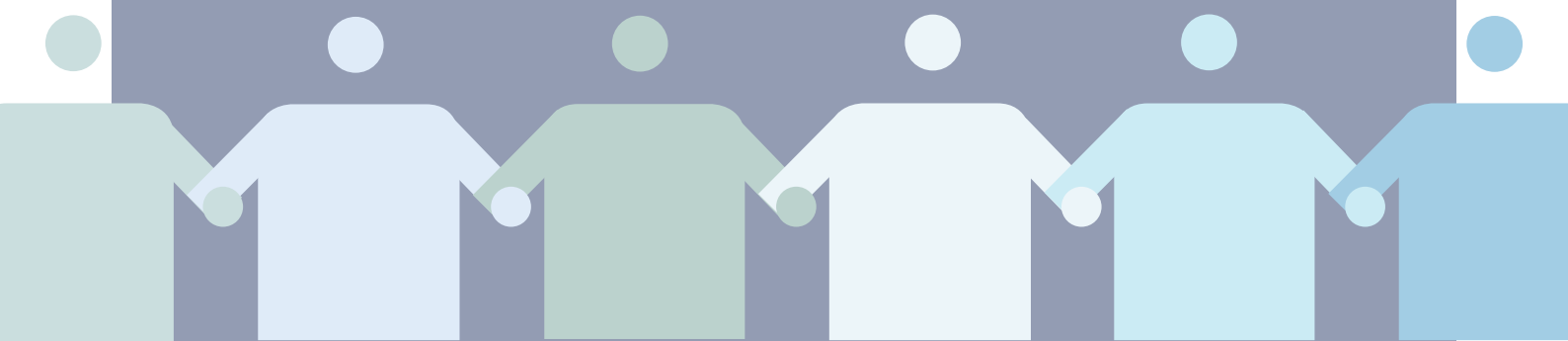# Equality Matters in Community Sponsorship

Considerations for Obtaining Feedback from Stakeholders

Executive Summary

Karen Smith | Carol Ballantine | Angham Younes | Zuhair Al Fakir

UCD | DUBLIN
School of Social Policy,
Social Work and Social Justice

Nasc
Migrant & Refugee Rights

IRISH RESEARCH COUNCIL
An Chomhairle um Thaighde in Éirinn

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

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

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

- **Inequality on the basis of refugee/international protection/migration status**

- **Inequality arising from the intersection of refugee/international protection status with other equality grounds**

- **Programmatic inequality arising from differences in rights and entitlements between and within programmes of settlement support for persons with refugee/ international protection status.**

- **Given that dispersal is a feature of resettlement under Community Sponsorship and of the mainstream resettlement programme, issues of spatial inequality are likely to arise.**

Findings

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Recommendations

Enhancing rights

- Ensure provision in native language and accessible format of a reference guide/ resource on rights and entitlements directly to refugee background stakeholders as soon as possible after arrival in Ireland.

- Ensure that accessible information on rights and entitlements in appropriate format is made available to children/young people; persons who are pre-literate in any language; persons with sensory impairments; persons with additional learning needs.

- Information on rights and entitlements provided to refugee background stakeholders should include clear information on how to raise issues/ concerns and make complaints within CSI and on how to recognise and report discrimination on racialised or other grounds.

- Development of a training module on rights and equality aimed at persons with international protection status should be considered.

- To ensure that refugee background stakeholders are facilitated to communicate effectively with members of CSGs and personnel in RSOs and other service providers, access to quality interpretation and intercultural support should be available as of right. Consideration should be given as to how to most effectively enhance, share, and coordinate provision of language and intercultural support across the two resettlement programmes.

- Regular 'check-ins' should be conducted with refugee background stakeholders, independently from the CSG, either by personnel employed in an RSO or another CSI stakeholder agency. We recommend that check-ins are conducted in the first language of the refugee background stakeholder and therefore consideration should be given to employment of personnel with requisite language skills who could carry out this function.

- Mechanisms for consultation with persons resettled under CSI should be developed in order to feed into policy development, review and reform.

- Support should be provided to establish a peer network for refugee background stakeholders (potentially across the mainstream and sponsorship programmes)

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

Feedback for the purposes of accountability and policy learning

- **Standardised reporting procedure for CSGs should be developed and implemented**

- **Provisions should be put in place for obtaining regular feedback from resettled persons through regular check-ins with RSO personnel or other appropriate persons as well as provision for feedback on anonymous basis**

- **There should be clear procedures for reporting and recording incidents within CSI of discriminatory treatment on racialised or other equality grounds**

- **Provision should be made for monitoring of experiences and outcomes for persons resettled under CSI during and after the programme period. Monitoring indicators should incorporate subjective views of refugee background stakeholders and take into account diverse needs, interests and challenges of persons disadvantaged on one or more equality grounds.**

- **Provision should be made for monitoring access to rights and entitlements across the various pathways for international protection in Ireland, in order to identify instances of programmatic inequality and address any disparities in provision.**

- **Monitoring and evaluation should take into account persons disadvantaged on one or more equality grounds. This could be achieved by disaggregating quantitative data according to key variables including gender, age, racialised identity, religion, gender and sexual identity, and disability status; and by actively seeking qualitative input from individuals disadvantaged on equality grounds.**