

Measuring Up?

Using monitoring and evaluation to make good on the promise of refugee sponsorship

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Executive Summary

By Spring 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic had ground international protection operations to a halt around the world amid travel restrictions and border closures. But this unexpected pause in day-to-day work has a small silver lining: policymakers have a precious opportunity to revisit what they aim to achieve with their programmes, and how to develop a system that monitors progress towards these goals and facilitates evidence-based improvements.

This forced hiatus comes at a critical juncture in the development of many refugee sponsorship programmes (also called community or private sponsorship, or humanitarian corridors in some contexts). Private sponsorship emerged in Canada in the 1980s, but the model only gained traction in Europe after the 2015–16 refugee crisis. Unlike in traditional refugee resettlement, refugee sponsorship allows communities and civil-society organisations to take a hands-on role in supporting the settlement and integration of refugees, with government authorities retaining ultimate responsibility for the success or failure of the programme. But there is relatively limited evidence on how sponsorship programmes are performing, whether they are fulfilling the high expectations policymakers and the public hold for

them, where there is scope for improvement, and, crucially, what impact they have on refugees, sponsors, and wider communities.

As uncertainty looms over whether and when countries that have been hit hard by the pandemic will resume their protection programmes, refugee sponsorship, which operates outside of government-set resettlement quotas in some countries, may become an even more critical lifeline for refugees in regions of displacement. A monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system can help give decisionmakers the confidence—and evidence—they need to launch or expand a sponsorship scheme. It also helps ensure that challenges can be quickly identified and addressed so that programmes are able to achieve their desired impact, and makes programmes more accountable to the public, refugees, and their sponsors.

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To get an M&E system off the ground and reap these benefits, policymakers and other stakeholders must consider:

- ▶ **What types of data are already available and what data must be collected to best capture a programme's performance against its objectives?** A wide range of process- and results-related considerations warrant tracking through an M&E framework. But the question on many policymakers' minds is whether sponsorship programmes live up to their claim of creating more welcoming societies for refugees. While there is only limited research in this area, there are a few promising examples, such as work by researchers at the University of Birmingham in the United Kingdom on how M&E systems could tackle this question. To date, many evaluations of refugee sponsorship initiatives have relied on qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews and focus groups, but a smart set of alternative data collection tools (including quantitative ones) merit exploration to shore up gaps in analysis and avoid overwhelming busy sponsors and refugees.
- ▶ **How can policymakers secure the buy-in of key sponsorship stakeholders and coordinate an M&E system?** Sponsorship programmes are quintessential public-private partnerships with many and diverse stakeholders, such as national and local governments, civil-society organisations, international organisations, individual volunteers, and refugees themselves. M&E success therefore hinges on policymakers' ability to gather all these stakeholders around the table in order to agree on a programme's data needs and the role each actor will take in collecting and analysing these data. Moreover, the process of developing an M&E

system can help crystallise a set of common objectives between these actors and ensure these aims are reflected in the logic guiding the sponsorship programme's design. Making sure that M&E findings are relevant and cater to different stakeholders' needs can help secure and maintain their commitment to both M&E and the sponsorship programme itself.

Integrating M&E into refugee sponsorship systems will build the evidence base on what does and does not work at different stages in these programmes, making them more resilient in times of unprecedented uncertainty. But in order for sponsorship programmes to smoothly transition from being relative novelties to established features of countries' protection portfolios, the current opportunity to implement or beef up M&E systems must be seized—and quickly.

1 Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic has forced a pause on resettlement operations around the world. With an estimated 1.4 million of the world's refugees in need of resettlement because return to their country of origin or local integration in their first country of asylum is not feasible, the timing could not be worse.¹ But this pause also marks an unexpected and valuable opportunity for policymakers to reflect on the objectives of their protection programmes and how a (strengthened) monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system could document progress towards these aims and inform timely programme changes.

In countries that have refugee sponsorship programmes, these programmes are often relatively new or still in the pilot phase. While the idea of private sponsorship traces its roots back several decades to Canada in the 1980s, it has been trialled and transformed in Europe, the Americas, and Oceania in the wake of the 2015–16 refugee crisis.²

Uptake has been highest in Europe, with seven countries on the continent having either piloted or implemented sponsorship schemes.³ Yet surprisingly little evidence is available about how well such programmes are performing, their impact on refugees and receiving communities, or how to invest smartly to scale up operations. The relative youth of these programmes could leave them more fragile after the disruption forced by the pandemic, particularly where they have been unable to attract or train new sponsors, or where a political decision is needed to scale up or continue a pilot programme.

BOX 1

What is refugee sponsorship?

Rather than a single type of programme, refugee sponsorship is an umbrella term for initiatives that share a common premise: that certain responsibilities within refugee resettlement systems that have traditionally been held by the government—such as the selection of refugees to be resettled, the organisation of their travel and reception, and support for their integration after arrival—can be transferred to nongovernmental organisations or private individuals.

This transfer or sharing of responsibilities aims to increase the number of available protection places, harness the support of local volunteers, and boost integration outcomes by placing refugees directly into welcoming communities. Different forms of sponsorship, such as humanitarian corridors, special family reunification schemes, and community sponsorship, have different levels of government involvement and requirements for sponsors.

This issue brief looks at the added value that M&E can bring to sponsorship programmes. It also highlights key challenges policymakers will need to tackle to get M&E mechanisms off the ground.

As protection regimes around the world begin to think ahead to how they will bounce back from the pandemic, sponsorship may become even more of a critical lifeline for refugees in first countries of asylum.⁴ At the same time, the pandemic is affecting core elements of sponsorship programmes as social distancing measures limit interactions between sponsors, refugees, and society more broadly. Common programme offerings designed to welcome and ease the integration of newly arrived refugees—such as language and educational classes offered by public authorities, or sponsors taking refugees grocery shopping or for a visit to the local employment office—have in some cases been suspended or changed in the face of the public health crisis, all with unknown consequences. Seizing on the small but growing interest in M&E within refugee sponsorship and other protection pathways⁵ is essential to ensure that these programmes are resilient and that they (continue) delivering on their objectives.

2 The Value of M&E for Refugee Sponsorship

Unlike refugees who come to a country under traditional resettlement programmes, or asylum seekers who arrive spontaneously, sponsorship initiatives aim to provide refugees immediately with a welcoming and supportive community to help them navigate their new environment. There is a plethora of anecdotal evidence suggesting that, as a result, sponsorship schemes yield positive integration outcomes for refugees, and that sponsors benefit from a rejuvenated sense of community and purpose.⁶ But without robust M&E, it is difficult to identify the mechanisms through which sponsorship generates these benefits and to test how well they work across different profiles of refugees, sponsors, and hosting societies.⁷

An infrastructure for sharing best practices between states, civil-society organisations, and sponsors is beginning to take shape.⁸ However, unless the research base underpinning exchange efforts is strengthened, countries will be left to find their way through the design and implementation of sponsorship programmes largely by trial and error. A stronger evidence base could provide guidance on, for example, which essential programme features merit more investment. By carefully monitoring and evaluating the performance and impact of sponsorship programmes, policymakers and programme designers can expect three main benefits: increased political commitment, accountability, and effectiveness.

BOX 2

What is monitoring and evaluation?

Monitoring is the continuous process of collecting and analysing information to assess how well a project, programme, or policy is performing and to facilitate quick interventions to solve problems. Monitoring can also track performance against expected results, compare across programmes, and analyse trends over time.

Evaluation, by contrast, is the assessment of an ongoing or completed programme or policy in terms of whether its objectives were met and how or why it was (not) successful. It examines the relevance of the intervention, along with its efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability. An evaluation should provide information that is credible and useful, allowing lessons learnt to be incorporated into the future decision-making processes and operations of both implementing partners and donors.

Sources: Paul J. Gertler et al., *Impact Evaluation in Practice*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: World Bank Group and Inter-American Development Bank, 2016); Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Development Assistance Committee, *Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results-Based Management* (Paris: OECD, 2002).

A. *Strengthening political commitment to sponsorship*

Political commitment and public buy-in are essential to get sponsorship programmes off the ground and make them sustainable. Getting it right—and being seen as getting it right—is particularly important for policymakers who stick their necks out to advocate for the testing of these innovative programmes. For example, after Ireland launched its community sponsorship pilot in December 2018, the minister responsible for immigration and integration made a direct appeal to ‘communities across the country to extend the hand of friendship to a refugee family and work alongside government to make this a reality.’⁹ Before rolling out the scheme across Ireland, the government commissioned an external evaluation to help determine the value of the pilot and, if continued, how it could be scaled up.¹⁰ Sponsorship programmes that can provide evidence of their success can even become a calling card for political leaders on the international stage. The former immigration minister in Canada, John McCallum, is said to have proudly remarked to counterparts from around the world that Canada is the only country that could not get refugees fast enough to meet the demand and generosity of sponsors.¹¹

Evaluations can also help boost political capital by protecting sponsorship programmes from unpredictable external shocks. In Germany, for example, the COVID-19 pandemic struck just after the country’s pilot sponsorship programme started admitting its first refugees, testing the patience of sponsors and refugees, and possibly limiting the success stories its political supporters will be able to tell. If an evaluation, such as the one underway by the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees,

demonstrates that the pilot brought value, despite this unforeseen challenge, it could help insulate the programme from the frustrations and disappointments that might otherwise influence a decision on the programme's future.

B. Ensuring the accountability of programme design and implementation

Compared to traditional protection pathways, such as resettlement, sponsorship programmes represent a sea change in terms of how responsibility for refugees is divided between the government, civil-society organisations, and private individuals. They can require sponsor groups to arrange housing, transportation, school enrolment, and orientation activities for newcomers, making these programmes significantly more reliant on the investments of civil-society organisations and the goodwill of the public. But lay persons are often less familiar with the needs and rights of (sponsored) refugees and the landscape of services available to them. And because sponsorship takes place in private in living rooms and community spaces, rather than government-funded reception centres or under the watchful eye of care professionals, issues may not be identified as quickly and government support in addressing them can be more complicated to provide. The shifting of tasks to sponsors may also trigger concern that the government is shirking its responsibilities or using this as an opportunity to further an unstated ambition to reduce its protection-related costs. For example, prior to the launch of the German pilot sponsorship programme, Neustart im Team (NesT), several German nongovernmental organisations expressed such concerns.¹² It is therefore critical for the government to retain oversight over this process, in order to intervene when necessary and ensure nongovernment actors are delivering on their responsibilities.

M&E can help programme designers strike the delicate balance between public oversight, accountability, and micromanagement, and between structure and flexibility. It can also focus attention on the areas of a programme that most need it, and help prevent arduous administrative requirements from unnecessarily blocking or discouraging capable would-be sponsors. For example, the University of Birmingham conducted a formative evaluation early into the launch of the UK sponsorship programme in order to quickly identify and address challenges in the programme's design. Through strong feedback loops that channelled findings back to programme designers, the researchers were able to alert the Home Office to the fact that sponsors found requests for detailed inventories, such as everything that would be put in the kitchen of a home to prepare it for a refugee's arrival, overly burdensome and unnecessary.¹³ Feedback loops can also help inform the training that sponsors receive to ensure they are able to perform their roles while avoiding common mistakes.

C. Improving programme effectiveness

In many countries, policymakers and the public hold lofty expectations for sponsorship programmes. M&E can help identify whether sponsorship initiatives are in fact meeting these high hopes, and why or why not. For example, policymakers may be interested to know whether sponsorship is effective in improving community cohesion, and whether refugees are better off than they would have been if they were admitted under another protection pathway, such as traditional resettlement. More M&E, in this and other protection pathways, is needed to improve understanding of whether and which groups of refugees benefit from sponsorship. For this reason, evaluations of the Canadian private sponsorship programme published by Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada also incorporate an analysis

of the other programmes within its protection portfolio, including its traditional government-assisted refugee resettlement programme. This has highlighted divergences between the programmes, including in terms of the profile and characteristics of refugees under the different tracks, the support they receive, and programme outcomes, with sponsored refugees having higher employment and earnings, and lower reliance on social assistance.¹⁴

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With public and private funds for humanitarian assistance and resettlement in short supply and insufficient to meet global needs, it is crucial that these limited funds be spent effectively. M&E can help by identifying which activities and processes are the best value for money, such as by comparing the impact of an intervention (e.g., in language learning or economic empowerment) against a control group. For example, the Netherlands is piloting an algorithmic matching tool, based on demographic and preference-ranking surveys, to match refugees under the traditional resettlement scheme with volunteer groups. The tool, called Pairity, also includes an M&E mechanism to gather information on the impact of matching on integration outcomes such as labour market participation, language skills, and community engagement, which could be compared to data on the outcomes of 'unmatched' refugees.¹⁵ Such an approach could also be applied to assess sponsorship.

The question of whether sponsorship costs governments less than other protection pathways is also ripe for the kind of further investigation that M&E can support. Historically, one of the principles of

sponsorship is that since private actors absorb many of the costs normally paid for by the government (e.g., for refugees' housing), the number of places offered can be additional to rather than part of government quotas for refugee admissions. While this is the case in some programmes in Europe, as in the United Kingdom and Germany, these models also frequently include extensive government-funded supports for sponsored refugees. A solid analysis of costs associated with sponsorship programmes, and with other protection programmes, would help stakeholders make informed decisions about the true resources needed when launching or scaling up these protection pathways.

In sum, sponsorship is unique in its approach to engaging nontraditional actors in offering refugees protection and in building meaningful relationships between community members and refugee families. But these same features that contribute to programmes' success also increase their reliance on the personal qualities and actions of sponsors and sponsored refugees. M&E can help policymakers and programme designers make sense of whether and how their goals are being realised, and how the design and implementation of programmes is affecting their performance. The benefits of this may extend even beyond sponsorship programmes, as good practices and factors that support success can be distilled and incorporated into other protection pathways, such as for resettled refugees and spontaneous arrivals who seek asylum.

4 How to Conduct M&E in Sponsorship Programmes

As policy circles increasingly acknowledge the myriad potential benefits of integrating M&E systems into refugee sponsorship schemes, policymakers and programme designers may find it possible to

build the momentum needed to get them off the ground. Unlike with traditional refugee resettlement, which is managed by ministries of interior or refugee agencies that may not have an established M&E culture, refugee sponsorship schemes benefit from the co-direction of civil-society organisations, many of which already depend on M&E to attract funders or conduct communications campaigns. And with the coronavirus outbreak slowing refugee resettlement and sponsorship operations around the world, these key stakeholders have an unexpected opportunity to start laying the foundation of an M&E framework.

A. *Accessing or generating the desired data*

There are a number of important questions that M&E can help answer, but one is particularly burning: does sponsorship make societies more welcoming towards refugees? The success of sponsorship programmes is often defined not only by how well refugees fare after resettlement, but also by the sense of satisfaction and achievement that sponsors and the broader receiving community are left with. This rather intangible goal is crucial to the long-term survival of a programme as it is important that sponsors feel motivated to renew their commitments or share their enthusiasm with others.

While there is relatively limited conclusive evidence on the impact of refugee sponsorship on receiving communities, there are several promising examples of how such a question could be included in an M&E system. The University of Birmingham found through its evaluation of the UK scheme that the impact of community sponsorship went beyond its immediate effects on refugee families and sponsorship groups.¹⁶ The volunteers within the sponsor groups created networks across the local community, which played a role in managing local tensions and addressing misconceptions about refugees. In Canada, meanwhile, an impact evaluation of a refu-

gee student sponsorship scheme by the World University Service of Canada found that 74 per cent of volunteers reported increased engagement in global issues following their participation.¹⁷ Innovative research approaches, such as social media analysis, could offer new tools for illuminating changes in public opinion. The UK Home Office analysed geolocated Twitter posts to test whether attitudes towards Syrian resettled refugees changed in the time before and a year and a half after launching its resettlement scheme.¹⁸ Positive sentiments far outweighed negative views expressed at the idea of refugees being resettled in the United Kingdom. But more work needs to be done to isolate the impact of resettlement or sponsorship schemes on these attitudes, as opposed to that of other contributing factors.

A programme that is primarily run by (a small group of) volunteers, and that unfolds in private homes and communal spaces, poses a unique set of challenges for M&E experts. Compounded with the limited evidence base on sponsorship, many evaluations within this domain have tended to use exploratory qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews. For example, the evaluation of New Zealand's 2018 pilot community sponsorship programme was based primarily on in-depth interviews with sponsored refugees, sponsors, representatives of the ministry responsible for the scheme, and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee (UNHCR) staff, allowing them to capture a detailed and diverse range of perspectives.¹⁹

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While interviews and other qualitative methods, such as focus groups, can be incredibly useful in ex-

ploratory research—that is, when seeking to generate insights on a topic about which there is relatively little existing information—they also have drawbacks. Sponsors and refugees may experience interviews and focus groups as (emotionally) intrusive or time consuming. M&E teams may wish to reconsider whether and how these methods are used, especially where the information collected will quickly become redundant (such as due to a planned change in policy or programme design), where there is limited scope to address the issues that are raised, and where the emotional and time burdens of participation outweigh the perceived value of the generated insights. For example, Reset, the body responsible for recruiting and training sponsors in the United Kingdom, is taking advantage of the pause in operations forced by the COVID-19 pandemic to carefully think through the monitoring activities sponsors are required to participate in after refugees arrive and how to best collect essential data without inducing ‘interview fatigue’.²⁰

Determining what data already exist on a sponsorship programme is therefore a prerequisite for building an M&E system that is not overly burdensome and that is sustainable over time. The administrative data that public authorities collect on the services they offer is a useful starting point. For example, interior ministries and asylum agencies may have information on the demographic and socioeconomic profile of sponsored refugees; health-care service providers on their medical and psychosocial wellbeing; institutions of lifelong learning on the language or vocational classes that refugees complete; and public employment agencies on refugees’ efforts to enter the labour market. Similarly, civil-society organisations that coordinate the work of sponsors may have data on the gender, age, socioeconomic characteristics, professional background, and religious or cultural heritage of their sponsors.

In both cases, accessing these existing data (in an anonymised form) may enable researchers to gen-

erate a group picture of the sponsors or sponsored refugees, which can then be expanded upon, if need be, in individual interviews. Accessing these data may also offer a state lens on sponsored refugees’ integration trajectory, or an organisational lens on the recruitment of sponsors, which can complement the perspectives that refugees and sponsors offer in their private interviews.

Administrative data sources, however, often come with strict rules about who can access them and for which reasons, particularly if the findings of an evaluation will become public. Some governments may also feel caught in a bind, wanting their sponsorship programmes to flourish but not to outshine other government-run protection programmes for resettled refugees and asylum seekers. Developing a relationship of trust between programme designers, the research team, and other stakeholders is therefore essential to promote data sharing and responsiveness to feedback. This trust should be built on the basis of clear communication regarding the information needs of programme designers and a firm understanding of the potential benefits of M&E for their work.

Even if an M&E team can secure access to administrative data, these existing sources may not satisfy all of their data needs. For example, administrative databases may not be designed to allow users to discern which language course participants or mental-health patients are (sponsored) refugees,²¹ especially where they are a very small slice of the service population.²² In other cases, public authorities may sit on a goldmine of raw data, such as the educational, employment, and family history information on the applications submitted by sponsors nominating refugees for resettlement and on the Resettlement Registration Forms used by UNHCR. Some level of prep work may be needed before an M&E team can mine this data; for example, the data may need to be anonymised, or the researchers may need to seek approval from a data protection or

ethics committee. Still, it is a worthwhile long-term investment to contact public authorities and explore with them what data they collect, which datasets could be immediately used for M&E, and what further conditions would need to be fulfilled to access others. If it is possible to overcome these hurdles, administrative data can offer a varied set of continuous data streams and, ultimately, validate and enrich evaluation exercises. Canada and Sweden, for example, have publicly available longitudinal administrative data on refugees, strengthening understanding in particular of their labour market integration outcomes (e.g., via employment rate and earnings data).²³

Data collection methods must also take into account ethical and other best practices for researching vulnerable populations. Evaluators who work with sponsors and/or refugees will have to respect general principles for quality research (e.g., no leading questions) and data ethics (e.g., guaranteeing anonymity and confidentiality, soliciting participants' informed consent). They must also be prepared to refer participants to support organisations if they notice that (psychosocial) help is needed. Furthermore, evaluators should engage in data collection at a time and place of preference/convenience to the sponsor or refugee and adopt other measures that convey to participants that they care about their wellbeing and comfort—elements that are key to securing their trust and full (ongoing) participation. For example, the Building a New Life in Australia project, commissioned by the Australian Department of Social Services, is a longitudinal study on the difficulties refugees face in accessing programmes and services. During the first three waves of the study, the project provided clear information on how the data collected would be used ethically and issued annual newsletters summarising insights for participants, sharing email and telephone contact details for the project team, and steering respondents towards useful websites on the services available to refugees through the Department of Social Services.²⁴ This meaningful

engagement allowed the project to maintain 79 per cent of its respondents between the first and third waves of the survey.²⁵

If the perspectives of sponsors and refugees are to be fed into the M&E system on a continuous basis, the frequency of interviews (e.g., every six months) will have to be carefully considered alongside other, less burdensome data collection tools. Written, picture, or video diaries; minutes or summaries of sponsor or refugee meetings (anonymised and with written consent); and other means of gathering information could be employed, as could mini questionnaires focused on particular areas of interest, such as whether updates to certain public services have affected refugees or their sponsors. For example, a 2018 evaluation of the humanitarian corridors programme in France used online and telephone questionnaires to collect data on the profile and experiences of sponsors and refugees involved in the programme.²⁶ This more anonymous and easily aggregated format can lend itself to asking potentially sensitive questions, such as whether sponsored refugees have previously tried to reach Europe irregularly; in the French study, less than 6 per cent of respondents reported doing so. These less traditional methods require further exploration and testing.

B. *Securing buy-in and coordinating stakeholder input*

A further challenge for those who design and implement M&E systems within sponsorship programmes is the sheer number and diversity of stakeholders. These stakeholders may be geographically dispersed or operating from remote locations (e.g., sponsorship groups in rural communities) and spread across different governance levels (e.g., national, regional, local); policy domains (home affairs, employment, education, health); and types of organisations (civil society, religious organisations). Yet securing their buy-in and coordinating their input are crucial steps

if the M&E system is to be a success and its added value felt by all.

The very process of designing an M&E framework can help crystallise the main strategic objectives of a programme.

To make sure this diverse set of stakeholders is on board and involved, different types of coordination are needed. First, M&E ‘champions’ within the government agency responsible for a sponsorship programme must get stakeholders to agree on what their programme is working to achieve and what would indicate success (i.e., conceptual coordination). To do so, it can be useful to construct a theory of change with the main stakeholders of the sponsorship programme. In short, a theory of change captures what the stakeholders aim to achieve with their initiative (i.e., the change they want to instigate), what measures they have or will put in place to pursue these aims (i.e., the activities), and why they think these measures can generate the desired change (i.e., the rationale underpinning the initiative).²⁷ The very process of designing an M&E framework can help crystallise the main strategic objectives of a programme among policymakers, programme designers, and other stakeholders, ensuring that it has a coherent underlying logic and a system to track progress on key targets.

Sponsorship programmes rely on the continued commitment and investment of both government and nongovernmental actors, each of which may come with a different set of explicit and implicit goals.²⁸ For example, some stakeholders may view a sponsorship programme as a way to express solidarity with countries of first asylum that are hosting large numbers of refugees.²⁹ But knowing whether these objectives are being realised could require more monitoring (e.g., of whether first asylum coun-

tries value the programme as an effective form of solidarity or whether they favour other types of engagement, such as humanitarian or development funding to assist the refugees they host). Furthermore, a deeper understanding of which factors (such as solidarity, volunteerism, and community cohesion) motivate which profiles of sponsors could help develop more inclusive and diverse recruitment processes, spreading the experience and benefits of sponsorship.

A second type of coordination concerns the collection and analysis of data. With a variety of actors collecting data and a diversity of data streams feeding into the M&E process (see Section 3.A.), it is important to have a single entity responsible for coordination (i.e., institutional or organisational coordination). In the case of a one-off evaluation conducted by researchers external to the sponsorship programme, the contractor performs that coordinating role (e.g., the University of Birmingham in the United Kingdom,³⁰ Montbretia consultancy in Ireland). If the evaluation is conducted internally, or if a long-term M&E system is built up, designating an in-house unit as responsible for supervision and execution is important. The Research Centre on Migration, Integration, and Asylum within the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees,³¹ and the Evaluation Division within Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada,³² have conducted evaluations for their respective countries’ resettlement and sponsorship programmes. The evidence basis that these administrative entities have built over time shows the tremendous benefits of having an in-house research body, one that is staffed with M&E experts and has an ongoing work programme and budget that new government-funded projects can tap into.

A final type of coordination within M&E systems needs to occur at the stage of dissemination and (programme or policy) learning. Close lines of communication between the M&E team, programme partners, and the political hierarchy can make a

world of difference to the sponsorship programme, its performance, and (continued) political viability. For example, the collaborative relationship between University of Birmingham researchers and the Home Office during the formative evaluation of the UK sponsorship programme resulted in most of the researchers' recommendations being adopted even before their final report was published.³³

It is also important that the findings of the M&E system are shared in suitable formats. Indeed, M&E outputs, such as annual reports, internal briefs, and infographics, should be tailored to stakeholders' ambitions, such as strengthening a training programme for sponsors, smoothing the application process for potential sponsors, or improving the information and referral procedures for sponsored refugees. Having all stakeholders on board from the very beginning will up the chances of an M&E system being able to do exactly that.

4 Conclusions and Next Steps

The many actors that contribute to sponsorship programmes—national and local governments, civil-society organisations, and volunteer sponsors—are continuously observing what works and what does not, and they often share these valuable insights with their peers and operating partners. This may do the trick when a programme is new, small in scale, and benefits from high staff retention. But as the programme grows and staff come and go, this largely informal approach to programme learning can quickly become inadequate. By systematically tracking a sponsorship programme's progress towards its objectives, a formal M&E framework can help formalise this learning and make it easier to share lessons with other interested stakeholders (both within countries and internationally).

Once stakeholders are convinced of the added value M&E can bring to their sponsorship programme and have examined what information is most important to track and how, there are three main practical issues to consider before getting an M&E system off the ground.

- ▶ **Securing the needed human and financial resources.** The availability of funding and personnel inevitably plays a strong role in defining the timing, scope, and methodology of an M&E system. Particularly where sponsorship places are offered in additionality to the government's quota for refugee admissions, it raises the question whether funding for the sponsorship programme's M&E should come primarily from the public purse, or from nongovernmental sources such as private philanthropy, universities, and research councils. One rationale behind the additionality principle is lowering the cost of protection for taxpayers, and making the government financially responsible for M&E may offset this somewhat. In Italy, researchers from the University of Notre Dame partnered with Caritas to conduct a five-year longitudinal study of the country's humanitarian corridors initiative.³⁴ While external funding is desirable, there is still a strong case to be made for governments investing directly in the development of M&E systems. Refugee sponsorship programmes are public-private partnerships, but governments remain the ultimate authorities and safeguards. They also have a huge stake in sponsorship programmes' success—when sponsorship arrangements break down, they are forced to pick up the pieces, and the tab, for ensuring refugees' welfare.
- ▶ **Finding the right moment to kickstart M&E.** While there is never a bad time, per se, to start an M&E programme, an opportune

moment may present itself to initiate the conversation within an organisation's hierarchy and eventually to generate the necessary political will. The people who champion M&E within their sponsorship programmes should identify organic launch points that can help move the needle, such as the introduction of a new programme element (e.g., working with unaccompanied children). In December 2019, the Swedish Migration Agency (SMA) received orders from the government to develop a predeparture cultural orientation programme for refugees, after running its resettlement programme without one for three years. To help guide the design of this orientation programme, SMA commissioned the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) Europe to conduct a literature review, interviews with municipal representatives, and focus groups with resettled refugees, all under the framework of the European Union Action on Facilitating Resettlement and Refugee Admission through New Knowledge (EU-FRANK) project. As part of this process, MPI Europe is advising the SMA on how to tie an M&E component to the programme, including via feedback loops between refugees, receiving municipalities, and the agency.

- ▶ **Cooperating across borders.** Tricky questions, such as those related to the impact of refugee sponsorship on receiving communities, require more investment and methodological exploration. But with all sponsorship countries (and even some without a sponsorship programme) interested in finding the answers, there may be scope

for more joint investment and cooperation on such topics. There is already a growing community of practice, such as the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Network³⁵ at the EU level, and the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative³⁶ and joint UNHCR-International Organization for Migration (IOM) Sustainable Resettlement and Complementary Pathways Initiative (CRISP)³⁷ at the international level. Strengthening engagement between trained qualitative and quantitative researchers and policymakers could also help countries capitalise on emerging lessons rather than having to reinvent the wheel.

For refugee sponsorship to make the transition from an innovative policy pursued by a handful of states to a sustainable and evidence-backed model that can be replicated and scaled up around the world, much more must be done to develop the knowledge base on what works, for whom, when, and why. In short, proponents of sponsorship programmes need to take the value of M&E to heart. If the assumptions and anecdotal evidence around the benefits of sponsorship prove true, these insights can be used not only to improve sponsorship programmes, but also to rethink how some of their central elements (e.g., the principles of public-private partnership and emphasis on volunteerism) could enhance other protection programmes—and community cohesion initiatives more broadly. And with the coronavirus pandemic wreaking significant economic and social havoc in countries across the world, these insights, especially on building resilient and supportive communities around the most vulnerable members of a society, could not come soon enough.

Endnotes

- 1 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *UNHCR Global Resettlement Needs 2020* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2019).
- 2 ICF and Migration Policy Institute (MPI) Europe, *Study on the Feasibility and Added Value of Sponsorship Schemes as a Possible Pathway to Safe Channels for Admission to the EU, Including Resettlement* (Brussels: European Commission Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, 2018).
- 3 Pilots and larger national sponsorship schemes have taken root in Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom. See Susan Fratzke, Lena Kainz, Hanne Beirens, Emma Dorst, and Jessica Bolter, *Refugee Sponsorship Programmes: A Global State of Play and Opportunities for Investment* (Brussels: MPI Europe, 2019).
- 4 UNHCR, 'Beware Long-Term Damage to Human Rights and Refugee Rights from the Coronavirus Pandemic: UNHCR' (press release, 22 April 2020).
- 5 For a discussion of monitoring and evaluation for refugee resettlement more broadly, see Aliyyah Ahad, Camille Le Coz, and Hanne Beirens, *Using Evidence to Improve Refugee Resettlement: A Monitoring and Evaluation Road Map* (Brussels: MPI Europe, 2020).
- 6 There are many testimonials that describe sponsorship as improving integration (including by helping newcomers make friends quickly and participate in community events and organisations) and community solidarity and cohesion. See, for example, Humanitarian Corridors, *Humanitarian Corridors: Implementation Procedures for Their Extension on a European Scale* (N.p.: Humanitarian Corridors, 2019); Citizens UK, 'Stories of Sponsorship', accessed 27 April 2020.
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- 8 For example, the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (GRSI) was set up to share Canada's experiences with private sponsorship and to support other countries in developing their own models. It also connects 'peer' actors from countries around the world to help guide the design and implementation of sponsorship programmes. Similarly, the SHARE Community Sponsorship Working Group has helped identify and promote best practices in sponsorship programmes. See GRSI, 'About GRSI', accessed 14 June 2020; SHARE, 'Private Sponsorship', accessed 14 June 2020.
- 9 Irish Government News Service, 'Minister Stanton Calls on Communities to Sponsor a Refugee Family as He Launches Pilot Community Sponsorship Ireland Initiative' (press release, 6 March 2019).
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- 11 Speech by Ahmed Hussen, Minister of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) at a luncheon at the Canadian Club of Toronto, 19 April 2017.
- 12 Ricarda Breyton, 'Letztlich bekommt man einen Flüchtling vor den Latz geknallt', *Welt*, 24 July 2019.
- 13 Author interview with Jenny Phillimore, Professor of Migration and Super Diversity, University of Birmingham, 1 April 2020.
- 14 IRCC, *Evaluation of the Resettlement Programs (GAR, PSR, BVOR, and RAP)* (Ottawa: IRCC Evaluation Division, 2016).
- 15 Pairity, 'Platform Details', accessed 28 April 2019.
- 16 Marisol Reyes and Jenny Phillimore, *Like Pebbles in a Pool: The Effect of Community Sponsorship on Knowledge about, and Attitudes to, Refugees in Less-Diverse Communities* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, Institute for Research into Superdiversity, 2020).
- 17 World University Service of Canada, *The Student Refugee Program* (Ottawa: World University Service of Canada, 2015).
- 18 Carrie Hough, *The UK Government's Approach to Evaluating the Vulnerable Persons and Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Schemes* (London: UK Home Office, 2018).
- 19 These data, alongside administrative data recorded by sponsors (such as on the personnel involved and hours spent on tasks, budget, and timelines), showed that the pilot achieved its primary objective of giving community organisations an opportunity to support refugee resettlement. But it also identified areas that require more attention before scaling up the programme, such as on communication between Immigration New Zealand and sponsors and on the nomination process for refugees. See New Zealand Ministry of Business, Innovation, and Employment, *Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship Category Pilot: Process Evaluation* (Wellington: New Zealand Ministry of Business, Innovation, and Employment, Evidence and Insights Branch, 2019).
- 20 Author interview with Monika Kruesmann, Co-Director, Reset, 15 April 2020.
- 21 This is referred to as 'disaggregation', where databases allow researchers to split the data pool based on particular characteristics of interest, such as gender, age group, nationality, or entry status.
- 22 For example, in Italy, where the number of spontaneously arrived asylum seekers far exceeds the number of resettled refugees, the organisation responsible for early integration activities did not distinguish between the two categories apart from in select areas when reporting data to the Ministry of the Interior. Comments by representatives of the Resettlement Unit, Italian Ministry of the Interior, during the workshop Monitoring and Evaluation Systems for Resettlement, organised by MPI Europe, Rome, 12 March 2019.

- 23 This includes the Longitudinal Immigration Database in Canada and the STATIV longitudinal database for integration studies by Statistics Sweden. See, for example, Pieter Bevelander and Ravi Pendakur, 'The Labour Market Integration of Refugee and Family Reunion Immigrants: A Comparison of Outcomes in Canada and Sweden', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 40, no. 5 (2014): 689–709.
- 24 See, for example, Australian Institute for Family Studies, 'Building a New Life in Australia' (newsletter, 2017).
- 25 Australian Government, Department of Social Services, *National Centre for Longitudinal Data: Building a New Life in Australia (BDNLA): The Longitudinal Study of Humanitarian Migrants* (Canberra: Australian Government, Department of Social Services, 2017).
- 26 Secours Catholique-Caritas France, *Hébergement Citoyen des Personnes Réfugiées* (Paris: Secours Catholique-Caritas France, 2018).
- 27 A theory of change makes predictions about the causal pathways between resources invested, the design of activities, and the desired results. See, for example, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, *Logic Model Development Guide* (Battle Creek, MI: W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2004).
- 28 These goals could be values based, strategic protection considerations, or national or domestic interests, often related to asylum, migration, and border management goals. See Hanne Beirens and Susan Fratzke, *Taking Stock of Refugee Resettlement: Policy Objectives, Practical Tradeoffs, and the Evidence Base* (Brussels: MPI Europe, 2017).
- 29 For example, the Humanitarian Corridors handbook, which was created by Italian and French civil-society and church organisations, describes the genesis of the project as 'the desire to provide answers to the many refugees who, every day, are fleeing situations of war and poverty and seeking shelter in bordering countries or Europe'. See Humanitarian Corridors, *Humanitarian Corridors: Implementing Procedures*.
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- 32 IRCC, 'Program Evaluations – Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada', updated 15 May 2020.
- 33 Phillimore and Reyes, *Community Sponsorship in the UK*.
- 34 University of Notre Dame, Kellogg Institute for International Studies, 'Humanitarian Corridor Initiative', accessed 6 May 2020.
- 35 European Asylum Support Office, 'Two New Cooperation Networks Joined EASO's Family', accessed 14 June 2020.
- 36 GRSI, 'About GRSI'.
- 37 CRISP – Sustainable Resettlement and Complementary Pathways Initiative, 'About Us', accessed 14 June 2020.

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