

# Welcome Groups



## What are Welcome Groups?

Welcome Groups, also called Community Sponsorship Groups supporting refugee students, are supportive networks formed by volunteer university students and staff, alumni and community members to help welcome newly arrived refugee students to campus.

Welcome Groups play an essential role in supporting refugee students by providing emotional, social, and practical assistance, ensuring the refugee students feel welcomed and integrated into university life throughout their studies.

## Why Get Involved?

The number of people forced to flee their homes globally is now over 120 million, with the vast majority hosted in low- and middle-income countries. Almost half of the world's refugees are of working age, but many find themselves in countries where they have limited opportunities to work or study.

**Welcome Groups are a meaningful way to get involved and to create a safe and welcoming space for a refugee to study in your country.**

### Joining a Welcome Group means you:

- **Make a Difference:** Help refugee students adapt to their new environment and thrive.
- **Build Community:** Strengthen connections among students, alumni, and refugees, enhancing campus diversity and inclusion.
- **Develop Skills:** Gain valuable leadership and teamwork experience while engaging in meaningful service.

**“[It’s] the best thing to have happened to me in the new phase of my life, I have been able to meet new people, learn from them, felt loved and appreciated...”**

*Refugee Student Ireland*

**“An amazing experience! Working as a team, with incoming students, and being given the chance to take on a formal role has given me real world experience and networking that will be invaluable once I graduate.”**

*Student Member of Fáilte Cork – A Higher Education Community Sponsorship Group*

# Create a Welcome Group



## Step 1: Raise Awareness

- Raise awareness about how you can support refugee students through Welcome Groups.
- Start by learning about the experiences of refugee students and the scholarship programs that support them.
- See how your university can support the group. For example, some groups have been supported by the chaplaincy, international office etc.
- Collaborate with student organisations, faculty, administration and community groups to spread the word.
- Organise an event (workshop, film screening, invited guest speaker) to create awareness about the Welcome Groups.
- Use social media, posters in the student centre or the university newspaper to get the word out.



## Step 2: Reach out

- Identify students, faculty, alumni and community members who are passionate about refugee support.
- Reach out to student groups, clubs, and societies, language groups or community organisations to promote your initiative and reach a wider audience. Contact alumni networks to invite former students to join.
- Hold an information session to discuss the purpose and vision of the Welcome Group.



## Step 3: Get organized

- Draft a simple agreement outlining the purpose, structure, and activities of your Welcome Group.
- Seek recognition as an official student group, if possible, which can help with funding and university support.
- Assign roles and responsibilities for each group member, such as coordinator, administrator (as needed by the group).
- Create a communication platform (e.g., WhatsApp, Slack, email list) to keep members engaged.



## Step 4: Plan your first activity

- Check with your university or partnering NGO as to how best to provide support. This might be a fundraiser, arranging a campus tour or a welcome dinner for the arriving students.
- Use your local knowledge to create an information booklet - what are the things a new student arriving in your country should know. This can be information on the best places to shop, where you can rent a bike, the cheapest phone networks or where to find mental health supports on campus.
- Provide academic and social support, such as study groups and networking opportunities.
- Plan social events. Are you familiar with the local town or city? Why not arrange a walking tour or a picnic?



## Step 5: Growing the Group

- Regularly evaluate your activities and gather feedback from refugee students.
- Seek funding opportunities through grants, university programs, or student government.
- Document best practices and share them with other universities to inspire similar initiatives.
- Pass on leadership roles to ensure continuity from year to year.
- Keep raising awareness of the work of the Welcome Group to encourage more members to join.

