**“Community Sponsorship Programme” – Frequently Asked Questions**

**What is Community Sponsorship?**

Community Sponsorship is a new way to welcome refugees to Ireland. The programme is a unique collaboration between the Irish Government, United Nations, non-government agencies, and local communities. In contrast to Ireland's existing refugee resettlement programme – where the State provides integration services directly – Community Sponsorship relies on members of the public to welcome and integrate a Syrian family into their community.

**Who is a refugee?**

The United Nations defines a refugee as “someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence.” A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Most likely, they cannot return home or are afraid to do so. War and ethnic, tribal and religious violence are leading causes of refugees fleeing their countries. About two-thirds of all refugees worldwide come from just five countries: [Syria](https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/syria/), Afghanistan, [South Sudan](https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/south-sudan/), Myanmar and Somalia.

**Is Ireland the first country to offer Community Sponsorship?**

No. This model of resettlement was pioneered in Canada in 1979. Since then, it has been expanded to many countries, with hugely positive outcomes that have transformed the lives of both the resettled family and the volunteers, including those in Ireland. Already, one Syrian family has been provided with a fresh start in Dunshaughlin, Co. Meath.

**What is resettlement?**

Resettlement is a United Nations sponsored process through which refugees who are outside their home country are facilitated to move to another country, where they are granted long term residency. In order to be eligible for resettlement, refugees must prove to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) that they are unable to return safely to their home country and either be at risk or have no prospects of integrating in the country where they are currently living. As the number of resettlement places needed far surpasses the number available, UNHCR prioritises cases for resettlement on the basis of need and vulnerability.

**Who can be resettled to Ireland via Community Sponsorship?**

The referral of refugees through Community Sponsorship is made under stringent procedures. Under these procedures, refugees must first be registered with the UNHCR in the country to which they have fled. At present, the vast majority of refugees involved in this programme have fled Syria and are living in either Lebanon or Jordan.

**What precautions are taken to ensure that the refugee family is appropriate for Ireland?**

Once the UNHCR identifies an appropriate refugee family in need of resettlement, the family is interviewed by Irish Government officials in the country where the refugees are residing. Based on that interview and background investigations – which include Garda security assessment and fingerprint check against international databases – the officials make a final decision about whether the family is appropriate for resettlement in Ireland. Members of the refugee family also undergo health screening before they leave for Ireland. As part of the resettlement procedure, all members of the family will be entitled to work and to reside permanently in Ireland.

**Why Clane and Rathcoffey?**

A group of local people from Clane and Rathcoffey – with expertise in education, law, parish and community affairs, property, local government, and healthcare – have come together to form a steering committee to support a Syrian family in our area. As part of the resettlement project, we will welcome a family from Syria into our community by ensuring the family has suitable accommodation, helping enrol their children in school, improving their English, and providing them with the friendship and emotional support they need for their first two years in Ireland. Our group will also play a key role in introducing our resettled family to State services, local amenities, and social and professional networks to ensure that they integrate as fully as possible into our community.

**What can I do if I want to help?**

Any member of our co-ordinating group would be delighted to speak with you about our Community Sponsorship Programme in greater detail; we also welcome any suggestions you may have for the project in our area. Please contact Fr Paul at (045) 868 249 for further information about the programme. Information about the Community Sponsorship Programme is also available through the Irish Refugee Council at [www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie](http://www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie).

You may donate by forwarding a cheque payable to ***Clane Rathcoffey Community Sponsorship Programme*** to Fr Paul O’Boyle (Parochial House, Prosperous Road, Clane, County Kildare) or by electronic fund transfer payment to:

Account Name: C and R Community Sponsorship Programme;

Account Number: 25675;

BIC: EDCNIE21;

IBAN: IEI23EDCN99104209879082.