Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

IRPP – Humanitarian Admissions Programme

A Guide for Prospective Sponsors

Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
www.gov.ie/dcediy

Introduction

The Humanitarian Admissions Programme
Between 2021 and 2024, Ireland welcomed 700+ humanitarian cases from Afghanistan through the IRPP Afghan Programme. This work continues through the Irish Government's IRPP Humanitarian Admissions Programme, prioritising at-risk individuals such as human rights defenders, women's rights activists, LGBTQ+ individuals, and journalists.

For 2025, The Open Community has been appointed to administer the programme, supporting the admission of 50 individuals through a Community Sponsorship (CS) framework.

Communities across Ireland have been asked to play an important and direct role in this programme. Through Community Sponsorship, they have been encouraged to come together to show solidarity with those affected by war and persecution and to assume responsibility for welcoming them to their community. Community Sponsorship Groups (CSGs) are provided with training and support so that they feel empowered with the knowledge and skills to effectively assist beneficiaries coming to Ireland to build a new life in a safe and welcoming environment.

This guide explains how Community Sponsorship works, the obligations of sponsors and the application process involved should your community group wish to play a part in welcoming beneficiaries to Ireland under IRPP - Humanitarian Admissions Programme.

What is Community Sponsorship?

Community Sponsorship started in Canada in the 1970s. Unlike traditional refugee resettlement models, where the State or State-supported actors provide settlement and integration services directly to refugees, Community Sponsorship invites members of the public to play a key role in the delivery of these supports.

Under such programmes, private citizens and community organisations, rather than government officials, become the face of welcome for refugees arriving to their country. In Ireland, communities are supported to provide direct assistance to beneficiaries settling in their locality through the Humanitarian Admissions Programme. Sponsors commit to provide social and emotional support to beneficiaries over a specific period of time, to source suitable accommodation and help them to find employment, learn the local language, enrol in schools and more; they play a key role in introducing them to state services and social and professional networks in the new community in which they have settled. For communities, such programmes are a great way to build broader awareness of refugee-related issues and to help promote understanding and intercultural exchanges. Often both sponsors and beneficiaries have a life-changing and enriching experience, and both in Ireland and abroad it has been shown to bring communities together.

Who can be considered for admission to Ireland under the IRPP Humanitarian Admissions Programme?

People who:

- have exposed themselves to particular risk through their commitment to women's/human rights or their work in the spheres of justice, politics, the media, education, culture, sport or academia and are thus vulnerable

  and/or

- due to the special circumstances of their individual cases- have experienced or are experiencing violence or persecution based on their gender, sexual orientation or gender identity or religion and are therefore at concrete and personal risk. In particular, these are victims of serious individual women's rights violations, homo- or transphobic human rights violations or vulnerable representatives of religious groups/communities.

Who can submit a Community Sponsorship application?

Participation in community sponsorship is voluntary, and applications are open to all kinds of community groups, including local community groups, faith groups, businesses, neighbours, charities etc.

Engaging in Community Sponsorship is a substantial undertaking requiring the assumption of a significant responsibility. A Community Sponsorship Group (CSG) must consider all aspects of their commitment before applying.

In order to submit an application your group must consider and demonstrate the following:

- Your group must comprise a minimum core group of five people (a primary and secondary sponsor and a minimum of three additional CSG support personnel), all of whom must be over 18. They should have an interest in other cultures, respect for diversity and a demonstrated connection to their community.

- Each member of the group must be legally resident in Ireland.

- Your group must nominate a Primary Sponsor who will assume responsibility for applying for approval to become sponsors in the first instance, and if approved, for leading the co-ordination and the delivery of the sponsorship commitments. He/she will be the primary point of contact for the CSG.

- Your group must also nominate a Secondary Sponsor who will support the Primary Sponsor in the co-ordination and the delivery of the sponsorship commitments. He/she will be the primary point of contact when the Primary Sponsor is unavailable.

- CSG support personnel are people who will play a regular or significant role in the delivery of settlement supports to the beneficiary. While friends and family may also help you on an occasional basis, it's important for safeguarding reasons that you identify everyone you anticipate will be playing a regular or significant role in the delivery of supports.

- Your group should include individuals with a range of skill sets so that a varied level of experience is covered. For example, someone with language skills; someone with experience in education, employment, financial supports; and someone who has experience in working in an intercultural context or supporting vulnerable people would all be beneficial. In your Settlement Plan you will be asked to designate who has responsibility for each area.

- Your group must agree to undergo specified training in advance of the commencement of the programme.

- Your group must commit to raising a minimum of €10,000 to support a sponsored beneficiary/€5,000 in the case of an individual, of which a maximum of €2,000 may be in-

kind contributions. In your application you will be asked to provide details on how you plan to raise funds to support the implementation of your Settlement Plan and to cater for unexpected eventualities.

How long is the Community Sponsorship Group commitment?

Your CSG will be expected to commit to sponsor a beneficiary for a period of eighteen months and to ensure that accommodation is secured for the beneficiary for a minimum period of two years.

Sponsoring means your CSG will provide all necessary supports to the beneficiary during the initial period of their relocation to Ireland and assist the beneficiary's successful integration into your community.

What are the responsibilities of a Community Sponsorship Group?

Community Sponsorship does not curtail in any way the existing rights and entitlements of beneficiaries to access state services. The legal rights of IRPP beneficiaries are set out in Section 59 of the International Protection Act 2015.[1] As mentioned above, such beneficiaries have a right to legal residence upon arrival and in most respects, including education, employment and social protection, they have the same rights and entitlements as Irish citizens. They become eligible to apply for naturalisation after three years.

Your CSG will meet the beneficiary in the airport on day one to welcome them to Ireland and bring them to their new home where you will help them to get set up and provide some initial orientation. Groups also help newcomer beneficiaries to register with the appropriate authorities and introduce them to essential state services covering basic needs in areas such as health, education, and social protection. You will also need to ensure that appropriate interpretation services are available as required, particularly during the initial months of the sponsorship commitment period.

In addition to ensuring access to key services and entitlements, your CSG will play a vital role in helping beneficiaries to become independent and to develop the capacity to participate fully in Irish life. In other words, you will be asked to promote positive integration outcomes for the beneficiaries you welcome to your community. Integration in this context 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".[2] In particular, you will be required to support and enable them to:

- Interact with the local community and participate in cultural, sporting and other activities while preserving also 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 with confidence.

[1] Irish Statute Book: International Protection Act 2015, Section 59

[2] justice.ie: The Migrant Integration Strategy

- Access education appropriate to their needs and capacities.
- Participate in economic life– in employment and self-employment.
- Become full and active members of the community and Irish society.
- Prepare them for their eventual move to more permanent accommodation at the end of the support period.

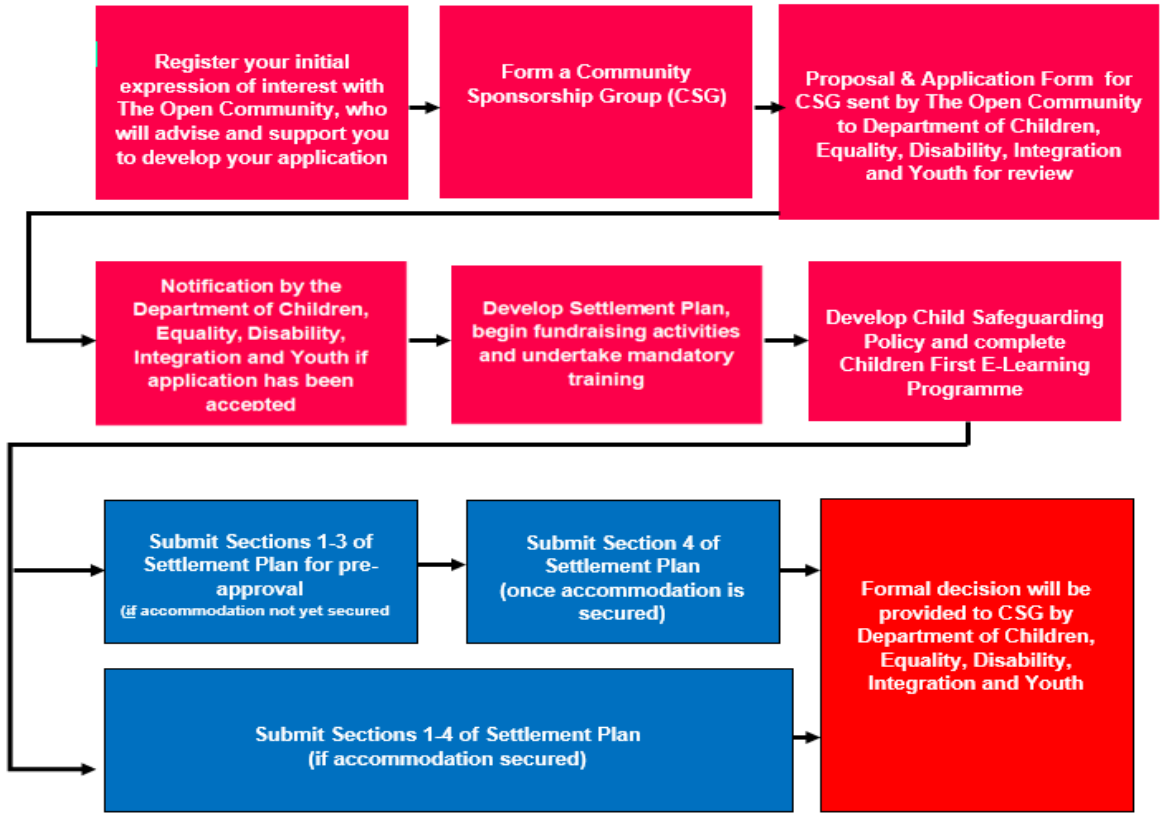
Your group will be asked to plan in detail for the provision of these supports and to demonstrate your preparations through the submission of a Settlement Plan. Every household will need different kinds and levels of support and your CSG must be prepared to adapt as it plans to support beneficiaries arriving to their community.

I'm interested in applying, what are the next steps?

If you would like to apply to become a sponsor under the Community Sponsorship Programme, for IRPP Humanitarian Admissions Programme the first thing to do is to find like-minded individuals who wish to apply with you.

The Application Process

In order to become a sponsor under the Community Sponsorship Initiative, you will be required to undertake the following steps before being approved to sponsor a beneficiary:



1. Register your initial expression of interest with The Open Community, who will advise, guide, and support you to develop your application.

2. Come together as a group of 5 or more to form a CSG; nominate a Primary and Secondary Sponsor and determine the roles the other members of the group will have.

3. Complete and submit to The Open Community, a Proposal and Application Form. The form will include plans for fundraising and a Sponsorship Undertaking whereby all members of the group commit to meet the obligations of the programme.

4. Your group will receive formal notification that your Application Form has been accepted by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.

5. Your group should begin developing your Settlement Plan, start your planned fundraising activities and participate in mandatory training.

6. All group members must complete Tusla's Children First e-learning module, available free online. A digital certificate is provided on completion of this module. Complete a group Child Safeguarding Policy that outlines your group's policies and procedures to mitigate harm and risk of harm to children under the supervision of your group or at events held by your group. Please note that each group is required to nominate a safeguarding 'Designated Liaison Person' within the group.

7. Complete and submit a detailed Settlement Plan, explaining how you plan to support a newcomer household. The Open Community will be able to provide feedback and advise of any necessary amendments before it is submitted to the Department. The CSG's Child Safeguarding Policy, evidence of funds raised, and Children First E-Learning certificates must be submitted to the Department alongside the Settlement Plan.

8. If you do not have an accommodation solution available at the time of submission of the Settlement Plan, you may submit Sections 1 – 3 of the Settlement Plan for approval and submit Section 4 once you have secured suitable accommodation. A formal decision can only be made once suitable accommodation has been secured.

9. Once all sections of the Settlement Plan have been submitted to the Department, your group will receive formal notification from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth that your Settlement Plan has been accepted. At that stage, your group will wait for the final approval of the HA application and will be notified of the anticipated arrival date of the beneficiary at that point.

Financial Commitment and Fundraising

As mentioned above, when submitting a Settlement Plan, sponsors are required to demonstrate that they have a minimum of €10,000 on hand to support a sponsored beneficiary/€5,000 in the case of an individual, of which a maximum of €2,000 may be in-kind contributions (e.g. a commitment given to provide professional interpretation services, English classes, childcare etc. free of charge).

Beneficiaries are entitled to access a range of social welfare benefits on the basis of the same eligibility criteria as Irish citizens. Applications can be made in person at your local Intreo Centre

or Department of Social Protection.[3] In the first few months after arrival, the beneficiary will typically require a range of financial supports, to cover expenses such as food, medical expenses, clothing and educational materials, including books and school uniforms etc. Depending on their individual circumstances, some beneficiary households may qualify for supplementary or discretionary welfare schemes, such as the Exceptional Needs Payments.

CSGs are expected to demonstrate that they have fully considered the needs and requirements of each beneficiary and to plan financial needs accordingly. Additional funding may also be required to ensure that the beneficiaries can participate fully, to the extent they wish to, in local society and community activities. However, this provision of support should be balanced with the ultimate goal of the beneficiaries becoming financially and otherwise self-sufficient by the end of the sponsorship period.

Financial Planning

Essential criteria

- A draft budget should be prepared initially to project monthly expenditure.
- A fundraising plan must be drawn up and set out in your Application Form.
- A minimum of €10,000/€5,000 fundraised (of which up to €2,000 may be committed by way of in-kind contributions). This is to be held in a secure account with a minimum of two signatories to be drawn down, as required, over the duration of the Community Sponsorship period.

Meeting the criteria

- **Prepare an initial budget**
  Examine the areas that your CSG will be responsible for and how you plan to address this over the course of the sponsorship period. When preparing your budget take into account which resources can be provided in-kind, through donations and which can be covered by social welfare until such time as beneficiary's access employment. You will also need to ensure contingency for any additional or unforeseen costs such as urgent dental work, or any special needs the beneficiary might have. Back to Education supports for children and adults should also be fully researched and planned for (e.g. childcare arrangements while parents attend classes). You may also need to factor in delays in accessing certain entitlements.

- **Fundraise**
  It is essential to put together a fundraising plan with realistic targets as to how your CSG can reach the financial commitment of this programme. Community Sponsorship is a community endeavour, so your initial fundraising targets should start within your community. This is also a great way to work together towards a common goal and to spread the news about your plans. A broad approach can also be useful, mixing fundraising with donations from local businesses, for example.

[3] gov.ie: Supplementary Welfare Allowance

- **Evidence of funds**
  A dedicated account should be set up for the purposes of administering and holding in trust any funds raised with appropriate oversight and controls established. For instance, a minimum of two co-signatories should be required prior to any withdrawal. Bank statements will need to be submitted along with your Settlement Plan in order to provide evidence that your group has a minimum of €10,000/€5,000 available (€8,000 where €2,000 is committed by way of in-kind contributions) but also, more generally, sufficient funds to meet the anticipated costs set out in the budget by reference to the overall Settlement Plan.

Safeguarding

Children First guidance and legislation must be strictly adhered to in the implementation of Community Sponsorship. As CSGs are likely to be working with children and vulnerable adults, they are required to:

- Keep children safe from harm while they are using the service and attending events etc. organised by the CSG.
- Your group must designate a Child Safeguarding Liaison Person within the CSG.
- All members of the CSG who, will have direct contact with the beneficiary, will be required to complete Tusla's Children First E-Learning Programme.[4] Proof of completion of the E-Learning Programme must be submitted along with your Settlement Plan.
- The CSG will be required to develop a Child Safeguarding Policy. The Child Safeguarding Policy must be submitted along with your Settlement Plan.

Data protection and privacy

Maintaining the privacy of the beneficiary is important; therefore, your CSG must commit to:

- Never share personal information, documentation or data provided by or relating to the beneficiary without their informed consent.
- Get informed consent from the beneficiary in relation to any proposed media exposure, requests or interest. Note that these beneficiaries are termed 'programme refugees' under section 59 of the International Protection Act 2015.

Your group should inform itself of its statutory obligations more generally with respect to the Data Protection Acts 1988 to 2018, for example, to keep personal data secure or to notify affected parties in the case of a breach.

[4] Tusla: Children First E-learning Programme

Settlement Plan

A detailed Settlement Plan is required as part of the application process and should fully consider all aspects of the support and needs of a beneficiary. Your CSG's Settlement Plan should demonstrate how your group will deliver Community Sponsorship to a beneficiary. It should set out by who, how, where and when the various aspects of your Settlement Plan will be delivered.

Settlement Planning

Essential criteria

- Development of a detailed Settlement Plan that sufficiently sets out how you will meet the needs of a beneficiary, both before and after their arrival.

Meeting the criteria

  - **Set out when you will provide the requisite supports for a** beneficiary using the guidance documents available, plan which supports should be provided immediately, and which supports should come later in the process.

- **Ensure you include as much detail as possible in the Settlement Plan**
  - From the beginning it is crucial that you consider where the accommodation will be and the size of accommodation available. If you do not have an accommodation solution available at the time of submission of the Settlement Plan, you may submit Sections 1 – 3 of the Settlement Plan for approval and submit Section 4 once you have secured suitable accommodation. It is recommended that you only commit to accommodation once you have almost or fully completed the other sections of the Settlement Plan.
  - Consider the types of support needed by a beneficiary and detail who will provide these supports.
  - Your plan will need to be robust and comprise evidence of how the supports will be provided and by whom. This should include the names and addresses of the individuals and organisations concerned.

- **Get support when required**
  - If you do not have the necessary skills and expertise within your group, source and identify additional support from organisations or other individuals who can provide this when required.

- **Build in contingency plans**
  - Be prepared for things to go wrong and not according to plan.
  - What alternate arrangements have you made in these circumstances?

- **Ensure that your Settlement Plan contains the full list of requirements required by the programme**
  This includes:
  - Arrival plan
  - Orientation – for both local community and beneficiaries
  - Proof of funds
  - Safeguarding Policy
  - Registration plan (IRP, PPSN etc.)
  - Social Welfare support
  - Suitable accommodation or a clear plan as to how it will be secured
  - Language courses
  - School places
  - Healthcare access; a G.P. and dentist willing to accept new medical card patients
  - Interpretation and translation Services
  - Access to employment services
  - Move to more permanent accommodation at the end of the sponsorship period

Resources

» Settlement Plan
» Guidance for Sponsors' Settlement Planning

What if something goes wrong? Dealing with relationship difficulties and breakdown.

If your group is experiencing difficulties, your CSG will be expected at all times to make every effort in good faith to prevent a breakdown in the relationship. Where this cannot be prevented, you will be required to seek a resolution, and enter into mediation where necessary.

Additional information

Thank you for your interest in Community Sponsorship and in helping to support a beneficiary through IRPP Humanitarian Admissions Programme as they rebuild their lives in Ireland.

For more information, please contact The Open Community.

Contact Details

The Open Community
Email: HAP25@theopencommunity.ie.

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