



Private Sponsorship of Refugees in the United States:

Guiding Principles and Recommendations

Executive Summary of Forthcoming Paper

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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 the 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.

For more information on how you can help, email Betsy Fisher, Policy Director of the International Refugee Assistance Project, at bfisher@refugeerights.org.