG and RSO, such as that relating to the size of family, ages, education, and language skills, to inform their settlement plans. There will be no obligation to share sensitive or personal information, such as details of their medical history, where the family do not wish to. Where access to particular services, such as health services, has been identified as a particular need, this will be considered during the matching process to ensure that required services will be available in the location where they are to be resettled.

Once a match has been made, the CSG and RSO will be immediately informed. From this point, the Department of Justice and Equality will move forward with pre-departure and travel planning. When finalised, travel details for the refugees matched to a sponsoring community will be provided to the sponsors so that they can be on hand to welcome them on arrival, to provide onward transportation and to ensure initial arrangements are in place. A designated focal point within the IRPP will be the primary point of contact with the CSG and RSO for the purposes of coordinating refugee arrivals following approval and for verifying that appropriate arrangements are in place beforehand.

REGIONAL SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS (RSOs)

To ensure sponsors are well prepared to take on the responsibilities of their engagement, each Community Sponsorship Group will be required to align themselves with a Regional Support Organisation. RSOs are organisations who enter into an agreement with the Department of Justice and Equality to provide training and support to a CSG in applying to participate in CSI and, if approved, in the delivery of resettlement support throughout the sponsorship period. Such organisations must be: incorporated (a legally created organisation); have a physical presence in Ireland; and satisfy the Department of Justice and Equality that they have the necessary resources, experience and expertise in place to provide the necessary supports.

[5]See further UNHCR Resettlement Handbook, 2011, July 2011, available at:

http://www.refworld.org/docid/4ecb973c2.html

These organisations will be responsible for educating potential sponsors on the sponsorship process, and helping CSGs in the development of their settlement plans. RSOs will also provide on-going support to sponsors prior to, during and following the arrival of the refugees, assist in the resolution of issues which may arise between the refugee family and their sponsors. RSOs will also participate in the monitoring, evaluation, and further development of the CSI programme.

During the Development Phase, the Department of Justice and Equality will enter initially into an agreement with a minimum of five Local Development Companies[6] and NGOs who are experienced in the provision of supports to refugees and migrants. These groups will collaborate to assist the IRPP to develop, trial and evaluate tools and systems for general deployment during the Implementation Phase. RSOs will also play an active role in promoting community sponsorship and recruiting and training sponsors at the local level. During the Implementation Phase, it is envisaged that the identification and engagement of CSGs will also be promoted at a national level through the activities of the IRPP and the National Support Organisation.

During the Implementation Phase, prospective new Regional Support Organisations will apply to the Department of Justice and Equality in order to be approved as a RSO under Community Sponsorship Ireland. Organisations will be required to provide information about the size, budget, nature, capacity governance and goals of the organisation. Any incorporated organisation with a physical presence in Ireland, for example trade unions, national sporting bodies, civil society organisations etc., may apply. They will also be asked to provide information about their experience related to the resettlement of refugees in the community. Those organisations who do not have such prior experience may access additional support through a new National Support Organisation to be established during the Development Phase that will assist emergent RSOs to develop the necessary capacity (see section below for more information on the National Support Organisation).

RSOs will enter into a formal agreement with the Department of Justice and Equality. The agreements will cover the RSOs organisational responsibilities for support and coordination of CSGs, as well as vetting of sponsorship applications.

NATIONAL SUPPORT ORGANISATION (NSO)

Experience in Canada and the United Kingdom, two countries that have developed and successfully rolled out community sponsorship programmes, points to the need for high quality, ongoing support both for Regional Support Organisations (RSOs) that are already established and for organisations that wish to become a RSO so that these organisations can support CSGs in a coordinated and standardised way.

In the Irish programme, a civil society-led umbrella body will be established over the course of the Development Phase to provide national support to RSOs. It is envisaged that this organisation will be broadly similar in nature to the Canadian Refugee Sponsorship Agreement Holders Association (a national membership association for RSOs).

The role of this organisation is likely to include:

- The promotion of community sponsorship at the national level.
- Supporting and building capacity amongst RSOs.
- The recruitment of future RSOs.
- The development and delivery of training programmes for Community Sponsorship Groups in collaboration with RSOs as required (both web based and in-person).
- Providing supports and assistance to RSOs actively involved in the delivery of CSI.

[6]For more information about the national network of Local Development Companies see:

http://ildn.ie

- Facilitating and encouraging innovation and collaboration amongst RSOs; avoiding duplication of work, identifying and minimising gaps.
- Accessing and leveraging private sector funding and resources to grow community sponsorship in a scalable fashion.
- Evaluating the effectiveness of both the RSOs and the sponsor groups affiliated with this body to effectively support refugee families.
- Providing support and assistance to RSOs when breakdown issues arise with sponsorship placements.

Roll out, Monitoring and Evaluation, Contingency Planning

LAUNCH OF INITIAL DEVELOPMENT PHASE

In order to meet the targets of resettling a minimum of 50 persons by July 2019, and of Community Sponsorship Ireland being fully operational before the end of the current mandate of the IRPP in 2019, an initial Development Phase will be launched to run from October 2018 to September 2019. Through an initial period of development, the Irish Government and its civil society partners intend to demonstrate the concept of community sponsorship in Ireland and to ensure that all of the necessary systems and structures are tried and tested in time for the launch of the Implementation Phase in August 2019.

At the beginning of the Development Phase, the Department of Justice and Equality will enter into agreements with a minimum of five Regional Support Organisations who will in turn be asked to promote community sponsorship locally and to recruit one or two Community Sponsorship Groups each with the aim of resettling a minimum of 50 refugees over the course of the following 12 months. The RSOs chosen will collaborate to assist the IRPP to develop and evaluate tools and systems for general deployment during the Implementation Phase.

A National Support Organisation will also be established during the Project Development Phase. This civil society-led organisation will, once fully operational, provide national support to sponsors and Regional Support Organisations during the Project Implementation Phase. Potential RSOs who wish to apply to become involved in CSI during the implementation phase, but who do not have significant experience in the delivery of supports to refugees or migrants, will be able to access assistance through this new NSO who will facilitate emergent RSOs to develop the necessary capacity.

In tandem, the development will begin of a new application and case management portal to provide one central entry-point for all the operational stakeholders involved in Community Sponsorship Ireland. This new scalable, efficient and adaptable platform will fully comply with data protection laws and ensure access to data is regulated in strict compliance with all legal obligations.

In October 2019, the Implementation Phase will begin and Community Sponsorship Ireland will become fully operational and start accepting applications on an ongoing basis. For a detailed timeline, see Appendix II below. Robust monitoring and evaluation systems will be built into CSI from the beginning to facilitate a process of ongoing review and refinement as it scales up over years to come.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

As CSI will launch initially as a Development Phase to demonstrate the concept in the Irish environment, it is important that there is a mechanism in place to gather data and assess performance of the scheme against key benchmarks or performance indicators.

Much of the data to monitor the performance of CSI can be collected through reporting requirements built into both the agreements between the Department of Justice and Equality and approved RSOs. Given the small set of individuals involved, surveys are likely to produce acceptable response rates and yield usable data.

As the CSI stream will run in tandem with the existing IRPP State-run stream, there is also an opportunity for the collection of comparative data from the field staff spread throughout existing infrastructure. Over the course of the Development Phase, a robust monitoring and evaluation framework will be developed for roll-out during the Implementation Phase. An independent evaluation of the programme will also be undertaken at an appropriate juncture of the project's development, which will include an opportunity for people resettled under CSI to share their views.

SPONSORSHIP BREAKDOWN

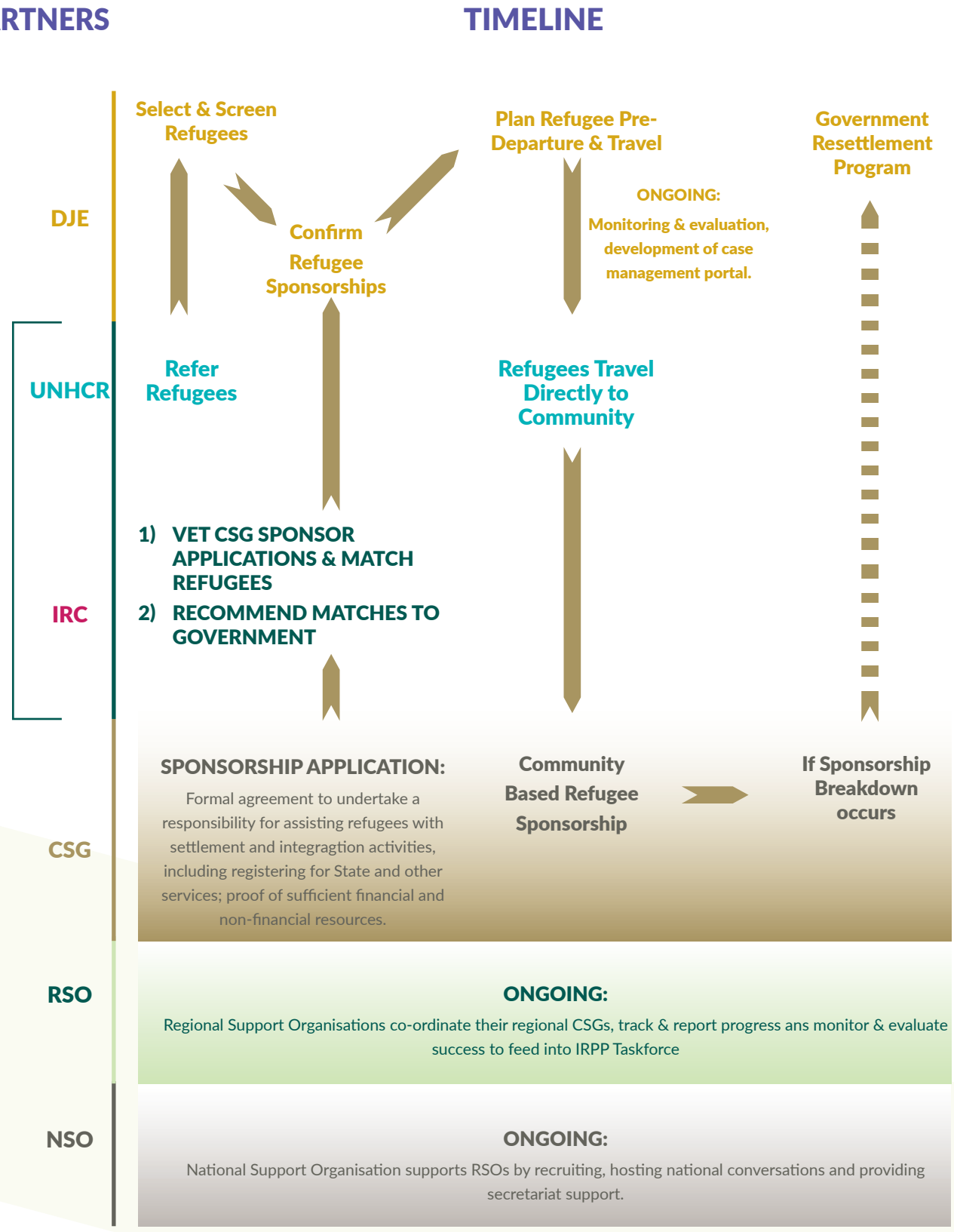
When an irreparable failure to meet the sponsorship arrangement (care, lodging, settlement) has occurred, this is called a sponsorship breakdown. Experience in the Canadian community sponsorship programme suggests that sponsorship breakdown is rare. The process of establishing a sponsorship, selecting an appropriate refugee family and placing them into the right community builds a level of flexibility and "give" which allow most unforeseen circumstances to be addressed. The resources and training provided by Regional Support Organisations and the National Support Organisation will be an additional support in forestalling breakdown. However, experience has shown that despite these best efforts, sponsorship relationships can fall apart and be irrevocably damaged: individuals undergo life-changing events; organisations face competing pressures, funding gaps, volunteer shortages and fatigue.

Given that the State and community streams will both exist under the rubric of the IRPP, in the event of a complete breakdown of the sponsorship all ties will be severed with the sponsoring group and the refugees will then continue their settlement via the State system. In certain circumstances, this may require a temporary placement of the refugees into an available Emergency Reception and Orientation Centre.

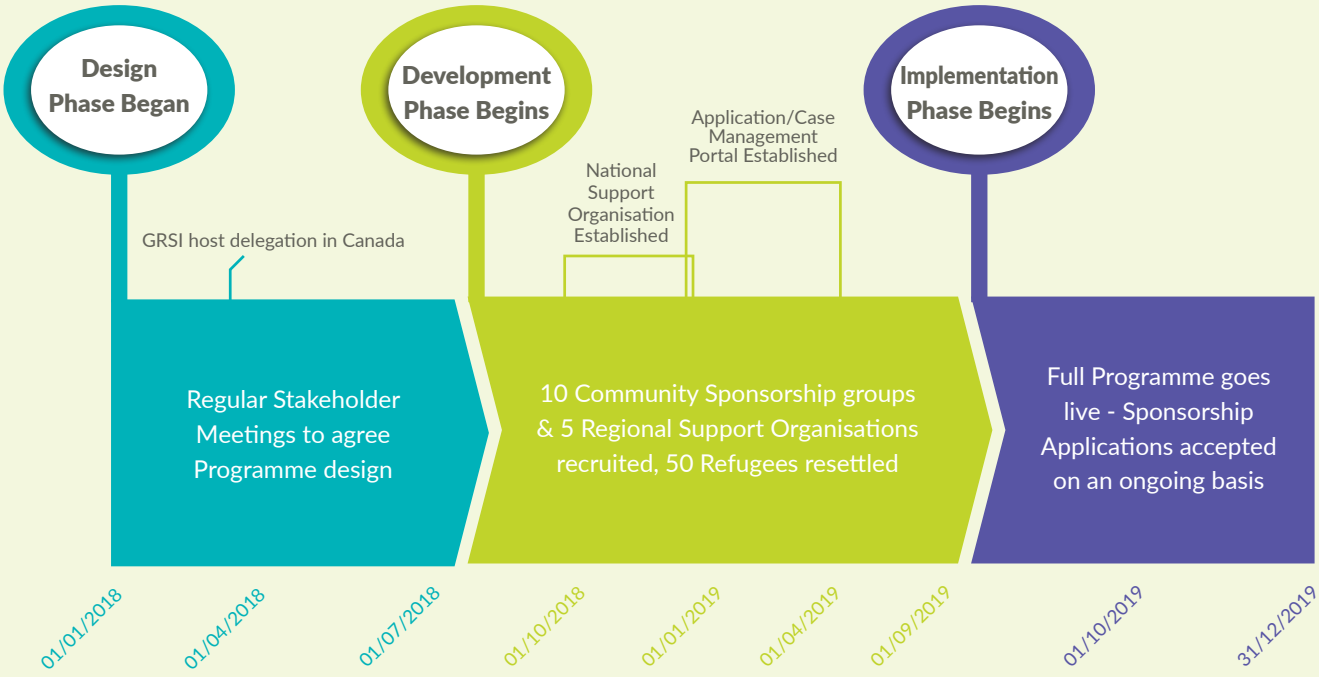
Before breakdown is declared, the RSO will act as mediator and work with the CSG and the refugees to seek a resolution. Where requested, the NSO will provide the RSO with additional levels of support and advice in seeking a satisfactory resolution. All effort will be taken to prevent breakdown and to ensure sponsored refugees continue to receive the needed care, lodging, settlement assistance and financial support from the CSG. Equally, the RSO will endeavour to support the Community Sponsorship Group to ensure they are not hindered or obstructed in their efforts to abide by the terms of their undertaking as specified in the agreed settlement plan.

In the absence of a solution, the Irish Refugee Protection Programme will be the final arbiter and will decide upon an appropriate resolution.

Appendix I: CSI Process Flow – Implementation Phase



Appedix II: Project Timelines



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